

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 5 October 2015 at 6.00 pm**

**Present:** Geoff Hughes (Chairman)

**Members of the Forum:**

Tom Bolton, Councillor Neil Foster, Ian Gray, Neil Gander, Brian Hodgson, Andrew Jeffrey, Angela Johnson, David Maughan, Councillor Eddie Tomlinson and Robin Trounson

**Officers:**

Mike Ogden, Victoria Lloyd-Gent and Jill Errington

### **1 Welcome, Introduction and Apologies**

The Chairman welcomed new member Andrew Jeffrey to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received from Geoff Rigden, Jim Welch and Audrey Christie.

Tom Bolton was thanked for the informative training he had delivered to members on Common Land and Village Greens prior to the meeting. The LAF members were of the view that training amongst the Forum members was useful and it was suggested that a session on Rights of Way be provided immediately before the next meeting.

### **2 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **3 Network Rail - Level Crossings**

The Chairman advised that unfortunately David Shorrocks of Network Rail was unable to attend due to unforeseen circumstances.

**AGREED** that Network Rail be invited to a future meeting of the Forum.

### **4 Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 6 July 2015**

The Minutes of the AGM held on 6 July 2015 were agreed as a correct record.

## 5 Matters Arising

### a) **County Durham Plan**

Councillor Neil Foster provided an update on the current position with the County Durham Plan. He explained that the High Court had resolved that the Inspector's Interim Report be quashed, and therefore the Plan would now be withdrawn. The evidence base was currently being updated and a revised Plan would be submitted for consultation in the New Year. Following agreement by Cabinet in the Spring of 2016 the Plan would be subject to examination by a new Inspector.

The Chairman advised that the LAF had submitted comments on the Plan which may need to be re-visited during the next round of consultation.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

**ACTION:** The LAF continue to receive updates.

### b) **Heritage Coast Management Plan**

Angela Johnson informed members that the draft Plan had been circulated to a Steering Group of partners and Niall Benson was awaiting their feedback. A date for commencement of the wider consultation on the final draft had not yet been set.

**AGREED** that the information be noted and further developments be awaited.

**ACTION:** Angela Johnson to keep members informed of progress.

Mike Ogden advised of a Coast Festival planned for the end of May, early June 2016 with a wide range of walks, rides and other events, including some for people with physical difficulty and sight impairment. Heritage Coast had requested that the LAF be a key partner in the arrangements.

**AGREED** that a Sub-Group comprising Andrew Jeffrey, Tom Bolton and Jim Welch be set up to assist with the organisation of the Coast Festival.

## 6 National/Regional Issues

### a) **Royal Garden Party Nominations for 2016**

Members were informed that DEFRA had invited nominations from LAFs for candidates to attend a Royal Garden Party in 2016 who had interests in landscape, outdoor recreation and forestry.

Robin Trounson suggested that Geoff Hughes be nominated to attend as Chairman of the LAF in view of his contribution to the work of the Forum since its inception. The Royal Garden Party was an opportunity to network with other organisations and to promote the work of the LAF.

**AGREED** that Geoff Hughes be nominated to attend a Royal Garden Party in 2016.

**ACTION:** Jill Errington to submit nomination to DEFRA.

b) **LAF National Conferences 2016**

The Chairman advised of a Natural England Survey of LAFs regarding proposals for LAF Conferences in 2016. The survey invited views for potential conference topics and identified Hull as being a possible venue for the north conference.

In responding to the survey the Chairman had suggested potential topics which included Sport England's report on Getting Active Outdoors. He had also suggested Durham as a potential venue for the north conference. Councillor Foster added that he would offer his support to using County Hall if Durham was members' preferred venue for the northern conference.

**AGREED** that the information be noted and further details of the National Conferences be awaited.

c) **MENE**

Robin Trounson provided some background to MENE which was data produced on a quarterly basis by Natural England relating to people's engagement with the outdoors. The information produced provided a national picture and whilst Natural England could analyse the data to produce a local extract there were costs involved.

It had been agreed at a previous LAF meeting that MENE data may be of use to Public Health and its Healthy Weight Alliance Strategy. An offer had been made for Jim Milner of Natural England and Robin Trounson to attend a Healthy Weight Alliance Group (HWAG) meeting and give a presentation on MENE. The HWAG had not taken up the offer and Robin Trounson suggested that he write to the Group advising of the existence of the data and how it might be of use.

**AGREED** that the information be noted and a letter be sent to the Healthy Weight Alliance Group.

**ACTION:**

Robin Trounson.

d) **LAF News – Issue 7**

Consideration was given to Issue 7 of the LAF Newsletter. Robin Trounson noted that Natural England were currently consulting Huddle members about whether an alternative social media platform might be more suitable than Huddle.

Neil Gander used Huddle and it was therefore **AGREED** that he respond to the consultation and replace Roger Cornwell as the LAF's Huddle Champion.

**ACTION:** Neil Gander.

e) **A New Strategy for Sport**

Consideration was given to the response sent by the Chairman with regard to Government Consultation paper 'A New Strategy for Sport' which had been drawn to the LAF's attention via the LAF Newsletter.

Mike Ogden advised that Durham County Council and Durham Sport Physical Activity Alliance had both responded to the Consultation and key points they made was the need for a Regional Structure to support organisations delivering sport and that transport and transport costs were barriers to participation in sport. The Alliance membership was made up of agencies including public health and education, and Mike Ogden asked if the LAF felt it should be represented on the Group.

Geoff Hughes asked that the LAF be provided with a copy of the responses submitted with a view to considering the potential for working with the Alliance in the future.

**AGREED** that the response to the consultation be confirmed and a copy of the responses submitted by DCC and the Durham Sport Physical Activity Alliance be requested.

**ACTION:** Mike Ogden/Jill Errington.

f) **Natural England Update**

Consideration was given to an update from Natural England which had been received earlier that day. A copy was circulated to members for information.

**AGREED** that the information be received and Jim Milner be invited to the next meeting of the Forum to provide an update on behalf of Natural England.

## 7 **Update from Rights of Way Team**

Mike Ogden reported that work on the Pelaw Woods landslide was due to commence the following day and was expected to be completed early next year. Information about the work was posted on the Council's website ([www.durham.gov.uk/pelawwoodlandslip](http://www.durham.gov.uk/pelawwoodlandslip)) and signage would be erected on site showing alternative routes.

Members were informed that the Parish Paths Officer had left the Authority in July 2015 and the post would not be filled, bringing the Partnership to an end. The Partnership had been a great success and had been unique in getting volunteers together to maintain and improve access to the countryside. Members discussed how the work could be continued.

Voluntary rangers had played a valuable role in re-opening paths but most of the Partnership funds had been granted to Parish Councils to employ contractors to carry out works not suitable for volunteers. Mike Ogden advised that there may be

plans to pool volunteer resources and members suggested that the LAF offers to facilitate a meeting of key agencies such as Natural England, Durham Wildlife Trust, North Pennines AONB Partnership, Durham Heritage Coast, Durham Voluntary Countryside Ranger Service, the Ramblers Association and Sustrans.

Ian Gray agreed to lead on this, supported by Geoff Hughes and Robin Trounson.

**AGREED** that the LAF offer to facilitate a meeting of key agencies to discuss co-ordination of volunteers across County Durham.

**ACTION:** Ian Gray, Geoff Hughes and Robin Trounson.

## **8 Rights of Way Improvement Plan Review**

Victoria Lloyd-Gent reported that ROWIP3 was to be considered by Cabinet on 21 October 2015, having been well-received by the Council's Management Teams. It approved a launch and photo-shoot would be arranged.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

## **9 Access Prioritisation**

Victoria Lloyd-Gent reported that the survey work had been completed and the draft report was awaited. A launch was planned for 4 November 2015 to be chaired by Geoff Hughes. The LAF Sub-Group members Geoff Rigden and Jim Welch would also be invited to attend. Subject to the number of confirmed attendances it may be possible to extend the invitation to other LAF members.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

## **10 Cycling**

### **a) Awareness Campaign – Hedgecutting**

Consideration was given to the proposed campaign to encourage landowners to clear hedge cuttings and it was suggested that a press release be issued to raise awareness, rather than by way of an information leaflet. Geoff Rigden had previously agreed to provide suitable wording and David Maughan offered to provide input from a landowner's perspective.

**AGREED** that a press release be drafted to raise awareness and encourage landowners to clear hedge cuttings.

**ACTION:** Geoff Rigden and David Maughan.

### **b) Durham City Cycle Forum**

Neil Gander provided feedback from his attendance at Durham City Cycle Forum which discussed SCOOT, a new scheme to speed up the flow of traffic through Durham. He was disappointed that there appeared to have

been no integration between highways and cycling provision within the scheme.

Councillor Foster advised that SCOOT would ensure that traffic through the City was managed as quickly and efficiently as possible and the scheme would endeavour to integrate cyclists. There would be opportunities to discuss the matter further.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

## **11 Consultation on Planning Applications - DCC**

### **a) Field House Farm, West Rainton**

Consideration was given to notification received of a Public Inquiry regarding the appeal against refusal of planning permission for a surface mine scheme at Field House Farm, West Rainton. The LAF had submitted comments on the scoping opinion and planning application.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

### **b) Lambton Park, Chester Road, Bournmoor**

Consideration was given to the draft response prepared by the Chairman to the proposed planning application for Lambton Park. Andrew Jeffrey suggested an amendment to the letter to refer to obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Councillor Foster advised that the scheme was an opportunity to exploit access opportunities and Robin Trounson made the point that whilst this was an excellent opportunity the applicant's Asset Management Plan discussed charging for access. MENE had identified this as a barrier to access to the outdoors. It was also noted that Tyne and Wear LAF were also commenting on the proposals and there may be scope for a joint approach.

**AGREED** that the letter be confirmed with the proposed amendment and submitted to the Local Planning Authority.

**ACTION:** Jill Errington to amend and submit letter.

## **12 Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership**

David Maughan provided an update in relation to the work of the Partnership. Members had received the Partnership's Newsletter for 2015 which informed of the Annual Forum to be held on 11 November 2015 and which would celebrate its achievements.

The project was coming to an end and it was suggested that Emma Ashton-Wickett, Paths for All Officer be invited to the next LAF meeting to review the Partnership's achievements and discuss how the LAF might support the legacy it would leave.

**AGREED** that the information be noted and Emma Ashton-Wickett be invited to the next LAF meeting in January 2016.

**13 3Rivers Local Nature Partnership and Bright Water Landscape Project**

The Chairman advised that a proposal to merge 3Rivers LNP with both Northumberland Lowlands and North of the Tyne LNPs was currently under consideration.

The 3Rivers LNP had been instrumental in proposals for the Bright Water Landscape Project for the River Skerne catchment. A decision on the Stage 1 bid for funding of £2.2m was expected by 27 October 2015.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

**ACTION:** The Chairman to continue to provide updates.

**14 National Trails Partnership**

Mike Ogden advised that through the Partnership he had been given an opportunity to attend a workshop on Volunteers on National Trails. He hoped that the workshop would provide useful suggestions for improved co-ordination of voluntary work in County Durham.

Robin Trounson asked about the North Pennines Walking Festival held between 26 September and 4 October 2015 and was advised that although formal feedback had not yet been received it was understood that it had been a success.

**AGREED** that the information be noted and Mike Ogden provide feedback on the Walking Festival at the next meeting.

**ACTION:** Mike Ogden.

**15 Dedication of Land (Durham County Council)**

Consideration was given to the letter sent to DCC regarding proposed dedication of land as open access in its ownership. Councillor Neil Foster advised that Stuart Timmiss had proposed a meeting with LAF members to take this forward.

The Chairman proposed that prior to a meeting being arranged Stuart Timmiss be asked to provide views on the LAF's suggestion that Pity Me Carrs and Crowtrees Local Nature Reserves were examples of land that could be suitable for dedication.

**AGREED** that the letter to DCC be confirmed and Councillor Foster feed-back the views of the LAF to Stuart Timmiss.

## 16 Common Land

### a) Common Land

Tom Bolton advised that no further progress had been made in relation to the establishment of an Officer Working Group to consider policies for the management and protection of Common Land and Village Greens.

**AGREED** that a further reminder be sent to DCC.

**ACTION:** Tom Bolton.

### b) Application to de-register Common Land at Low Etherley

Consideration was given to the LAF response to an application to de-register Common Land at Low Etherley.

**AGREED** that the response be confirmed.

## 17 Membership and Promotion of the LAF

The Chairman advised that an article about the LAF had now appeared in the latest edition of County Durham News.

Mike Ogden advised that he would pursue the provision of ID badges for LAF members.

To generate interest in membership Members were encouraged to promote the LAF at meetings they may attend with other organisations and David Maughan suggested that local NFU branches be approached which may encourage interest from landowners.

Mike Ogden advised that he had promoted the work of the LAF at a recent talk he had given to tourism businesses in Weardale but this had not generated any interest to date.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

**ACTION:** Mike Ogden to contact NFU branches.

## 18 Notification of Open Access Restrictions

The Chairman reported the receipt of notifications in respect of the following:-

- No public access - Part Hamsterley Forest – 12 September 2015
- No public access – Part Hamsterley Forest – 23-25 September 2015

**AGREED** that the information be noted.



## **19 Work Programme/Targets and Outputs**

The Chairman asked members to consider tasks and targets for their own work areas and also asked for volunteers for the topics formerly undertaken by Roger Cornwell.

The Work Programme would be updated to reflect member changes to Huddle and Public Health, and to add new topic areas as discussed.

**AGREED** that the Work Programme be updated and any member interested in being involved in any of the topic areas or those formerly undertaken by Roger Cornwell should inform the LAF Secretary.

**ACTION:** All members to consider. Jill Errington to update Work Programme.

## **20 Future Meeting Dates**

**AGREED** that meetings for 2016 be held at 6.00pm on the following dates:-

Monday 18 January 2016  
Monday 18 April 2016  
Monday 11 July 2016 – AGM  
Monday 10 October 2016