

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

**Minutes of Meeting held Thursday 19 January 2006 from 1800 - 2100**

**Northumberland National Park, Eastburn, Hexham**

- JLAF Members:       Richard Cross, Chair  
                          Pamela Brooks, Vice Chair  
                          George Astbury                     Graham Gill  
                          Erica Bamford                     Angus Collingwood-Cameron  
                          Barry Imeson                     Paul Kelly  
                          Ted Liddle                         Susan Rogers  
                          Nick Rossiter                     Bryan Harwood  
                          Janet Robinson                  Kevin Heyman  
                          Alison Carter                     Gill Featonby
- Officers:             Catriona Mulligan, Northumberland National Park (NPA)  
                          David Brookes, Northumberland County Council (NCC)  
                          Rob Mayhew, Northumberland National Park  
                          Marion Hume, Northumberland National Park/JLAF Administrator  
                          Lorna Lazzari, Northumberland National Park
- Others:              Tony Gates, CEO Northumberland National Park, observer  
                          Martin Shaw, Countryside Agency, speaker  
                          Simon Wilson, North Pennines AONB, speaker  
                          Iain Hedley, member of the public  
                          Vic Brown, member of the public
- Apologies:         James Boulton                     Michael Walton  
                          Jo Deniel-Rowe                    Mark Wood

**1       Welcome and Apologies**

R Cross welcomed everyone to the meeting and said he was again delighted at the turnout of members. He introduced Tony Gates, the new Chief Executive of Northumberland National Park. He also welcomed the two speakers, Martin Shaw, Countryside Agency and Simon Wilson, North Pennines AONB.

**2       Public Participation**

No questions had been received from members of the public in advance of the meeting. R Cross welcomed two members of the public - Ian Hedley, Northumberland National Park Cheviot Action Area Officer and Vic Brown, British Canoe Union River Access Campaign and invited them to raise any questions. M Hume said she had again circulated the agenda to all Parish Clerks as well as placing adverts in local papers and on the internet to spread notification of meetings to a wider audience.

**3       Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

#### **4 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 20 October 2005 were approved by members and signed by the Chairman as a true record of the meeting.

#### **5 Matters Arising**

##### Item 5: Annual report

The Chairman said all information had finally been received to allow the completion of the Annual Report for 2004 – 2005 and this was now available. Whilst it met DEFRA's requirements, it did not meet those of the Joint Local Access Forum and accordingly, the 2005 - 2006 Annual Report will be radically different in as much as it would be aimed more at informing the public and would therefore be circulated to a wider audience. He said he hoped a draft would be available to circulate before the July meeting.

##### Item 6.6 Liaison

It was confirmed that R Cross and P Brooks would hold an informal liaison meeting with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Cumbria and Durham local access forums in March/April. Simon Wilson of the North Pennines AONB said he would be happy to host such a meeting at Stanhope and would liaise with M Hume regarding arrangements. The discussion topics would include the North Pennines AONB.

##### Item 8.1: Issue raised by Gill Featonby

Concern remained about the areas of access land with dog restrictions in place due to the presence of grouse and the notices which abound saying '*Sorry No Dogs except on Public Rights of Way*'. R Mayhew said that although landowners had the right to place these Section 23 restrictions on permissive paths, e.g. Simonside, some estates including Northumberland Estates, have given written permission for dogs to be taken on permissive paths. R Mayhew said he was continuing to liaise with other landowners who were not allowing such permissions. K Heyman pointed out that search and rescue dogs were an exception from the exclusions.

D Brookes said that he was not aware that any permissive rights enjoyed by walkers with dogs had been affected by subsequent Section 23 restrictions outside the National Park.

##### Item 9: Consultation documents (see also Item 8.3 of this meeting)

R Cross thanked the members for their work on the recent DEFRA consultation documents and confirmed that responses had been sent to DEFRA to meet the deadlines. Members would be informed of the outcomes when these were available.

- Consultation of Diversions of Rights of Way for the protection of SSSIs;
- Consultation on the Confirmation of Byelaws relating to Countryside Recreation;
- Consultation relating to the amendments of the LAF (England) Regulation.

##### Item 10.2: Salters Road

D Brookes said the outcome would be reported at a future meeting.

## **6 Presentation by the Countryside Agency**

Martin Shaw, Senior Countryside Officer, gave a very interesting presentation which covered a range of subjects including the Natural England and Rural Communities (NERC) Bill. A summary of his presentation is included (Appendix 1).

## **7 Presentation by the North Pennines AONB**

Simon Wilson, North Pennines AONB Officer, provided members with an informative introduction to the North Pennines AONB and a summary of his presentation is included (Appendix 2).

## **8 Updates.**

### **8.1 Financial Update**

#### **8.1a) Northumberland National Park**

C Mulligan reported on the £100,000 budget to invest in the Rights of Way/recreation network and that an extra £30,000 had been budgeted for 2005 – 2006 due to unexpected repairs necessary to Hareshaw Linn which had been caused by heavy rain. She added that Performance Indicators had highlighted that rights of way in general in the National Park had deteriorated prior to 2004 due to the emphasis placed on the Hadrian's Wall Trail and before that, the Pennine Way. She concluded by saying that the National Park was facing a tough time in 2006 – 2007 due to budget cuts and T Gates advised the National Park was facing a '0' settlement over the next two years and that the National Park was currently looking at its priorities..

The two Performance Indicators for Rights of Way signed from the roadside and Ease of Use had shown that only 66% of paths were easy to use in 2003 - 2004. However, 75% of this year's budget was now spent and 99% of rights of way were signed from the roadside with 78% easy to use.

Alluding to the annual sample of random selections (6%) of paths undertaken by Northumberland County Council, however C Mulligan said that it was felt that the true situation was likely to be nearer 74% as only one forestry route had been in the random selection yet forestry covers 20% of the National Park. She said that running the condition survey as a snapshot was not accurate enough – this was a three year project (£50,000 per annum). D Brookes expanded on annual samples of random selections which were part of Northumberland County Council's Best Value Performance Indicators and said he would check the last three years figures for representation and forward this information to M Hume (see Appendix 3).

A Carter asked about Conditions Assessments and R Mayhew said these were undertaken by in-house staff and trained volunteers using the BDPI 178 methodology. There were stringent guidelines for the methodology and that the Ministry of defence and Forestry Commission were being targeted for the 2006 – 2007 surveys.

#### **8.1b) Northumberland County Council**

D Brookes reported that Northumberland County Council had £11 million to save in 2006 – 2007. Whilst there were no specific details of where these savings would be made it was likely that some cuts to the Rights of Way and Access budgets would be made. He said he would keep the Joint Local Access Forum informed of the situation.

8.1c) B Harwood expressed continuing concern at the steady and relentless reduction in budgets for access and recreation. He asked R Cross, on behalf of the Joint Local Access Forum, to communicate directly with Northumberland County Council, as Highway Authority, the cost effective nature that small budgets and big returns engender. R Cross agreed to write to the Leader of Northumberland County Council in this regard and request a meeting for himself and P Brooks with the Director of Finance. Members noted there was a series of budgetary consultation meetings being held around the area and P Kelly said he would send a list of these to M Hume to be circulated to Joint Local Access Forum members. M Shaw said that research shows that rights of way and access to the countryside are worthwhile and that the Joint Local Access Forum must stress this evidence when making economic arguments and highlight the big returns from a relatively small investment.

## 8.2 CROW Update

### 8.2a) Mapping issues

R Mayhew said he had a template for recording mapping anomalies and added that the Countryside Agency held a database of mapping issues for the Decadal Review. He requested members to forward any mapping anomaly issues to him using the template indicated, which would be amended to include 'whole of Northumberland' and a copy sent to all members. He said he was happy to hold this information for the entire JLAF area.

### 8.2b) Closures

Members agreed closures in the North Pennines appeared extreme and in particular, some felt the number of 5-year exclusions excessive as the public were not yet using the areas as much as had been originally anticipated though it was still early days. Some members felt that the rarity of black grouse species meant that all efforts had to be taken to ensure they are not compromised in any way whilst others felt that closures go against the spirit of CROW as some seem to be going over the minimum closures needed to keep wildlife safe. It was noted that whilst only 1% of the North Pennines was affected by closures it was the most used area and therefore the most contentious.

## 8.3 Working Group Feedback

- Working Group One – Recreation and Access Strategy

K Heymann reported on the meeting held on 29 November at which the DEFRA Consultation document '*Consultation relating to the amendment of the LAF (England) Regulations 2002*' was discussed. A report from the meeting had been circulated to all JLAF members and M Hume had sent the response to DEFRA on behalf of the JLAF.

- Working Group Two – Rights of Way Network Improvement

G Gill said that the working group had met on 4 November to discuss the DEFRA Consultation document '*Consultation of the diversions of ROW for the protection of SSSIs*'. A report from the meeting had been circulated to all JLAF members and M Hume had sent the response to DEFRA on behalf of the JLAF.

- Working Group Three – Implementation of the Statutory Right of Access

R Cross said that the working group had met on 21 November to discuss the DEFRA

Consultation document '*Consultation on the Confirmation of Byelaws relating to Countryside Recreation*'. A report from the meeting had been circulated to all JLAF members and M Hume had sent the response to DEFRA on behalf of the JLAF. The group had also met on 9 January 2006 to discuss the draft ROWIP document.

#### 8.4 Update on information from other LAFS

##### 8.4a) LAF Regional Seminar

P Brooks reported on the LAF Regional Seminar organised by the Countryside Agency on 14 November 2005 in Preston which she attended with B Imeson and M Hume. Some key points from the seminar included the speech by the Minister, the suggestion that it was time now for LAFs to evaluate themselves and the potential power of LAFS to make their voice heard particularly with their appointing authority officers. Diversity issues, strategy for the horse industry, disability issues, Lost Ways and budget cuts were also discussed. With regard to the evaluation process, she said that she was already liaising with R Cross about a draft workplan for the forthcoming year.

She said that the Minister had said that all Highway Authorities must produce a ROWIP but there was no separate pot of cash to implement this as and that agencies had been advised of this at the outset. He had also said that local access forums should be actively involved in the compilation of the document and not just rubber stamp it. She concluded by saying she had posed several questions to the Minister and although promised a written reply, none had been forthcoming so she would write to him and remind him of her questions.

S Rogers said she had written to her MP, Alan Beith, last year regarding rights of way improvement and she would forward a copy of the reply from Alun Michael to P Brooks for information.

##### 8.4b Access Officer Seminar

R Mayhew reported on the Access Officer seminar held in November 2005, to which all National Park Access Officers had been invited. Key issues discussed included: getting the message re access education out to the wider public domain; cross compliance and removing Rights of Way obstructions; networking between National Park staff and the Rural Payments Agency and the Land Reform Act. They also heard an interesting presentation from Neil McKay of the Scottish Borders Council on the Scottish Access Strategy.

The group visited the Otterburn estate and had noted the byelaw review currently underway which will propose that all Ministry of Defence land is by-lawed land (currently only two thirds of Otterburn is by-lawed) therefore under CROW there is a potential loss of access.

Referring to cross-compliance, some members expressed concern over cross compliance issues and D Brookes explained that Northumberland County Council had included in its enforcement letters, references to the potential implications for landowners of failing to be cross-compliant in relation to public rights of way on their land.

JLAF members asked to be kept informed about Otterburn access issues and it was suggested that a visit to the estate might be of interest as an information/ training exercise for the members.

## 8.5 Rights of Way Improvement Plan

D Brookes noted that the JLAF had been consulting on, and considering, the draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan and the preliminary outcomes would be discussed in Part II of the meeting. It was agreed that working groups would meet if members felt it necessary and comments passed to D Brookes by end of February.

## 9 **Members' Section**

### 9.1 Issue raised by Gill Featonby

G Featonby raised an issue with regard to encouraging local authorities and organisations including the National Trust and English Heritage to provide greater access for horse riders and cyclists on land they owned and managed. It was agreed Working Group One would discuss this issue and report back to a future meeting.

### 9.2 Bridleways in the Cheviots

S Rogers was thanked for promptly responding to a member of the public's regarding an issue re Bridleways in the Cheviots. She asked how we could encourage more members of the public to contact us.

### 9.3 Individual updates

B Harwood raised the issue of DEFRA's five point strategy regarding coastal access and suggested it be an agenda item for a future meeting.

S Rogers raised an issue of concern for the British Horse Society regarding Section 15 land as they were concerned that rights of way might be lost. The Countryside Agency had done research and some Section 15 land areas were identified which were felt to be incomplete.

T Little said he was working on two new cross country routes for multi-use (but not including canoeists) from Eskdale to Esk Valley (improved Wainwright Route) and Teviotdale to Skipton (Dozen Dales and some) and therefore will share the proposed route alignment with the JLAF.

### 9.4 Recruitment

M Hume said that the recruitment process for Year 4 (1 May 2006 to 30 April 2007) would take place in March and April with new members in place by early May. Advertising would be done in local papers and on the web pages of the National Park and Northumberland County Council, with information also passed to other organisations including libraries and parish councils.

## 10 **Any Other Business**

### 10.1a) British Canoe Union

Ms V Brown of the British Canoe Union updated members on her role and the latest concerns with regard to water sports. Not only was there no dedicated money for canoeing, there was also no rights of way network for rivers. Consequently, the BCU found it hard to negotiate with landowners and riparian owners of waterways and did not want to resort to 'mass trespass'. She added that the annual canoe rally in Hexham brought in significant business to the area at an otherwise quiet time.

The Chair asked Ms Brown to provide more information on canoe access, particularly in Northumberland and what part the BCU hoped to play in this. Members were interested to see if canoeing would be included in any revised recreation strategies.

#### 10.1b) Pennine Journey

Members noted the document provided with the papers, said they would need to review the whole document to make a judgement and questioned if another long distance walking route was required as some members were concerned at the plethora of promoted routes with little people involvement. Members also felt it should be meshed into the ROWIP. L Lazarri noted their comments and said she would keep the JLAF up-to-date with any progress.

#### 10.1c) TRACX

Members noted the documentation from Simon Wilson of the North Pennines AONB Partnership regarding the system for the recording of mechanically propelled vehicle use of rights of way and upland areas within the North Pennines AONB. M Hume said she could obtain an electronic version of the form and circulate to members if required.

#### 10.2 Wagon Ways

T Liddle said he was continuing to obtain information from various sources and would provide an update at the next meeting.

#### 10.3 Internet Maps of Rights of Way – NCC

D Brookes advised members that digitised maps were now accessible from the NCC website and suggested members took time to look at this and use the maps. A trialling exercise for logging anomalies and claims was currently underway

### **11 Date of next meeting**

The next meeting date was agreed by those present as Thursday 6 April 2006 (provisionally afternoon/evening in Jedburgh area to discuss managing access in Scotland and access issues in the Cheviot Hills).

## **NOTES FROM PART II**

### **Discussion on the consultation on Northumberland County Council's draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan**

This part of the meeting allowed the opportunity for members to meet in informal groups to discuss issues outwith the main agenda.

On this occasion they discussed Northumberland County Council's draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan, which members had received in advance of the meeting along with consultation guidelines and questions to consider. Comments were noted by D Brookes.

It was agreed that members could also meet in their working groups if they required to continue the consultation process and they agreed to do this. All comments from the working groups would be passed to D Brookes by the end of February.

With the conclusion of this item, the meeting ended at 2100. The Chair thanked everyone for attending.

## Notes from Martin Shaw's Presentation

Topics discussed included:

- Natural Environment & Rural Communities Bill – will rationalise the way the natural environment is handled - October 2006 vesting day
- National Trails (especially Hadrian's Wall Heritage Ltd);
- Access; Country Parks; Diversity Review;
- Recreation; Healthy Walking; Tourism;
- Open Access (still managed centrally but in process of being devolved to regions), part of regional management team.

### Natural England

- Officially comes into being in October '06.
- Customer focus, less duplication.
- A new organisation, not a bolting together.
- Small HQ....Central Policy Teams.....Regions.....
- In the North East, all based under one roof at the Quadrant, Newburn.

### What will we be doing?

Continuation of our current remits. Joint business plan for 2006 - 2007 in production. Some clues/thoughts include:

- health and recreation (change in emphasis, picking up the economic and health benefits of rights of way)
- new 'recreation strategy' - this will be the first Natural England
- Policy document
- new lottery bid for health / green space

Intention is to engage partners via a range of meetings in the new financial year.

### The LAF Perspective

- Occasional input to individual LAFs
- Joint regional work, taking forward and building on the meeting last October
- ROWIPs - closer links with rights of way teams and a small but hopefully growing budget to help facilitate their implementation
- BOATS - amendments to NERC bill should see a reduction in new claims but as an organisation whose role is to promote access for all, a mechanisms to enable reasoned judgement will be needed. Currently engaged in a research project to produce such a toolkit which will be available for all partners to use.

### Comments from members

- what benefits, or otherwise, will Local Access Forums get from the NERC Bill;
- future of the healthy walks scheme – many groups will continue;
- is the NERC Bill an opportunity to 'right some wrongs'?
- hope for cohesion with outside bodies and some outward thinking;
- management of open access and forestry estates;
- more awareness of 'customer care' – making messages relevant – cited Diversity Review;
- awareness of other approaches to Access e.g Scottish Natural Heritage – learn from others.

### Notes from Simon Boyd's Presentation

Simon Boyd handed out copies of the North Pennines AONB Management Plan and some notes to accompany his presentation.

His presentation included:

- the accolade of Geopark status awarded to the AONB, particularly noting the geology of the area;
- funding mechanisms from component authorities plus Countryside Agency;
- mindful of the JLAFs interest being access and recreation;
- Black Grouse;
- open access promotion to link to YHA;
- helping bed and breakfast establishments improve their genuine cyclist welcome;
- ROWIP project in Teasdale;
- Heritage Lottery – Pack Horse Trials across AONB;
- Waterside Access – reservoirs and rivers.

He also covered:

- the role LAFs might have in the work he does as North Pennines AONB Officer;
- the hopes of the AONB that the work it does will encourage people to visit the AONB;
- working closely with the Cumbria LAF especially with regard to mechanically propelled vehicles group – liaises with the Chair and Vice Chair and hopes this will extend to include the Northumberland JLAF – a start is the proposed Cumbria/Durham/Northumberland Chairs and Vice Chairs meeting in the Spring.

Comments from the members included:

- few horse riders in Upper Teasdale though network was potentially good therefore possibility of a mini-ROWIP to rectify lack of bridleways/facilities for riders? Might the 'Discovering Lost Ways' project uncover a few?
- possibility of co-operation to produce good quality documentation on access that is neither confusing nor misleading, and therefore providing better value for money e.g. the Discovery Guides should be circulated to the wider community and not kept within the AONB;
- protected landscapes of the North East;
- issues that the JLAF might need to be aware of now that the Northumberland JLAF includes the North Pennines area of Northumberland including black grouse and maintenance.

**Northumberland County Council**

**Best Value Performance Indicators**

**Three Year Comparison of the % of paths surveyed by status (2003 – 2006)**

		2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Total no of public paths		4117	4198	4229
No of public paths surveyed		309	334	338
% of route network surveyed		7.5	7.9	7.9
Public paths by status and (%) of the network:		Percentage of paths surveyed by status type		
Public Footpath (74)		72	74	73
Public Bridleway (22)		22	23	23
Byway Open to All Traffic (4)		6	3	4

From D Brookes January 2006