

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum** held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 18 January 2016 at 6.00 pm**

Present: Geoff Hughes (Chairman)

Members of the Forum:

Tom Bolton, Councillor Neil Foster, Ian Gray, Brian Hodgson, Pat Holding, Angela Johnson, Geoff Rigden (until item 11) , Councillor Eddie Tomlinson and Jim Welch

Officers

Mike Ogden, Victoria Lloyd-Gent, Audrey Christie and Jill Errington

Emma Ashton-Wickett, Paths for All People Officer, Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership (until item 5)

Lisa Stephenson, Development Manager, Land of Oak and Iron Landscape Partnership (until item 5)

1 Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

The Chairman welcomed new member Pat Holding to the meeting and Lisa Stephenson of Groundwork NE and Cumbria, and Emma Ashton-Wickett, Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership.

Apologies for absence were received from Andrew Jeffrey, Neil Gander and David Maughan. Members were informed that Andrew Jeffrey had recently undergone surgery and was now recovering. It was agreed that the best wishes of the LAF be sent to him.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Land of Oak and Iron Landscape Partnership

Lisa Stephenson, Development Manager of Groundwork NE and Cumbria provided Members with an overview of the Land of Oak and Iron Landscape Partnership which had secured £2.2m in Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) towards a 4 year programme to be delivered from 2016-2020. The project area stretched from Derwent Reservoir to the River Tyne, covering the 3 local authority areas of Durham, Northumberland and Gateshead.

Proposed access improvement schemes in County Durham included the following:-

Hamsterley Riverside – Derwent Walk connection for Blackhall Mill and Hamsterley Burnopfield Plantation – part of early waggonway network with community interest
Lintzford to Dipton – route that linked a number of key sites in the Derwent Valley

Bowes Railway – early railway which transported coal from North Durham collieries.

Following questions from the Chairman, Lisa Stephenson advised that, similar to the arrangements for the Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership, a full time Access and Woodland Officer would be appointed to focus on access improvement schemes. Although governance arrangements had not been confirmed, there would be an opportunity for County Durham LAF to be involved in the project.

In response to a question from Geoff Rigden, the LAF was informed that, although outside the HLF delivery area, the Partnership was keen to develop physical links between Beamish and the Land of Oak and Iron.

On behalf of the LAF, the Chairman thanked Lisa Stephenson for the information provided.

AGREED that the information be noted, a formal request be sent to the Partnership asking that the LAF be represented on the Board of the Land of Oak and Iron, and Andrew Jeffrey be asked to take the lead on the LAF's involvement in the project.

ACTION: The LAF be kept informed of developments.

4 Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership

Emma Ashton-Wickett, Paths for All People Officer reviewed the achievements of the Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership.

The Officer briefed members on the main Partnership themes, including the Paths for All People and other access projects, which included the following:-

Flatts Wood and Tees Bank Restoration
Teesdale Way Enhancement
Tees Railway Path Extension - Cotherstone
The Greta Walk

Other access projects included new gates and updated village walks at Boldron, path improvements at Thorsgill and Bowes, new walks leaflets at Barnard Castle, Startforth and Stainton, and 3 more photo-trails.

£250k had been spent in total with 55 miles of paths improved and 15 miles of newly promoted paths on the Greta Walk. 55 new handgates and 44 new signposts had been installed, and 5 new walks leaflets had been produced. 20 volunteers had given 100 hours of their time.

The Partnership was coming to an end later in the year and its legacy was to have encouraged people to explore, celebrate and conserve Teesdale's unique landscape and cultural heritage.

On behalf of the LAF the Chairman thanked Emma Ashton-Wickett for the presentation and all her work on the project and acknowledged the value of LAF involvement.

AGREED that the information be noted.

Emma Aston-Wickett and Lisa Stephenson left the meeting.

5 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 October 2016 were agreed as a correct record.

6 Matters Arising

a) County Durham Plan

Councillor Foster advised that the evidence base was being refreshed prior to consultation and following consideration by Cabinet in the Spring of 2016 would undergo examination by a new Inspector.

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

ACTION: The LAF continue to receive updates.

b) Heritage Coast Management Plan

Angela Johnson advised that Niall Benson was currently updating the Heritage Coast Management Plan to reflect the comments of partners. He hoped that the wider consultation would commence in the Spring 2016.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Angela Johnson to keep members informed of developments.

c) A New Strategy for Sport – A New Strategy for an Active Nation

The Chairman advised that since the last meeting when members had agreed a response to Government Consultation, the Strategy had now been published, a copy of which had previously been circulated to members. The LAF had asked for a copy of Durham County Council's response to the consultation but had been informed that this could not be provided.

AGREED that the information be noted and the Strategy be received.

7 National/Regional Issues

a) LAF National Conference 2016 (North)

The Chairman advised that the LAF Conference North was to be held on 1 March 2016 in the Oxford Place Centre, Leeds. Although a full programme had not yet been received, the event would include a workshop on Access Prioritisation in Durham. He indicated that either Geoff Rigden or himself was to chair the workshop which would involve presentations from Jim Phillips of Ethos Consultants and a representative of the County Council. One other conference place was available for a LAF member to attend and nominations were sought.

AGREED that the information be noted and the Chairman or Geoff Rigden, and Angela Johnson attend the LAF Conference on 1 March 2016.

ACTION: Members to book their own place on the conference using the on-line booking system.

b) **MENE**

Robin Trounson advised that because of changes to the structure of Natural England and the local LAF contacts, regular MENE updates would no longer be received. He understood that at the last Regional meeting of LAF Chairs and Vice-Chairs members had asked for a workshop to explore how MENE data could be effectively used. He therefore suggested that no further action be taken at present and MENE be revisited when there was anything further to report.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: No further action to be taken at present.

c) **Huddle**

As Neil Gander was not in attendance an update would be given at the next meeting.

d) **LAF Survey 2015**

Consideration was given to the results of the LAF Survey for 2015, copies of which had previously been circulated to members.

Robin Trounson highlighted key points from the survey results. There had been a decline in satisfaction rates in relation to the support received from Natural England and its local contacts. This was probably an indication of organisational changes and increasing demand on Natural England Officers which might well result in increasingly less local support in the future.

The survey also asked for views on training. 46% of appointing authorities provided training for new members but the survey also asked about other training received. He felt that it was important for training to be provided in relevant areas, to develop the knowledge and expertise of members who gave their time voluntarily.

LAF members had received an excellent training session on Rights of Way before the meeting and also on Common Land at the previous meeting. The Chairman stressed the importance of continuing to provide training both by way of refresher and in new areas, some of which could be provided internally by Officers or LAF members.

Finally, the survey had asked for views on Huddle but Robin Trounson noted that it had not asked if LAFs considered that it added any value to their work.

AGREED that the information be noted.

8 Update from Rights of Way Team

Audrey Christie reported that Assets had been asked to examine a new tranche of paths for dedication as Rights of Way at the following locations:-

Meeting of Waters
Eldon Bank
Bearpark
New Brancepeth
Birtley - near the County Boundary

The damage caused by Storm Desmond would be assessed and works prioritised.

The works on the landslide at Pelaw Woods were progressing according to schedule and would hopefully be completed by Easter 2016.

In response to a question from the Chairman, Mike Ogden confirmed that all the Durham paths to be improved within the Land of Oak and Iron HLF area were existing Public Rights of Way.

AGREED that the information be noted.

9 Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP3)

Victoria Lloyd-Gent reported that ROWIP3 had now been formally approved by Cabinet. A launch event had been proposed but this had been superseded by a press release issued in advance of the Cabinet meeting. It was therefore suggested that arrangements be made for a photoshoot on one of the project sites.

The Chairman indicated that ROWIP3 was a significant milestone in the work of the Sustainable Transport and Rights of Way Teams and was a demonstration of the effectiveness of a joined up approach.

AGREED that the information be noted and a photoshoot be arranged in due course as part of the implementation phase.

10 Access Prioritisation - Phase 3

The Chairman advised that he had chaired the launch event on 4 November 2015 which had been well-attended and well-received. The consultants had learnt from the earlier phases and a robust methodology had been used to produce Phase 3. The Access Prioritisation Sub-Group of Geoff Rigden and Jim Welch both concurred with these views.

Victoria Lloyd-Gent advised that since the launch £50k of LTP funding had been secured for priority improvements. Meetings with the Area Action Partnership and Great Aycliffe Town Council had been arranged, and Audrey Christie was liaising with the local Members for Bishop Auckland, Shildon and Newton Aycliffe areas.

AGREED that the information be noted.

Geoff Rigden left the meeting.

11 **Cycling**

a) **Awareness Campaign – Hedgecutting**

In the absence of Geoff Rigden and David Maughan the Chairman reported that there had been no further progress on drafting a press release to raise awareness to landowners about the importance of clearing after hedge-cutting etc.

Brian Hodgson stated that modern equipment produced smaller cuttings making it more difficult for landowners to clear up after hedge-cutting. He also made the point that landowners were now required to cut back more frequently.

The Chairman suggested that Brian Hodgson assist Geoff Rigden and David Maughan with the wording for the press release.

AGREED that the information be noted and further progress be awaited.

ACTION: Geoff Rigden, David Maughan and Brian Hodgson.

b) **Cycling Update**

Victoria Lloyd-Gent reported that the cycling audits were progressing according to plan. Five had been finished and on completion of the current audit in Durham City, work would commence on the audit of Newton Aycliffe.

Presentations had been given within the Council on Cycle Network Planning and it was proposed to roll this out to other local authorities.

A meeting had been held with Gateshead and Newcastle Councils to discuss National Cycle Route 725 with a view to undertaking joint promotion of the route, much of which travelled through Durham.

Members were informed of the 'Park that Bike' grant scheme which made cycle parking available to small businesses, shops etc in suitable locations. As the scheme was over-subscribed additional funding opportunities were being explored.

AGREED that the information be noted.

12 **Consultation on Planning Application - Lambton Park, Chester Road, Bournmoor**

Consideration was given to LAF responses to consultation on the planning application in respect of Lambton Park. It was noted that one of the letters had been omitted from the LAF papers and would be circulated to members following the meeting.

The Chairman advised that he had made representation on behalf of the LAF at the meeting of the County Planning Committee on 5 January 2016 when the application was considered and approved. He had circulated a statement to members of the Committee which set out the LAF's concerns.

In summary he had made the point that permissive access was inadequate for the scale of the development and that public access should be granted in perpetuity. He had also referred to the importance of rights of navigation on the River Wear. He had asked for access to be considered at the reserved matters stage but had been advised that this was not possible and that the developer could not commit to access in perpetuity as it might affect future plans for the estate. He felt that Members of the Committee had been persuaded by the economic benefits of the scheme.

Robin Trounson informed members of an e-mail received from a local resident which expressed concern about the same issues raised by the LAF but unfortunately this had been received following the Council's determination of the application.

Tyne and Wear LAF had supported the views of County Durham LAF and it had been suggested that a Continuing Professional Development event be arranged for Planning Officers to look at various aspects of rights of way and access. This would be referred to a LAF's regional meeting for consideration.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Jill Errington to send the Chairman's statement and the letter omitted from the papers to members for information.

13 3Rivers Local Nature Partnership, North East Local Nature Partnership and the Bright Water Landscape Project

The Chairman advised that he had attended the first meeting of the Executive of the North East Local Nature Partnership (LNP) and had been appointed Vice-Chair of the LNP for the south of the region. He had also been asked to chair the Board of the Bright Water Landscape Project, having previously chaired the interim Board. Partnership Agreements had been drawn up for both the North East LNP and the Bright Water Landscape Project which he had been asked to sign on behalf of the LAF. Copies of the Agreements were circulated to Members for consideration.

In discussing the agreements Robin Trounson referred members to a statement in the Bright Water Landscape Partnership Agreement that 'the parties shall use all reasonable endeavours to procure that their respective members and officers act in the best interests of the Project'. His only concern was that the LAF was an independent advisory group and its first duty was to the aims and interests of the LAF. He was confident that this would not be an issue in practice but thought that the LAF should be mindful of this.

The Chairman advised that he had forwarded his comments to Durham Wildlife Trust. Members felt that on balance the statement would not prevent the LAF fulfilling its duty as an independent advisory group and could be a 'critical friend' in supporting the delivery of the project's access improvements.

AGREED that the information be noted and the Partnership Agreements for the North East Local Nature Partnership and the Bright Water Landscape Project be signed by the Chairman.

ACTION: Chairman to sign and return Agreements.

14 National Trails Partnership

Mike Ogden reported that the last meeting of the Working Group had been postponed, and the Framework which would set out the LAF's involvement on the Partnership would be reported to the next meeting to be held on 10 February 2016.

The Donate-A-Gate scheme was to be extended to replace stiles on the Pennine Way.

He was awaiting feedback from the Friends of North Pennines on the success of the Walking Festival. Numbers at the event had fallen which may be attributed to the lack of funding for marketing of the Festival which would not be held in 2016 to allow funding options to be explored for 2017.

AGREED that the information be noted.

15 North Pennines AONB Partnership

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meetings of the Access and Recreation Working Group and the Pennine Way National Trail Northern Working Group held on 8 October 2016, copies of which had been circulated to members.

Robin Trounson provided feedback from the meetings. The Big Path Watch Project had been discussed which looked for volunteers to survey rights of way. The project was now closed and around 12% of the local network had been covered.

The meeting also discussed cross border anomalies and a proposed bridge connection between 2 bridleways in Upper Teesdale on the Durham/Cumbria border near Cow Green. Mike Ogden advised that discussions were ongoing with the landowners in relation to bridge design, and funding options would be explored when this had been resolved.

The meetings scheduled for 14 January 2016 had been postponed and would now be held on 10 February 2016.

AGREED that the information be noted and the minutes of the meetings held on 8 October 2016 be received.

ACTION: Robin Trounson or in his absence Neil Gander attend the next meeting, subject to there being items of interest to the LAF on the agenda.

16 Health

a) **County Durham Health and Well-Being Board Big Tent Event**

Consideration was given to a paper by Robin Trounson following his attendance at the Big Tent Event on 4 November 2015. The event was convened to launch consultation on the draft Physical Activity Framework for County Durham.

AGREED that the information be noted.

b) **Altogether Active – Framework to Increase Physical Activity in County Durham**

Consideration was given to the response drafted by Robin Trounson to the Physical Activity Framework leaflet produced to seek views on proposals to increase physical activity in County Durham. LAF members had been asked to submit any views on the Framework and Andrew Jeffrey had made some technical points about the leaflet design and content. These views were shared by Jim Welch.

It was suggested that Andrew Jeffrey may be interested in taking the lead if the LAF was invited to be involved in strategy development.

AGREED that the information be noted and Andrew Jeffrey be asked whether he might be interested in representing the LAF on further involvement with the Framework.

ACTION: Jill Errington to contact Andrew Jeffrey.

c) **Healthy Weight Alliance Group**

Robin Trounson and Jim Welch provided feedback from the meeting they had attended on 11 December 2015. Much of what was discussed at the meeting did not relate to access, but the regional Directors of Public Health had met and agreed that each Local Authority would lead on a physical activity for one month. Durham was to lead on walking in May 2016 and more information may be available at the Group's next meeting on 4 March 2016.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Robin Trounson and Jim Welch to continue to attend meetings when there were items on the Agenda relevant to the work of the LAF.

17 Dedication of Land (Durham County Council)

Councillor Neil Foster reported that he had discussed the LAF's request for the Council's views on the dedication of Pity Me Carrs and Crowtrees Local Nature Reserves with Stuart Timmiss. The Council's view was that these areas of land

already benefitted from open access with some restrictions to protect the public, wildlife and the landscape.

The Chairman indicated that in formulating its view on Dedication of Land the LAF had been guided by Natural England who was dedicating its own National Nature Reserves, and therefore the LAF wished to encourage DCC to adopt the same approach. Benefits to dedication included that the land would be recognised on OS maps and would remain open access land for the public in perpetuity.

Following discussion the LAF confirmed its position that the County Council be asked to provide a written response setting out the views of the Council on the LAF's suggestion that Pity Me Carrs and Crowtrees Local Nature Reserves were sites that could be suitable for dedication.

18 Common Land

Tom Bolton reported that the first meeting of the DCC Officer Working Group had been scheduled to discuss the management and protection of Common Land and Village Greens. The meeting was to be held on Wednesday 20 January 2016 and he had received an invitation to attend.

AGREED that information be noted and further developments be awaited.

ACTION: Tom Bolton to provide feedback from the meeting.

19 Volunteering

Ian Gray informed members of the work undertaken by Durham County Voluntary Rangers (DCVRS) on footpaths in the last 12 months.

The Chairman advised that at the last meeting it had been agreed that the LAF offer to facilitate a meeting of key agencies to discuss the co-ordination of volunteers across the County. It was noted that the North Pennines AONB Partnership was considering undertaking its own research on volunteering opportunities, and Mike Ogden had attended a National Trails workshop in Whitby in November 2015. A key issue arising from the workshop was that limited resources were a potential barrier faced by all key agencies, and that volunteers needed proper support and co-ordination.

The first task was to identify the organisations that offered volunteering opportunities and to see how resources might be pooled to provide the widest choices for the maximum number of volunteers. Mike Ogden advised that he would discuss this with Ian Gray.

AGREED that key organisations that offered volunteering opportunities be identified in the first instance, with a view to the LAF facilitating a meeting to discuss the co-ordination of volunteer resources across the County.

ACTION: Ian Gray and Mike Ogden.

20 Durham City Sustainable Transport Strategy and Action Plan 2015-2030

Consideration was given to the draft response by Neil Gander to the draft Durham City Sustainable Transport Strategy and Action Plan 2015-2030. The Strategy had previously been circulated to members and the proposed response was circulated at the meeting.

The Chairman proposed minor amendments to the letter which were agreed by members.

AGREED that the response be agreed as amended, and submitted to Durham County Council.

ACTION:

Jill Errington to submit amended response to DCC, and circulate to all LAF members for information.

21 Membership and Promotion of the LAF

The Chairman reported on the appointment of new member Pat Holding and advised that all members had now received their ID badges.

AGREED that the information be noted.

22 Notification of Open Access Restrictions

The Chairman reported the receipt of the following open access restriction:-

Fothergate Allotment – Dog Exclusion Order to protect moorland birds 10 December 2015 to 9 December 2020.

A copy of the notice was circulated to members at the meeting.

AGREED that the information be noted.

23 Work Programme/Annual Report

a) **Work Programme**

AGREED that the Work Programme be updated to include the following:-

Topic	Role	Member (Lead) and Group 2015-2016	Task	Target Date
Land of Oak and Iron Landscape Partnership		(Andrew Jeffrey)		
Awareness Campaign – Hedgecutting	To draft press release	(Geoff Rigden)/David Maughan/Brian Hodgson		

b) **Annual Report 2015-2016**

Robin Trounson reminded members of a suggestion made at the last AGM to change the way in which the Annual Report was presented for 2015-2016, with a focus on the LAF's Work Programme. LAF members would be asked to provide a summary of their individual topic areas and a brief explanation of what had been achieved in the year, together with aims for the forthcoming year.

AGREED that after 31 March 2016 LAF members be asked to provide information for the Annual Report for 2015/2016 in respect of their own topic areas, with a view to finalising the Report at the LAF meeting on 11 July 2016.

ACTION: Jill Errington to contact LAF members for the information.

24 Date, Time and Venue of Next Meeting

AGREED that the next meeting be held on Monday 18 April 2016 at 6.00pm in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham.