

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Northumberland National Park and
Countryside Joint Local Access Forum
Held on Tuesday 9th March 2004 at 6.00 pm.
At The Cheviot Centre, Wooler.**

PRESENT:

Members

Bryan Harwood – Chair
Richard Fordham
Ian Douglas
Mark Wood
Pam Neal
Michael Walton
Pat Scott
Ted Liddle

Richard Cross - Vice Chair
Kevin Heymann
James Boulton
Erica Bamford
Nick Rossiter
Pamela Brooks
Graham Gill
Trevor Hardy

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

Catriona Mulligan, Director Access & Communications	(NNPA)
Robert Mayhew, Team Leader (Recreation and Access)	(NNPA)
Clive Crossley, Countryside Service Manager	(NCC)
Karen Fallon, Local Access Forum Administration Officer	(NNPA)
Lorna McClusky, Countryside Access Officer	(NNPA)

- 1. Apologies:** Janet Robinson Linda Pinkham
 Peter Clark David Brookes
 Sue Bolam Jo Deniel-Rowe

2. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed John Turner from AJT Associates, Lindsey Perks Chairman of Tyne & Wear Local Access Forum, Clive Crossley from Northumberland County Council and several members of the public to the meeting.

3. Declaration of Interests

None were declared.

4. Questions from the Public

None had been received.

5. Minutes of the meeting held on 9th December 2003.

The minutes were agreed as a true record of the meeting subject to the following amendments

- ◆ Mark Wood to be removed from the apologies list.
- ◆ Richard Fordham to be added to the apologies list.

6. Presentation on Rights of Way Improvement Plan undertaken by AJT Associates.

John Turner, of AJT Associates gave the meeting a detailed and informative presentation on the methodology and results from the survey they had undertaken on behalf of Northumberland County Council in to the use of the Rights of Way Network in Northumberland.

A paper copy of the PowerPoint presentation is attached to these minutes for information purposes.

7. Forum Response to DEFRA Consultation on Use of Mechanically Propelled Vehicles on Rights of Way.

The Forum were advised that the document, which had been circulated prior to the meeting, was a possible response to DEFRA, but further comments from Forum Members would be welcomed.

The Forum approved the response in general, with the following comments to be taken into account:

- It was felt that in the general introduction there was not enough emphasis on the possible wear and tear and the lack of consideration shown in terms of damage to routes used by mechanically propelled vehicles, particularly when routes are used during inclement weather conditions and the resulting effects on other rights of way users.
- Felt that proposal 7 takes no account of benefits from the 20/20 initiative. Do not think it is far enough away. Not against 2026.
- It was emphasised that there is responsible use of the network by mechanically propelled vehicles and that 'joy riders' are getting responsible individuals a bad name. Concerns that speed guns and speed cameras are pushing tarmac bikers off-road.

- There are responsible drivers but due to the nature of the sport off-road vehicles have a higher percentage of miss-use. There should be off-road areas which can sustain the sport.
- Concerns voiced with reference to the possibility of old drove roads being restored to their former 60 yard width, which would lead to scarring of countryside in areas of natural beauty.
- Felt that there are scaremongering tactics afoot, tainted by prejudice and misconceptions.
- Those who have been using the countryside responsibly for many years not aware of significant damage to sustainable routes. Conditions have not deteriorated since the 1970's. consider use of routes sustainable. Feel that lack of status is an excuse for the highway authorities to minimise maintenance.
- DEFRA document not appreciated by off-road users. Responding to pressure groups with knee-jerk reactions.
- Concerns that with reference to proposal 4, if deny trail bike riders the spoils, will find less new routes established in the future.
- There was disagreement that the use of these routes by motorised vehicles was not leading to damage. Photographic evidence was circulated identifying damage to routes (i.e., The Street) by motorised vehicles using routes already in poor condition.
- Emphasis should be placed on educating people, as perhaps they don't realise the damage they are doing. There are those who do take the advice on board. Minority groups will always abuse.
- Should not damn the majority for the actions of the minority. Need to express a balance in the Forum response to DEFRA. More emphasis should be placed in third paragraph as to sustainable use of routes, pointing out dangers of use in bad weather. Information Boards at start of routes promoting responsible use of resource.
- Proposals for a permit system?
- Felt not possible to introduce a permit system for something which somebody has a legal right to carry out anyway. Own organisations should be policing members. Responsible use may lead to new opportunities.

- Particular reference made to the situation at Salter's Road. There are issues with drainage that could be resolved which would improve the condition of the route. Motorcyclists will continue to use these routes until there is an available alternative.
- Proposal 4 - great caution should be exercised as could result in loss of new paths.
- Felt that the signage on routes is not appropriate. Suggestion that given 1000's of hectares of land in public ownership, there were areas where routes could be created that would be long and challenging, through Forestry Commission or with agreement of landowners. Means of keeping people off routes that were never intended for motorcycle/off-road vehicular use.
- Agreed that this was a positive suggestion, but there would be concerns over demand management. How would it be policed? Could then create unsustainable demand in certain areas. It was noted that this has not happened in relation to off-road cycling routes. Would need to be resourced and nationwide.
- The Forum was advised that the MOD at Otterburn had, for a number of years, undertaken a weekend permitted event over a 26km circular route. This had in turn generated between 3 & 4 K for the local economy. In parallel a motorbike monitoring survey recently undertaken in the Cheviots had identified a 30% increase in activity in the area based on the previous year. The general trend was that numbers and sizes of groups are increasing.
- The Forum was advised that the event at Otterburn was in for motor sport users, not recreational motorcycle users.
- The question was asked as to whether the Forum was happy with the police and highway authorities' stance on enforcement?
- Powers exist to regulate - authorities should take opportunity to evoke powers. Take out TRM's in appropriate situations.
- There are two groups undertaking this activity - the formal and informal sector. The informal sector will not respect TRO's. It would be a waste of money and would not tackle the real issues. The police have had legislation to deal with issues since the 1930's but they are not interested. Response to DEFRA must distinguish between the two areas.

- Highway authorities are not accepting responsibility for maintenance of routes.
- Chairman of Tyne & Wear LAF commented that in their area the main problem was with underage, non-licensed, non-insured use. A high profile police presence would deter this use. The police have a key role to play.
- NCC tabled a Consultation paper titled 'A Framework for the Management of Byways Open to All Traffic (BOAT's)'. The overriding objective of the Framework is to ensure that BOAT's fulfil their maximum potential for balanced and safe recreational use subject to environmental considerations and sets out how NCC will achieve this objective through its approach to maintenance, consultation, voluntary restraint and regulation. The Joint Local Access Forum has been invited to comment on the Framework with the deadline for comments being end of April 2004. Forum Members are invited to submit individual comments to the Chair by the 15th April 2004, but it is anticipated that the working group established to look at 'Improving the Rights of Way Network' will look at this in more detail and submit a response on behalf of the Forum.

(Pat Scott left the meeting at 7.35pm).

8. Forum Response to Countryside Agency on Provisional Maps of Open Countryside for Area 5.

The draft letter which had been circulated prior to the meeting was approved.

The Forum would like to see the Countryside Agency's report for the designation of Lordenshaw.

With regard to the review process concerns were voiced that the Forum were asking for something that was not possible within current legislation. This would need to be investigated.

9. Working Group Tenure.

Membership of groups agreed as previously circulated. Karen Fallon to act as secretariat; arranging meetings, taking minutes etc. Working Group 1 – Chair person to be elected.

10. Tenure of Forum Membership.

Information item as per paper previously circulated. Catriona Mulligan, on behalf of NNPA, wished to thank the Forum members. It was felt that the Forum was working well and it was appreciated that people were giving generously in terms of time and sharing thoughts and information.

11. Northumberland County Council Countryside Section budget issues – response from Chief Executive, Northumberland County Council.

The response from the Chief Executive of Northumberland County Council, to Bryan Harwood's letter, was circulated prior to the meeting.

The Forum were advised that the Countryside Section budget would now be maintained as a standstill budget. This was a very favorable position, given the previous implications that the budget would be substantially reduced. The Countryside Section team was extremely grateful for the support and representation received from the Local Access Forum and it was felt that this had had a positive effect on the budget decision.

It was also agreed that the work of AJT Associates, as discussed in item 6, would give additional weight to the Countryside Section. It had been obvious from results of the work carried out by AJT Associates, that the majority of people used the various routes available to them irrespective of the legal standing of any particular route, but there were still issues to be addressed including unapproved routes being brought into the network, safety issues where ROW crossed major roads and concerns with the procedures associated with the diversion of footpaths, which was an extremely long and complicated process. Perhaps there was a role for access groups, such as LAF, to bring issues such as these to the attention of Government more speedily.

12. Appeals in Area 4/Area 5 – Update.

The Forum were advised that there had been difficulties obtaining information from the Planning Inspectorate as to the exact number of appeals in each area, but information on the Inspectorate website had indicated that no details for any appeals had been lodged for Area 5 and approximately 300 had been lodged for Area 4.

The Forum were advised that appeals had been received by the Inspectorate for Area 5, but had not yet made it to the website, however the number of appeals had been to a much lesser degree than other areas. This may have been an indication that the mapping process was much more refined, effective and accurate by the time it had reached Area

5 and it was hoped that as a result of this the conclusive map should be issued according to the original timetable.

13. Countryside Agency Issues - Update

The Chair briefed the group on the Modernising Rural Delivery Programme, having attended a NECTAR meeting in February. (A copy of the notes are attached to the minutes).

It was anticipated that the changes taking place would have a radical effect on various Government agencies.

A close eye will need to be kept on the situation.

14. Removal or Relaxation of General Restrictions on Access Land under Part 1 of the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 – for information.

The DEFRA response to the consultation had been circulated prior to the meeting, advising of the chosen route forward.

Concerns were raised about the legislation proposed in that it could result in the legality of higher rights clashing with permitted development. The situation could arise where dedicated change of use could go through under this legislation, side-stepping planning legislation. This issue would need to be followed up.

15. Such other Business which, in the opinion of the Chair, should be considered as a matter of urgency.

- 15 (a) Forum Members were advised that they had been invited to take part in a new project which has been commissioned by the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) and the Countryside Agency in partnership with the Northumberland National Park Authority, Northumberland Strategic Partnership, NE Regional Assembly and Durham County Council.

It is being conducted by staff from Northumbria and Newcastle Universities and is led by Dr Robert MacFarlane and the primary aim of the project is to develop a methodology for the mapping of relative degrees of tranquility

It is hoped that the specific objectives to achieve from the project are:

- to gain a better understanding of how people perceive, characterise and value tranquility in a countryside setting, premised in the belief

that tranquility has no concrete reality outside of people's values, interpretations and perceptions.

- To develop a consultation methodology to inform a more broadly-based definition of tranquility and understanding of the factors that comprise and detract from it.
- To develop a Geographical Information Systems (GIS) based modelling approach that is based in nationally available datasets and a set of parameters that is defined through the consultation phase.
- To understand, at a strategic level, the relative distribution of tranquility as a countryside resource.
- To refine the GIS model for application in an environmental assessment process where the effect of a proposed development on tranquility measurements can be calculated.
- To promote a greater awareness of tranquility as a resource through an appreciation of the research process and map outputs which may be considered as an appropriate for Countryside Quality Counts, the Regional Spatial Strategy and other strategic planning frameworks.

Forum Members were advised that at this stage the project was confidential as it had yet to be officially launched, but the Forum had been approached as it was felt that they would be an excellent source of on the ground information to assist with the project.

It was agreed that a separate evening event, possibly in April, would be organized, which would be hosted by NNPA, to which the Forum Members would be invited. It is anticipated that the session will take approximately an hour and a half and will be very much a hand's on, discussion seminar where Forum Members will be actively encouraged to voice opinions and debate issues in a facilitated environment. Details of the event will be circulated in due course.

- 15 (b) Concern was expressed by a member of the Forum with reference to an earlier discussion that the proper use of land to create wealth in the countryside should not be considered inappropriate.
- 15 (c) The question was raised as to how Countryside Stewardship Access Agreements were to be mapped in relation to Open Access? RM to follow up.

15 (d) With reference to the Northumberland AONB Consultation document, which Forum Members had previously commented on, the question was raised as to have the group been re-consulted as a drafting error had been present in the original document? The Forum was advised that it was usual practice on the discovery of errors within consultation documents, that once the error was corrected the document would need to go back out to consultation. The Forum was advised that no re-consultation had taken place.

16. Update on Forum Members Activities.

The Chair advised the Forum that he had been invited to sit on the Steering Committee for the Hadrian's Wall Path Trust. The aims of the Trust are:

- To promote the education and recreation value of the National Trail in way that is archaeologically, environmentally and economically sustainable.
- To provide a forum for visitors and locals alike, including anyone with an interest in the Trail, to contribute ideas and enthusiasm towards the well-being of both the World Heritage site and the Path.
- To lobby any sector – National/Local Government/Business organizations or individual for proper resourcing for the management and maintenance of Hadrian's Wall Path and in order to achieve the aims.

The Forum to be kept informed of progress of the group.

17. Date and Time of Next Meeting.

June 8th 2004 – venue to be confirmed.

It is hoped that this meeting will include a visit to an area where access issues are pertinent and it is anticipated that this will take place during the afternoon. The visit will then be followed by the Annual General Meeting.