

**NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK AND COUNTRYSIDE
JOINT LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON

THURSDAY 31 JANUARY 2008 at 1800 - 2030

STANNINGTON VILLAGE HALL, MORPETH

- JLAF Members: Pamela Brooks, Chair
George Astbury
James Brown
Edward Carrington
Gill Featonby
Ted Liddle
Susan Rogers
- Graham Gill
Victoria Brown
Erica Bamford
Susan Finch
Kevin Vigars
Peter Nicholson
- Officers: David Brookes, Northumberland County Council (till 2010)
Mike Jeffrey, Northumberland County Council (till 2010)
Marion Hume, Northumberland National Park/JLAF Administrator
Elaine Rigg, Northumberland National Park
Lorna Lazzari, Northumberland National Park Authority
- Observers: Mrs Stephanie Ord, Natural England
Mr Nicholas Gilbert, Trail Riders Fellowship
- Apologies: Richard Cross
Bryan Harwood
Paul Kelly
Jonathan Mullard
- David Towns
Lorraine Hershon
Angus Collingwood-Cameron

1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly Mrs S Ord and Mr N Gilbert attending as observers. She intimated that Richard Cross was unable to attend as he was in hospital and everyone wished him a speedy recovery.

The Chair notified the Joint Local Access Forum (JLAF) members that since the last meeting Alasdair Mitchell, for personal reasons, had resigned from the JLAF.

The Chair highlighted the fact that although local access forum meetings are open to members of the public, they are not public meetings.

2 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no questions from members of the public.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

T Liddle declared an interest in as much that during any discussions on cycling, he wished it noted that he was involved with a cycling initiative involving

Northumberland National Park Sustainable Development Fund and Northumberland Strategic Partnership.

4 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 24 October 2007 were approved by members.

5 MATTERS ARISING

Item 12.1: P Brooks said that Working Group Three had included a statement on windfarms in the report from their recent meeting. It was noted that the Greenrigg windfarm enquiry began on 18 January 2008.

Item 12.2: it was noted that the Minerals Waste Development Framework document had been withdrawn and G Featonby read out a letter to this effect from Northumberland County Council. M Hume confirmed she had written on behalf of the Chair, to G Halliday requesting that we be included in the list of statutory consultees for any future consultations on this matter.

Item 14 – Newbiggin' by the Sea Ban on Dogs: G Featonby reported that this matter was now in the hands of the Kennel Club. M Hume was asked to liaise with G Featonby, reply to the correspondent accordingly and remove this from the task list of Working Group One.

Action: MH/GF to liaise; MH to reply to correspondent and remove from WG1 agenda

6 CHAIR'S REPORT

The Chair said she would report on the afternoon session in the next item. She drew attention to other points of note which included a letter dated 21 January 2008 from the Minister, Jonathan Shaw, regarding Discovering Lost Ways and a meeting of local access forum Chairs at Natural England, Sheffield which she had attended, where it had been agreed to re-instate the National Access Forum. She said she would update members on this further once the Minutes of this meeting had been received.

7 OVERVIEW OF AFTERNOON SESSION

The Chair reported on the afternoon session which had the theme 'How well does Northumberland promote outdoor enjoyment of the County' and which comprised a series of presentations from E Rowark (Kielder Partnership), D Wise (Northumberland National Park Authority) and G Ingram (Northumberland Tourism) followed by a workshop attended by a number of invited guests from a wide variety of interested organisations in Northumberland. She thanked the members of the JLAF who had produced a series of vision statements for the meeting and all others who had contributed to the afternoon session.

She said feedback had revealed that discussions in the workshop had been more general than expected though the usefulness of the vision papers had been highlighted. The freshness of the audience had also been commented on by

guests. She said it was hoped that delegates would send in the information requested from the workshop deliberations so that these could be collated and one positive project be forthcoming. She concluded by saying that she felt that the profile of the JLAF had been raised positively by this meeting which was one of the targets of the 2007 – 2008 Action Plan.

8 MEDIATION PANEL

The Chair thanked G Astbury and JLAF members who had participated in the Mediation Panel, which had held its first meeting in August 2007 and last meeting on 3 December 2007, and drew members' attention to the Minutes of that meeting and associated appendices. G Astbury gave a brief verbal report on the exercise which had involved representatives from Allen Valleys Action Group, 4 Parishes BOATS Committee and Slaley Parish Council.

He emphasised that the outcome was due to voluntary process and the purpose was to seek common grounds for agreement with the Mediation Panel remaining totally neutral. He drew attention to the recommendations in Section D of the Minute of 3 December 2007.

D Brookes asked for clarification to be made in the Report of 3 December on the recommendations in Section D as follows:

- i) The action agreed by D Brookes, Northumberland County Council: to inform Natural England where a claim affects a site of special scientific interest (SSSI).
- ii) The action agreed by D Brookes, Northumberland County Council: to consider if it is necessary to inform English Heritage where an application for a Modification Order impacts on a scheduled ancient monument.

At the end of the discussions it was agreed to:

- a) amend the Report as per D Brookes request under Section D;
- b) send out report and appendices to all interested parties to say that the JLAF approved the report and D Brookes amendments with a covering letter saying the JLAF members will be holding a final meeting to tie up loose ends;
- c) organise a short meeting 'in camera' with JLAF members in mid February with any actions for the interested parties communicated to them after that.

See Appendix 1 for further details.

9 UPDATE ON THE RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Chair complemented D Brookes on the published version of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. D Brookes explained the procedure leading up to the final documents which had gone to the Northumberland County Council Executive on 3 December 2007. He added that he had been asked to give a short presentation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 30 January 2008. The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee had stated that the importance of

access and recreation to the economy should be considered when deciding annual budgets.

For 2008 - 2009 a bid for £175,000 of surface and bridge capital improvements from the Local Transport Plan had been made (Proposed Rights of Way Accessibility Improvement Projects 2008). The Council's Area Committees had considered the LTP Annual Programme but as yet there is no confirmation of the funding. In addition to the capital budget the Council has a revenue budget of approximately £125,000 for maintenance and repairs.

Referring to the paper '*Proposed Rights of Way Accessibility Improvement Projects 2008*' it was noted that this was 'not cast in stone' as there was still some consultation work being undertaken. The projects for 2008 – 2009 would focus on urban fringe paths but would also include £10,000 for Salters Road improvements, Ashington Wood improvements for cyclists and riders as well as walkers plus a £20,000 contribution towards the Lakeside Way at Kielder Forest and Water Park.

V Brown asked if JLAF member attendance at area committee meetings had raised the profile of public rights of way issues (PRoW) and M Jeffrey said it probably had helped to raise awareness of PRoW issues.

P Brooks, referring to the draft strategies in the RoWIP asked if the JLAF could work with Northumberland County Council on these e.g. could the JLAF produce some background vision statements e.g. 'Access for all' draft strategy, mobility impairment etc. D Brookes and M Jeffrey said they would consider this. A member of the JLAF said they had had an issue with Druridge Country Park and wheelchair access and were advised to discuss the issue with officers following the meeting.

T Liddle provided an update on the draft Northumberland Cycling Strategy which had gone out for informal consultation as it was now out of date. D Brookes said he and A Elliot would liaise in this regard and it was agreed it would be useful to invite A Elliot to a Working Group One meeting.

10 ANNUAL ACTION PLAN 2008 – 2009

The Chair thanked members for sending in their suggestions for the next Annual Action Plan and stressed the relevance and importance of this key JLAF working document, highlighting the fact that it required to be focussed, realistic and prioritise the issues to be considered by the JLAF (see Appendix 2 for further details). She added that the Annual Report and Action Plan should mesh together.

It was agreed that the Action Plan would be drafted, circulated to members and the appointing authorities and signed-off at the meeting on 24 April 2008 as a working document.

T Liddle raised the matter of having a JLAF information leaflet similar to that produced by other local access forums and it was agreed to look at this when reviewing the Action Plan.

11 RECRUITMENT YEAR 6 (2008 – 2009)

M Hume provided an update on the recruitment process for Year 6 (2008 – 2009) which would start in early March with interviews in early April and possibly, a new member induction event in May. E Rigg updated on her recent meeting with T Gates regarding recruitment issues, which resulted in the requirement to make some changes to the application form, application pack and the compilation of a more objective scoring system for judging member categories.

12 UPDATE ON MECHANICALLY PROPELLED VEHICLES (mpv's)

L Lazzari gave an update on the meeting which took place in November 2007 and which included input from the police. She said it was hoped a clear message could be conveyed to users as to what can and cannot be done with mechanically propelled vehicles (mpvs) and that the situation would be monitored. Other issues which came out of the meeting included a new partnership with the Forestry Commission and the aim to re-establish the Cheviot Motor Cycle group.

D Brookes said he would ask if it was feasible to invite a police officer, PC Andy Reay, to the next meeting of the JLAF on 24 April regarding reporting incidents to the police. K Vigars said that the Tyne & Wear LAF had been dealing with Northumbria Police on how to report all incidents to the police, however small, but whilst urban incidents were easier to notice, country incidents were more difficult to spot and therefore report on.

13 NEW GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK PAPER

It was noted this paper had been issued to JLAF members for information and highlighted that changes were effective from April 2008, the main one being a reduction in indicators from 198 to 35. D Brookes said that most authorities intended to carry on with best value performance indicators, using the same methodology so they can do comparisons as well as monitor performance. It was also noted that these indicators may also be included in local area agreements so will require to be used till 2011. E Rigg said that the National Park Authority would continue to use BVPI 178.

14 GENERAL UPDATES

14.1 Report from Northumberland National Park

The report was noted. Issues highlighted from the report included:

- L Lazzari advising members that she had nothing further to report on the removal and replacement of the Board Walks at Auchope Cairn as funding from Natural England for national trials was likely to be at a reduced level in 2008-2009.

- L Lazzari advising members that consideration was being given to an upgrade of signs and structures on the Pennine Way.
- P Brooks said that she was disappointed the JLAF had not received a reply from the letter sent to the Chief Executive of Hadrian's Wall Heritage Ltd following the JLAF visit to Hadrian's Wall path in October 2007 particularly as the deterioration of Milecastle 38 was continuing despite the fact that there had been a suggestion that funding was now in place for repairs. P Brooks asked G Gill to compile a letter to Hadrian's Wall Heritage Ltd to ascertain their plans and timescales.

Action: G Gill to compile letter to HWH Ltd

- Other issues raised from the report included the Border Ridge and Threestoneburn, which referred to the fact that this route appears in a book on mountain biking therefore the new diversion route would require a surface suitable for this activity.

Turning to best value performance indicators, and noting that surveys had shown a decline in performance, L Lazzari explained that this was as a result of issues including waymarking at junctions, paths on MoD estate and gate replacement. She added that BVPI was a random selection of 35 paths and the results had in fact shown a 12% reduction in defects on last year. M Jeffrey said he would compile a short report on the 2007 BVPI results for the next meeting.

Action: M Jeffrey to provide NVPI report for next meeting

14.2 Report from Northumberland County Council

The report was noted. P Brooks thanked M Jeffrey for his report on Wagon Ways. P Brooks asked all JLAF members to pass any further comments to G Gill, Chair of Working Group Two before their meeting on 26 February, and these would then be fed back to M Jeffrey following discussion at that meeting. G Featonby updated the meeting on the planning application for the development of Ellington Colliery and the possibility of a conflict with an adjacent wagon way.

14.3 Other reports

- Referring to Parish Pride, S Rogers said that Tarncliffe Parish Council were working on bridleways.
- Referring to his report from the North Pennines Access and Recreation Working Group, T Liddle suggested inviting R Keane from Natural England, to the JLAF meeting in January 2009 to discuss Access and Nature Conservation, and Managing Recreational Access matters. P Brooks subsequently mentioned her report of her conversation with R Keane and noted the suggestion to invite him to the January meeting.
- S Ord confirmed she was only the temporary Access Officer till March 2008 but would remain as the LAF support officer at Natural England.

15 MEMBERS' SECTION

S Rogers asked that the meeting referred to as Leader on 9 January was in fact, a meeting of The Outdoors Activities Network (TOAN); she advised that J monks

had attended the afternoon session and she would send a report from the meeting to M Hume to forward to members.

16 CONSULTATIONS

Members noted the closures which had been consulted on since the last meeting and that the final version of 'Access for All' was still awaited from DEFRA. There was nothing further to report.

17 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Path Diversions: V Brown suggested raising with DEFRA, a suggestion that there be a revision to the current method of dealing with path diversions to make them quicker, easier and cheaper to do. It was agreed that she would be invited to a meeting of Working Group Two, who would look at this issue initially, and report back to a future meeting of the JLAF.

18 DATES OF FUTURE JLAF MEETINGS

The meeting closed at 2035. The next meeting of the JLAF will take place on Thursday 24 April 2008 and further details will be available in due course.

Date	Location (venues tbc)	Meeting themes (provisional)
24 April 08	Blyth/Wansbeck	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Exercise – Primary Care Trusts • Mechanically Propelled Vehicles • 'Groundwork'
24 July 08	Ingram Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land manager perspective of access • Access and harmony with sporting interests • MoD – Access updates
30 October 08	Coastal AONB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coastal Access • Marine Bill • Coastal AONB 50th Celebrations
29 January 09		
30 April 09		
30 July 09		
29 October 09		

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Item 8: Notes of comments from the JLAF Meeting held on 31 January 2008 on the JLAF Mediation Panel

Appendix 2 - Item 10: Notes of comments from the JLAF Meeting held on 31 January 2008 Update on Action Plan

Item 8: Notes of comments from the JLAF Meeting held on 31 January 2008 on the JLAF Mediation Panel

This report is a fuller version of the discussions which took place at the JLAF meeting on 31 January 2008.

The Chair thanked G Astbury and JLAF members who had participated in the Mediation Panel, which had held its first meeting in August 2007 and last meeting on 3 December 2007, and drew members' attention to the Minutes of that meeting and associated appendices. He said that mediation was very demanding in terms of times and resources (both human and financial) and interpretation of legal issues e.g. fitting into due process.

G Astbury gave a brief verbal report on the exercise which had involved representatives from the interested parties (Allen Valleys Action Group, 4 Parishes BOATS Committee and Slaley Parish Council) and other invitees.

He emphasised that the outcome was due to voluntary process, the purpose was to seek common grounds for agreement and the Mediation Panel remained totally neutral. These three elements were emphasised in the letter sent to the interested parties for the meeting on 3 December.

G Astbury drew attention to the recommendations in Section D of the Minutes and suggested that a meeting of JLAF members, or a small sub-group, be arranged to expedite the complicated set of proposals sent in by AVAG and to decide if anything is to be done – or not – and communicate this to the interested parties. It was commented on that at the end of the day some of the issues raised were to do with Natural England's lack of intervention in trying to resolve the issues and the fact that relevant European legislation could be deemed to be lacking.

D Brookes asked for clarification in the Report of 3 December on the recommendations in Section D as follows:

- i) The action agreed by D Brookes, Northumberland County Council: to inform Natural England where a claim affects a site of special scientific interest (SSSI).
- ii) The action agreed by D Brookes, Northumberland County Council: to consider if it is necessary to inform English Heritage where an application for a Modification Order impacts on a scheduled ancient monument.

At the end of the day the Mediation Panel and interested parties' consensus was that a mutual understanding of some issues, if not success in the actual mediation process itself, had been achieved. However, subsequent correspondence from AVAG had made it clear they never wanted to be involved in mediation. J Brown said it was evident that one of the North Pennines main problem areas was lack of trust so this was not resolved as not all parties had been present on 3 December but that openness became evident during the meeting on 3 December from the interested parties which was refreshing.

The JLAF noted that Mr A Kind, having been the instigator of the mediation panel process at JLAF meeting on 19 July 2007, had subsequently not been in touch with the Panel regarding the matter all, including not attending the meeting on 3 December; though this was due to ill health he had made no contact with the Panel at all. P Brooks suggested that an agenda item for the sub-group meeting should be 'how to communicate with Mr Kind'.

At the end of the discussions it was agreed to:

- a) amend the Report as per D Brookes request under Section D
- b) send out report and appendices to all interested parties to say that the JLAF approved the report and D Brookes amendments with a covering letter saying the JLAF members will be holding a final meeting to tie up loose ends.
- c) organise a short meeting 'in camera' with JLAF members in mid February.

(amended 3 September 2008)

Item 10: Notes of comments from the JLAF Meeting held on 31 January 2008 Update on Action Plan

PB spoke about the relevance and importance of this document and said it needed to be more focussed and realistic with regard to the work of the JLAF and our capabilities and availabilities. She said the JLAF had made huge strides in what we do but was concerned we were taking on so much therefore we must prioritise what we do.

Various points were highlighted about content/style:

- Identify audience/s
- User friendly – make it shorter?
- Accept mainly internal document however
- No major re-vamp this year but consider for next year – WG 3 will look at this
- Annual Report to mesh with Action Plan – therefore mention urban routes, green exercise, land matters, RoWIP etc in it
- Future meetings – themes to be considered to include:
 - National Trust
 - Environmental issues
 - Conservation issues
 - RSPB
 - English Heritage
 - Tyne Rivers Trust and waterways issues
 - Environment Agency (especially regarding their view of what can and can't be done with rivers)
 - Mechanical vehicles
 - Re-visit Otterburn
- Working groups and geographical spread to be looked at mainly due to logistics of planning meetings – should this be addressed when re-forming working groups. However, some members felt there was an advantage to having this spread was advantageous. MH was asked to get a map of Northumberland and plot where all members are located and see if it was feasible to calculate the working groups on a location rather than interest, basis or should groups arrange to meet at a more central point.
- Draft Action Plan to be available for next meeting – may be need to hold member get-together to discuss content before this.
- Important to get appointing authorities on board as well (e.g. member reps to attend)

The Chair thanked members for sending in their suggestions for the next Annual Plan and stressed the relevance and importance of this key working document, highlighting the fact that it required to be focussed, realistic and prioritise the issues to be considered by the JLAF. She added that the Annual Report and Action Plan should mesh together. It was agreed that the Action Plan would be drafted, circulated to members and the appointing authorities and signed-off at the meeting on 24 April 2008 as a working document.