

NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK AND COUNTRYSIDE JOINT LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

The Access Mapping Team
Countryside Agency
PO Box 475
Redhill
Surrey
RH1 1WR

Date: 6th June 2003

Dear Sir,

COUNTRYSIDE AND RIGHTS OF WAY ACT 2000 CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT MAP OF OPEN COUNTRY AND REGISTERED COMMON LAND FOR NORTH EAST ENGLAND (AREA 5)

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Northumberland National Park and Countryside Joint Local Access Forum ('the Forum') is the statutory body set up under the above mentioned legislation by the appointing authorities of Northumberland National Park Authority and Northumberland County Council. The following comments relating to the draft map are restricted to the area remit of the forum, namely the county of Northumberland outwith the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- 1.2 We appreciate the scale and complexity of the task at hand and realised early on that we would not be able to comment in detail on every land parcel within our area. **Therefore this report identifies the general issues that were raised during our discussions, backed up with specific examples (see appendix).**

2 General Comments

- 2.1 All things considered we felt that the map was a good effort at accurately portraying the qualifying areas of open country and registered common land, given the age of some of the datasets used. We would urge, however, that this exercise cannot be undertaken as primarily a desk exercise. In order to substantiate the Agency's decision on those parcels where accuracy has been questioned during the draft consultation phase, **we request that additional field visits are undertaken by experienced staff.**
- 2.2 As the draft map stands, the Forum foresees there being problems arising out of the situation of having different access legislation in place within England and Scotland. Specifically the take up of new access rights to open water within Scotland and the management implications that will arise on the River Tweed that, for stretches, forms part of the National boundary.
- 2.3 We welcomed receiving our own copy of the draft map and felt that public access to the draft maps via parish councils, local authority and Agency offices, the road shows and the web was generally well provided for. However, one of our forum members is registered blind and we feel that there has been a distinct lack of provision of information and the means by which such people could actively partake in this consultation process. The provision of information (eg the Agency's frequently asked questions document) in

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audio format has been lacking as has access to a tactile version of the draft map. **We would expect this to be rectified before the publication of the provisional map for Area 5.**

3 Specific Comments

3.1 Our specific comments relate to seven areas of concern regarding the capture of information on the draft map. **We feel that the Agency should reassess its decision regards the areas identified and check for similar anomalies on the draft map.**

3.2 Former areas of forest or wood.

We have identified land parcels that were once forest/wood but subsequent to clear felling some time ago have reverted back to the former habitat, namely moor. (eg. Ant Hills map sheet NY88 JJ22). Conversely we appreciate that there are numerous areas of new tree planting on moor that have yet to establish, so it is anticipated, that if successful, these areas will be identified and removed at the decadal review, (eg. NT60 GG32).

3.3 Inconsistency in treatment of coastal dunes

Under which criteria of the mapping methodology does the coastal dune area at Ross Back Sands (NU02 CC5 to DD4) qualify? We feel that if this is to be included then it would be inconsistent not to include other such areas, (eg. Bamburgh Dunes NU02 MM12 or Holy Island Dunes NU04 BB35).

3.4 Inconsistency in portrayal of crags

It was noted that numerous areas of crag have not been captured at the draft mapping stage and we feel that this is a clear oversight of the Agency in that such features, no matter how small, obviously serve a useful purpose to those partaking in the sports of climbing and bouldering. The mapping methodology makes specific reference to such features within the mountain classification of open country and the examples identified such as Crag Lough (NY66 JJ27) or Bowden Doors (NU02 Q18) are often associated with the other vegetation types highlighted as being typical of such habitat.

3.5 Inconsistency in portrayal of moor within forested areas

It was not clear to the members of the Forum why in some cases such as Gowany Knowe (NY66 CC5+6) forest clearings with moor habitat had been captured whilst in others such as Hawthorne Rigg (NY66 BB6+7) or Bellcrag Flow (NY66 MM17) they had not, when on the ground the habitat is the same.

3.6 Land with appropriate open country characteristics not captured

It was felt that areas of qualifying habitat, specifically moor, had not been accurately mapped. In many cases these lay adjacent to areas identified as open country, for example Goatscrag Hill (NT82 MM7+8) or Lucker Moor (NU02 AA28).

3.7 Areas which do not appear to be mapped to a physical boundary

It would appear that numerous areas have not been mapped to a distinct physical boundary and this might lead to confusion on the ground by landowners and users when the new right of access commences, (eg. Catton Park Hill, NU02 Q24).

3.8 Area of 'No Useful Purpose' abutting open country area

Lemington Bank (NU00 EE19) has been identified as having no useful purpose yet it adjoins an area mapped as open country. This is inconsistent with the mapping methodology.

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3.9 Improved and semi-improved land mapped as open country

It was felt that several areas of in-bye land, either improved or semi-improved, had been inaccurately mapped as open country. Examples include Scaup (NY68 O7) and Featherwood (NT80 F34).

4 Conclusion

We trust that you find these comments constructive and helpful in the process of making the provisional map as accurate as possible inline with the mapping methodology. We would appreciate being kept informed as to the progress of the subsequent provisional map and would ask that, when produced, a list of the amendments made be accompanied with it.

It is also worth mentioning that as a result of this exercise, on more than one occasion, the potential difficulties in managing the new right of access on the ground were raised. It is our view that the revision and marketing of the new country code will be fundamental to the success of this and we would appreciate being kept informed as to the progress of this work and wish to be involved at an early stage. **We would like to offer you our expertise and actively assist in developing a new country code to take account of both user and landowner issues.**

Yours sincerely

Bryan Harwood
Chair
Northumberland National Park and Countryside Joint Local Access Forum

cc
Northumberland National Park Authority
Northumberland County Council
Countryside Agency (Regional Office)