

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Northumberland National Park
and Countryside Joint Local Access Forum
held on Tuesday 30th September 2003 at 6.00 pm
at Northumberland County Council Offices, Morpeth.**

PRESENT:

Members

Bryan Harwood (Chair)

James Boulton

Pamela Brooks

Peter Clark

Ian Douglas

Janet Robinson

Graham Gill

Trevor Hardy

Pam Neal

Pat Scott

Michael Walton

Jo Deniel-Rowe

**Officers from the Northumberland National Park Authority (NNPA) and
Northumberland County Council (NCC):**

Catriona Mulligan, Director of Access and Communications (NNPA)

Robert Mayhew, Team Leader (Recreation and Access) (NNPA)

David Brookes, Countryside Support Team Leader (NCC)

Linda Pinkham, Team Leader (Corporate Administration) (NNPA) – Secretary

Karen Fallon, Local Access Forum Administration Officer (NNPA)

Lorna McClusky, Recreation and Access Officer (NNPA).

1. Welcome

The Chairman welcomed the Forum Members and thanked Northumberland County Council for hosting this forum meeting. The Chair introduced Clive Crossley and David Brookes from Northumberland County Council and also Lorna McClusky from Northumberland National Park Authority.

2. Apologies for Absence

Richard Cross (Vice Chair), Erica Bamford, Sue Bolam, Kevin Heymann, Richard Fordham, Ted Liddle, Nick Rossiter and Mark Wood.

The Chairman moved that Item 6 be taken next.

6. Public Participation.

The Forum were advised that a letter had been submitted by a Mr Brian Atkins, regarding the issue of access land along Hadrian's Wall. The Chairman invited Mr Atkins to take the floor. Mr Atkins advised the Forum of his concerns regarding access land along Hadrian's Wall. He felt that access land along the route was insufficient and disconnected. Mr Atkins voiced concerns that the public were being informed that with CROW they will be able to go wherever they like, except areas with exclusions and that this was going to put even greater pressures on some areas of the wall. Hadrian's Wall is being actively promoted

throughout the world and this would lead to increased numbers of people, which would in turn lead to devastating erosion. Mr Atkins suggested that there should be some sort of joined up access along the length of the wall, although in practice this may be difficult due to the agriculture nature of some of the land at the western end of the wall. Mr Atkins felt that the NNPA and the National Trust needed to liaise together more strongly to get the message across to visitors.

Derek Proudlock (Senior Ranger, NNPA) informed the Forum that access maps regarding Hadrian's Wall were received within the consultation process. In conjunction with the other rangers, the maps had been marked to show where Northumberland National Park Authority felt access should be allowed. It was felt that access would be best on a uniform basis and that is what has been identified on the maps during the consultation process. DP advised that there will be problems with the management of small areas of access land, where there are no clear access routes identified – linear routes will be investigated.

Thanks were given to Mr Atkins for attending the meeting and raising a valid concern.

The Chairman moved that the meeting should return to item 3 on the Agenda.

3. Presentation by Phillip Wilson, English Nature – 'Nature Conservation and Open Access'

Phillip Wilson of English Nature proceeded to give an informative talk and power-point presentation, detailing how English Nature are proposing to protect nature conservation interests on access land.

(A copy of the presentation is attached to these minutes.)

At this point the Chairman moved that item 14 should follow.

14. Membership of the Moorland Access Group.

Phillip Wilson advised the Forum that he was the secretary for the Moorland Access Group, which is an advisory body, established in 2001, whose remit is to advise on the management of access over heather moorland and associated access land. The group is presently looking at establishing links with the various local access fora that have been sent up within the operational area of the Group.

The group which has members from a variety of agencies/groups has brought a wide selection of people together in a positive manner.

It was suggested that a member from Northumberland National Park Authority may also be a beneficial member of the group, as other National Park Authorities were members.

It was agreed that the Chair and Vice Chair would decide if it was felt beneficial for the Northumberland National Park and Countryside Joint Local Access Forum to become members of the group.

It was also suggested that this subject be discussed at the next meeting of the Northern LAF Chair's, with a view to perhaps a member of this group representing all the Northern LAF's on the Moorland Access Advisory Group.

The meeting returned to item 4.

4. Declarations of Interest.

- No interests were declared.

5. Minutes of the Previous Meeting.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3rd June 2003 were confirmed, subsequent to the following amendments:

Point 2 – Trevor Hardy to be removed from apologies and marked as an attendee.

Point 4 (a), paragraph 4 should read River Till, not River Twill.

7. Update on Timetable for release of Provisional Maps for Area 5.

The group were informed that the primary reason for scheduling this meeting had been the assumption that the Provisional Maps for Area 5 would be released three months from the closure of the initial consultation period. This timetable had now slipped and the Countryside Agency has now advised that the release of the maps should now take place in November.

David Brookes advised that provisional maps are now available for Area 4, with the deadline for comments being the end of November.

Robert Mayhew advised that there was a slight overlap between areas 4 and 5, south of the A69.

8. Chillingham White Cattle – Exclusion from Open Access.

Forum Member Pat Scott advised the group that she had been approached by Lord Joicey, Vice- President of the Chillingham Wild Cattle Association, with reference to part of Chillingham Park being identified as Open Access on the Draft Maps. Lord Joicey had sent a formal submission to the Countryside Agency expressing his concerns at the proposed access for a variety of reasons, predominantly the Health & Safety issues concerned with un-accompanied people moving through the park with the potential for the cattle attacking people, but also the uniqueness of the cattle and the un-interrupted history of the

breed within the park. Lord Joicey appreciated that although the Northumberland National Park and Countryside Joint Local Access Forum did not have a direct role to play in the mapping exercise, he would welcome any support the Forum could give.

Bryan Harwood recommended that a response be sent to Lord Joicey offering support in principle to his concerns, with the proviso that the Forum would comment in more detail once the DEFRA Regulations for Exclusions and Restrictions are released.

Robert Mayhew agreed that he could see the Health & Safety aspects being extremely pertinent, however the Countryside Agency may propose access limited to linear lines and that the cattle will undoubtedly adapt to the situation by staying away from areas which people are using on a regular basis.

David Brookes advised that the area of land in question is actually quite small and will probably not generate a great deal of interest and should therefore be relatively easy to manage.

Recommended: that a letter be sent to Lord Joicey, offering him support in principle to the situation and that the group would look again at the situation once the Provisional Maps had been released and the DEFRA Regulations were available.

9. Relationship with National Countryside Access Forum and attendance at next NCAF meeting.

Bryan Harwood informed the group as to his concerns regarding the apparent lack of communication between the National Countryside Access Forum and the Local Access Fora's which have been established throughout the country.

The group were advised that a letter had been sent to the Countryside Agency indicating these concerns and that the topic was to be discussed at the next meeting of the NCAF meeting in October.

Recommended that: Chair and/or Vice-Chair to attend next NCAF meeting to press for local liaison and to feedback at next Forum meeting.

10. Analysis of Forum Responses to Consultation on Country Code.

Group members had been supplied, prior to the meeting, with an analysis of those responses received from Forum Member regarding the Country Code.

Pat Scott suggested that the Northumberland County Council magazine, which is distributed to every household, may be a useful vehicle for getting the message about the Country Code across to large number of people. It was agreed that this would be beneficial and that

an article on the work of the Local Access Forum in general could also be included in the magazine.

David Brookes advised that he would supply a contact name for the magazine.

Recommended that: An article be published in future edition of the County Council Magazine.

11. LAF Member's Allowance Scheme.

Linda Pinkham informed the group that this paper was for information purposes, as all Forum members are entitled to claim expenses for their work for the Forum. A copy of the Scheme was provided to all members. (A copy is also attached to these minutes). The LAF Member's Allowance Scheme will be in operation from 30th September 2003.

Bryan Harwood asked if member's expenses had been processed from previous meetings? Karen Fallon advised that all expenses claims should now have been paid and that member's would receive a BACS receipt indicating payment into their account.

12. Ordnance Survey – boundary depiction issues.

Robert Mayhew informed the group that he had just had a meeting with the Ordnance Survey regarding boundary issues. The Ordnance Survey had previously considered removing parish/district/unitary and authority boundaries from maps, but had now decided to show these boundaries in Magenta Red with slightly differing patterns. With regard to National Park boundaries, the Ordnance Survey had previously felt these were insignificant and had proposed to remove them from maps. The National Park Authorities felt strongly that OS maps are key marketing tool for the National Parks and had fought this decision strongly and the Ordnance Survey have now decided they wish to consult further on this issue.

Pat Scott asked if the OS had given any consideration to the future local government re-organisation? Robert Mayhew advised that he had raised this issue with the OS at the earlier meeting and that given the new technological advances; the new boundaries would be picked up at the next review of OS maps.

Michael Walton suggested that it would be sensible for Open Access land to be coloured yellow on the maps; through to deep purple where there were restrictions. Robert Mayhew advised that this had also been discussed with the OS, who had advised that the situation would be quite complex and had gone for a blanket wash, but a standard red line will be shown round danger areas such as MOD land etc.

13. Attendance at October meeting of North of England LAF Group.

Recommended that: Chair, Vice-Chair and NPA officer should attend the next meeting in October.

14. This item was dealt with earlier in the Agenda.

15. Consultation Paper on Regulations relating to Removal or Relaxation of General Restrictions on Access Land under Part 1 of the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000.

Robert Mayhew gave a brief summary as to the purpose behind the Consultation Paper and the group agreed that Option 1 would be the preferred choice.

Recommended that: a response be sent to DEFRA by 3rd October, stating the Forum's preference for Option 1.

16. Rights of Way Improvement Plan Update.

David Brookes advised the group, that as discussed at the last meeting, Consultants have recently completed a telephone survey of residents within Northumberland regarding Rights of Way and their usage. A preliminary draft is expected mid October/November as to the results of the consultation. It was suggested that it would perhaps be beneficial for the consultants to give a presentation at a future LAF meeting.

Findings to date have indicated that there is a very local use of the ROW network, with people tending to walk close to where they live and that the ROW network is experiencing very widespread use. In terms of addressing the Rights of Way Network and prioritising the consultation will probably indicate that will have to look at keeping all the network open. It was felt that this would be beneficial ammunition to use in discussions with the Countryside Agency regarding funding for the Rights of Way Network, which is due to be substantially reduced.

David Brookes advised that any figures which had been seen regarding Authority Cuts to the ROW budget were, at this stage, purely speculative, but Authority Members would be faced with some difficult decisions as ROW and the Countryside Service do not have a loud voice within the Authority.

Bryan Harwood suggested that the Local Access Forum should fight for increased funding and there should be no reduction in Rights of Way.

Recommended that: a letter be sent to the Countryside Agency expressing concern at the reduction in funding, given the substantial implications Open Access will have on the Rights of Way Network.

A further letter to be sent to Northumberland County Council, stating that there has been a reduced budget for some time regarding countryside access and given the implications of Open Access, this should not be reduced further.

17. Appeals on Provisional Plans.

David Brookes advised the Forum that as there were no provisional maps available to date, he had looked at the Inspectorate website to find appeal decisions coming up from earlier areas. This gives an indication of what the Inspectors will be producing. There is also guidance on the website for third-parties.

Recommended that: a copy of an appeal decision to be circulated to all Forum Members with the minutes for information purposes.

18. Any Other Business.

None tabled.

19. Update on Forum Member Activities.

Janet Robinson advised that she had attended a meeting regarding the disappointingly low use of the Hadrian's Wall Bus by less able bodied individuals.

As some of the Forum members were not aware of the facility, Catriona Mulligan informed the group that the Hadrian's Wall Bus Service had been successful in attracting Rural Challenge Funding, with which a bus had been purchased with disabled access and also room for cycles. The bus operates from Wallsend to Bowness on Solway and passenger numbers are 30% higher than anticipated. Unfortunately however, there is insufficient funding to fund the operation of the bus throughout the winter season, with the full service timetable ending at the end of September. The visitor centres and larger tourist attractions are normally open during the half term period and at weekends during the winter season and it would have been ideal for the bus service to be available as well. The service is funded by a wide variety of bodies and one of the major contributors, the Countryside Agency, had advised that funding is not secure for next year.

Janet Robinson agreed that the service was ideal for getting people along the wall, but there was not enough for those lesser able individuals to do when they were actually there. More activities were required.

Catriona Mulligan advised that she would feed these concerns through to the Hadrian's Wall Tourism Partnership at its next meeting.

Trevor Hardy voiced concerns that large numbers of people were now walking up and down the military road, which was raising safety concerns and perhaps a speed limit should be introduced in that area.

Janet Robinson agreed that many felt very vulnerable when walking there.

Graham Gill responded that the Hadrian's Wall Tourism Partnership Steering Group were concerned about this issue and they would be making representation to the County Council.

Bryan Harwood agreed that it would be appropriate for the Forum to also voice their concerns to the County Council.

Recommended that: correspondence to be sent to Northumberland County Council Highways Section, regarding safety concerns on the military road.

20. Programme for training, visits and future meetings.

It was suggested that Forum meetings should take place on a quarterly cycle, with the next meeting suggested as the beginning of December, followed by March, June and September, with a rolling programme of venues.

Janet Robinson advised that an invitation had been offered to hold a meeting at Blagdon. Felt this would be a suitable venue for the December meeting.

Suggested training/visits and subjects for future discussion included:

- Speaker from the Countryside Agency.
- Site Visit to MOD land at Otterburn.
- Site visit to Hadrian's Wall – as likely area for problems with access.
- Visit/speaker from Scotland – identifying how they are dealing with access.
- Accessibility and Social Inclusion.
- Transport in Rural Areas.
- Speaker from Consultants looking at ROW in Northumberland.
- Possible visit to Nature Reserve and looking at problems faced by Wardens e.g. Lindisfarne.

It was agreed that once the provisional maps have been released, it is likely that certain areas will be highlighted which would benefit from further discussion and site visits.

21. Date and Time of Next Meeting.

Date for the next meeting was agreed as 9th December 2003 at 5.30 pm.

Recommended that: Karen Fallon would contact representative from Scottish Borders Council and invite them to attend this meeting.

Karen Fallon to contact Blagdon as possible venue for December meeting.

10. Administration

Nothing to report.

Meeting closed at 8.15 pm.