

Minutes of the meeting of the Northumberland National Park and Countryside Joint Local Access Forum held in the Main Restaurant, County Hall, Morpeth on Thursday 8th December 2004 at 6pm.

Present:

Members

Bryan Harwood - Chair
Mark Wood
Jo Deniel-Rowe
Michael Walton
Pat Scott
Graham Gill
Kevin Heymann
Gill Featonby

Richard Cross -Vice Chair
Erica Bamford
Peter Clark
Pamela Brooks
Janet Robinson
Trevor Hardy
Ted Liddle
Alison Carter

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

Catriona Mulligan, Director of Access and Communications	NNPA
David Brookes, Countryside Support Team Leader	NCC
Linda Pinkham, Team Leader (Corporate Administration)	NNPA
Lorna Lazzari, Countryside Access Officer	NNPA

Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly Alison Carter and Gill Featonby, the two new members of the Forum, who were attending the first meeting since their appointment in September.

The Chairman reported that the Local Access Forum Administration Officer, Karen Fallon, had now left the National Park Authority to take up a new job and that he intended to write to Karen, on behalf of the Members, to thank her for the sterling work she had done for the Forum.

1. Apologies for Absence

Sue Bolam, Nick Rossiter, Pam Neal, Robert Mayhew

2. Declaration of Interests

None were declared

3. Minutes of meeting held on 6th September 2004

The minutes were agreed as a true record of the meeting.

3a. Matters Arising

6. Recreational Demand and Capacity in National Parks - the report to be circulated to Members for discussion at the next meeting.
10. Countryside Agency - The Country Code: The Chairman had written to the Countryside Agency and would raise the issue when he met the Countryside Agency on 9th December 2004.
12. Updates on Member Activities: YHA - B Harwood suggested that details of the Pennine Way 40th Anniversary event be included in the National Park Authority events diary.

4. Public Participation

No questions had been received from the public.

5. Introduction to New Forum Members

Alison Carter (**) and Gill Featonby (Recreational User) had been appointed in September 2004 and had been introduced at the beginning of the meeting.

The Chairman proposed a change to the order of the agenda so that visiting members of staff were not unduly delayed. It was agreed to take Items 10, 6 and 8 next on the agenda.

10. Local Transport Plan for Northumberland: Update

The update was presented by Jack Walton, Team Leader Transport Policy, Northumberland County Council, who reported that the next phase of the Local Transport Plan, LTP2, would set out the 5-year programme for the Highways Authority from April 2006 - March 2011. The final document would be submitted to the Department of Transport for evaluation in July 2005.

The Chairman asked for the JLAF to be included on the consultation list for the draft document.

Members were also informed that the LTP2 had to be supported by a Strategic Environmental Assessment and an Asset Management Plan.

Previous transport policies concentrated on 'local solutions to local problems'. There was now a requirement to deliver and contribute to national targets set by Government and the Local Government Association on accessibility, air quality, safer roads and easing congestion, with an underlying theme of 'quality of life'. The most significant area for Northumberland was considered to be accessibility, including social inclusion and access to services.

Integration of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) with LTP2 would provide the opportunity to utilize the network better, particularly for safer routes for school travel, walking and cycling. Funding opportunities for such schemes could be considered under LTP2 but members were informed that there was no additional funding available from government. Therefore the County Council could not be too ambitious and new priorities would need to be considered.

The Chairman felt that it would be necessary to keep an eye on the budget situation.

Action: Northumberland National Park and Countryside Joint Local Access Forum to be added to the list of consultees.

6. 'Seeding Change'

Gill Thompson, Ecologist, Northumberland National Park Authority, gave a presentation on the project, which will provide links for work on local flower seeds in haymeadows and verges with communities in the National Park. An application had been made to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a Project Officer to co-ordinate the project in 2005.

Pam Brookes welcomed the project although noted that it only related to the area of the National Park. G Thompson confirmed that the work was limited by resources but it was hoped that community work would extend the project to other areas, including North Pennines and County Durham. Part of the Project Officer's role would be to increase publicity and contact local groups, including parishes. Clear guidance would need to be produced for such groups.

Potential partners also included Tyne and Wear, Newcastle City Council, the National Trust, Community Council for Northumberland and the Women's Institute.

8. Access Management Plan: Update

The update was presented by Mike Jeffrey, Countryside Access and Recreation Manager, Northumberland County Council who informed members that the Access Authority for North Northumberland, outside the National Park, was the County Council, funded by the Countryside Agency's Access Management Grant Scheme (AMGS). The AMGS provided 50-75% of the costs of access to open country.

A series of plans was being produced, identifying points where it would be appropriate to give access and where signs were needed:

- Green - Points for Access - where Public Rights of Way enter Access Land
- Red - Information
Primary Information Points - large interpretive panel showing what is in the vicinity, public rights, restrictions, information on dogs, information on landowners' rights, the Countryside Code, the Moorland Code
Suggested locations for Primary Information Points: Haltwhistle, Carter Bar, Chatton, Kielder Village, Tower Knowe, Wooler, Thropton, Elsdon
Close liaison and co-ordination with Northumberland National Park Authority was being planned to ensure seamless provision across the Park boundary.
- Blue - Management Information Points - instructing the public where it is preferred they should go and not go. Could relate to particular needs eg nature aspects.

Consultation had already begun with landowners, ahead of the publication of the final map, to identify safe access points and consider long term maintenance. Negotiations were also underway with Forest Enterprise about Kielder Forest. It was noted that there are no Public Rights of Way in the Border Mires area and no signs are currently planned.

Members were concerned:

- to avoid proliferation of signs - provide the basic minimum responding to need.
- re transport issues:
 - use of car parks
 - utilising Hadrian's Wall bus and Tyne Valley line - both for reaching access points and as an opportunity for information on timetables
- Visitors need to be able to access quality information at an early stage when planning a visit in advance, via websites. The Countryside Agency will also be an important feature because of short term closure information.
- Members also urged consideration be given to non web-based communications - libraries, TICs, hotels, B&Bs, YHA. It was noted that whilst OS maps were considered a prime source for information, not all walkers used the latest versions.
- On-going funding: Mike Jeffrey reported that AMGS funding had originally been for 12 months and was extended. It was hoped that there would be an on-going commitment from the Countryside Agency.

- Use of automated telephone messages. Members noted that this worked in Scotland. It was suggested that this should be raised with the Countryside Agency.

Action: A further report to be brought to the JLAF when the plans have been finalized.

Consideration be given to non web-based communication.

Suggestion of automated telephone messages be raised with the Countryside Agency.

7. Scoping Report on Barmoor Windfarm

Erica Bamford brought this item to the attention of members and stated that 12 turbines were being considered on the site, which included CROW land and 13.3 km of Rights of Way, including some within 150m of the proposed turbines. She considered that combined with a second windfarm of 14 turbines proposed 2 miles further north at Shaws Wood there would be significant impact when viewed from the Cheviots.

Members felt that the scoping report raised a number of issues which should be considered if the proposals went beyond the scoping phase:

- effect on access land
- cumulative impact
- RoW implications
- impact on the ecology of Ford Moss
- the importance of the siting of the works access
- negative impact of potential closure of bridleways in an area where these were already limited in number

Members agreed that the Chairman should write to the consultants to request that the JLAF be added to the list of consultees. Other groups which had been omitted from the consultation list were identified as the British Horse Society, Berwickshire Naturalist Club and the Archaeological Society.

Action: The Chairman to request that the JLAF be added to the list of consultees and suggest that the BHS and other groups also be included.

9. Rights of Way Improvement Plan: Update

The update was presented by David Brookes, Countryside Support Team Leader, Northumberland County Council who reported that two workshops had been held:

- 1) General introduction to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). Attendees had raised main issues of concern, strengths and weaknesses had been identified, utilising experience and expertise of attendees.
- 2) Focus on user organisations
 - walkers
 - cyclists and horse riders

A third workshop would be arranged to look at the summary document which was being produced and to start the prioritisation process. The draft ROWIP was expected late Spring/early Summer.

Rights of Way information, including Enclosure Maps from the Record Officer, were being digitised onto GIS database, which would be more readily available, ultimately via the web-site. An off-line version of the consolidated

definitive map was expected in the Spring and would be piloted, possibly with the JLAF.

Ted Liddle reported that a sub-group from the cycle/horse riders workshop had developed six categories of route types to recommend to Northumberland County Council to help the prioritisation process.

11. CROW update (including Restrictions and Exclusions)

Lorna Lazzari provided an update. Commencement in Areas 1 and 2 had been relatively quiet. Lorna Lazzari and Robert Mayhew were holding monthly meetings with the Countryside Agency re casework.

The date for Area 5 commencement of Open Access is 28th May 2005 (Bank Holiday weekend) and the main launch event for the Area would take place in the Yorkshire Dales.

The Chairman advised members of the notification of two appeals:

- i) Bamburgh Dunes - upheld trustees appeal against designation
- ii) Muckle Moss - upheld appeal against designation (small plantation)

Action: A report would be brought to the next meeting on the visit by Ann Glover, Countryside Agency, in mid-December.

12. DEFRA Consultations

David Brookes introduced the item and suggested that Forum members did not need to be unduly concerned with the issue. An Excel log of modifications was being kept and was available to the public and a new register of diversions was under consideration.

Following a suggestion from T Liddle, it was agreed that consideration would be given to providing a regular summary of changes.

D Brookes suggested members might like to visit the NCC committee web-site (www.northumberland.gov.uk) where the full history of each change were held with the Rights of Way Committee agenda and minutes. He added that it was anticipated that GIS information should be on the web-site by summer 2005.

Action: Northumberland County Council to consider providing a regular summary of changes

13. Reports from LAF Working Groups

- Development of Recreation and Access Strategy Working Group - this group had not yet met
- Improving Rights of Way Network Working Group - nothing to report
- Implementation of Statutory Rights of Access Working Group - nothing to report

14. Closure of British Telecom Phone Boxes in Rural Areas

The Chairman reminded the members that there were other boxes scheduled for closure outside the National Park. Concerns were raised over safety, sustainability of rural communities and the lack of mobile phone coverage in some of the areas where closure was proposed.

It was noted that the Community Council for Northumberland and Berwick MPs had also raised concerns.

Action: It was suggested that members should lend weight to the campaign individually.

15. Urgent Business

No other business was raised.

16. Members Update

Graham Gill reported that the Forestry Commission was in the process of dedicating freehold land under CROW (maps were provided for Members information). Closure applications would be made to the relevant authority for exclusions for harvesting sites. Those over six months would be brought to the Forum.

Trevor Hardy reported that Northumberland National Park Voluntary Rangers were currently replacing signs in the Elsdon area.

17. Items for Information:

- Forest Design Plan
- Chillingham Park Article
- Europarc Catalonian Declaration
- Press Cuttings

The above items were noted

- Lateral Thinking - response from Michael Walton to letter from Alun Michael, Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality
The potential role for the Forum was noted. Pam Brookes expressed concern about the notion that it would be easy to amend Public Rights of Way.

18. Date and Time of Next Meeting

As the definitive map was due out on 29th March 2005 it was suggested that a meeting be held after this date. The meeting would be held at Northumberland National Park Headquarters, Hexham and a date in April set when the date for publication of the map had been confirmed.