

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Northumberland National Park  
and Countryside Joint Local Access Forum  
Held on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2003 at 6.00 pm  
At Blagdon Estate, Seaton Burn.**

**PRESENT:**

**Members**

Bryan Harwood (Chair)	Richard Cross (Vice Chair)
Erica Bamford	Sue Bolam
James Boulton	Pamela Brooks
Jo Deniel-Rowe	Ian Douglas
Trevor Hardy	Kevin Heymann
Ted Liddle	Pam Neal
Nick Rossiter	Michael Walton
Mark Wood	

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

Robert Mayhew, Team Leader (Recreation and Access)	(NNPA)
Clive Crossley, Countryside Service Manager	(NCC)
Linda Pinkham, Team Leader (Corporate Administration)	(NNPA)
Karen Fallon, Local Access Forum Administration Officer	(NNPA)
Duncan Wise, Team Leader (Visitor Services)	(NNPA)

**1. Welcome**

The Chair welcomed the Forum Members and thanked Blagdon Estate for hosting the meeting.

**2. Apologies for Absence**

Janet Robinson, Peter Clark, Pat Scott, Graham Gill, Catriona Mulligan, David Brookes and Mark Wood. Barbara Crozier (County Access & Bridleways Officer – BHS)

**3. Declarations of Interest.**

- No interests were declared.

**4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting.**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2003 were confirmed with the following additional comments.

Point 11 – Moorland Access Advisory Group.

The Chair had discussed this at the Northern Regional LAF Chair's meeting where it had been decided that there was felt to be no mileage in having a composite membership of the MAAG

and that it should be left to the individual Fora to decide if they wished to become a member.

Concern was voiced as to how official the body was and that it was almost setting itself up as an alternative to LAF's, which may lead to confusion.

It was agreed that although the Northumberland National Park and Countryside Joint Local Access Forum did not wish to have an individual member on the MAAG, a communication channel should be maintained with the group.

Point 16, paragraph 2 – concern was voiced by Forum members at the wording of the second sentence in this paragraph, which indicated that there was the possibility that not all the network would be kept open. Clive Crossley advised that he would clarify this point with David Brookes, but felt the intention was to keep the entire network open.

**5. Public Participation.**

No questions had been received from the public.

**6. Update on timetable for Provisional Maps for Area 4.**

The group were advised that the deadline for comments on the provisional maps for Area 4 had closed at the end of November.

As yet no appeals for Area 4 have appeared on the Inspectorate Website.

**7. Chillingham White Cattle – Update**

The Forum were advised of the letter forwarded to Lord Joicey and that this matter would be discussed further by the Forum at a later date.

**8. Relationship with National Countryside Access Forum.**

The Chair briefed the group as to events to date with regard to the lack of communication between the National Countryside Access Forum and the Local Access Fora's which have been established throughout the country.

The Chair had written to the Countryside Agency detailing his concerns and had received a response, which the Chair felt to be inadequate.

**Recommended that:** A further letter is sent to the Countryside Agency reiterating concerns about the lack of communication.

## **9. North of England LAF Chair's meeting October 2003.**

The Forum was advised that the main issues to come out of the meeting were:

- An agreement that all of the Fora were going through a learning process.
- Good practice in disseminating information to each other.
- Marking of access land – should be nationally recognisable.
- Concern that the Fire Service were not aware of Open Access and closures resulting from fire risk.
- Removal of members due to non-attendance at meetings.
- R.O.W. Improvement Plans.

Clarification was requested from the Forum as to the meaning of the expression 'Desire Lines'. The Forum was advised that a 'desire line' is where people have created a footpath, but the footpath had no legal standing. This method of footpath creation was often seen in new housing estates, where planners often created footpaths following the creation of desire lines by the residents, but was not applicable in more rural areas.

Concerns were voiced as to the creation of desire lines as a means of reaching islands of Open Access. Where this is the case the Local Authority will need to be involved in creating a permissive path to reach the access land.

## **10. Removal or Relaxation of General Restrictions on Access Land.**

The group were advised that these are the key regulations for landowners and tenants with regard to the discretionary closure of land. The regulations are available from the HMSO website (web address: [www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/si/si2003/20032713.htm](http://www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/si/si2003/20032713.htm)) or if a paper copy is required contact Karen Fallon on 01434 611550. Copies are also available in Braille, but not yet in audio format.

The fact sheet supplied with the agenda, gives details of how the regulations will work on the ground.

It is intended that supporting the regulations will be a computer system, which uses information concerning applications for restrictions and exclusions, supplied by Local Authority's, which will provide up to date information available on a website for the general public to access when they are planning walks etc over open access land. The Countryside Agency will be releasing details in the near future as to which company has been awarded the contract.

## **11. Rights of Way Improvement Plan**

The Forum was advised that Northumberland County Council had hoped that the pilot study recently undertaken would have been

complete by now. The report has yet to be finalised but should be available in the near future.

**Recommended that:** The Consultants carrying out the work on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan should be invited to attend the next Forum meeting.

## **12. Countryside Agency Signage Issues.**

The Forum was advised that Countryside Agency is in the process of creating a new logo which will depict Open Access. (A copy of the proposed design was shown to the members and a copy will be circulated with the minutes for those not at the meeting). Anticipated that the logo will be used on Ordnance Survey Maps overlying specific sites and on the ground there will be signage on to Open Access land and signage leaving Open Access land. The Countryside Agency is pulling together guidance as to how Authorities should use the signage. An information group is currently pulling together a pack for land managers, looking at signage and closures.

Visually and texturally the signage needs to be clear to all concerned. No guidance has been received as yet on colour, but it was felt routing in timber might be effective.

It was agreed that there also needed to be formal signage where access was not permitted.

All Forum members agreed that the education of the public was key to the exercise in getting the message across. The Countryside Agency has been tasked with the role of educating the wider general public. It was felt that there should be a national exercise to educate the public in the sustainable use of the countryside.

## **13. Northumberland County Council Countryside Section Budget Issues.**

The Forum was advised that the initial problems with the County Council budget related to a steep decline in grant aid from Europe and the Countryside Agency. This has been compounded by extra costs associated with The Countryside Act.

There has been a lot of public interest in the issues and Members at County Hall have received letters from the public and letters have been appearing in the local press.

Actual budgets have yet to be agreed, but will be finalised in the New Year.

#### **14. LAF Response to Budget Cuts**

A draft letter addressed to the Chief Executive of Northumberland County Council had been circulated to the Forum Members. It was agreed that the letter was taking the right tack, but that attacks should be made in more than one direction with individuals contacting Committee Members and Councillors to press the case. Individual Forum Members could respond and should also encourage contacts in other organisations to do the same.

It was felt that if anything had been learnt from the Foot & Mouth Inquiry, which the Council themselves instigated; it was that tourism and the economy are inextricably linked. Footpaths in Northumberland are vital to the tourism industry in the area and any reduction in tourism could result in the area losing not just thousands, but millions of pounds in revenue.

The Countryside Section was commended in that although they had a limited budget, significant returns were being seen with new stiles and signage around the County.

It was suggested that a copy of a Ramblers Publication about the Value of Tourism should be forwarded to all County Councillors.

The Chair thanked the Countryside Section for all the hard work that has been done in the past.

#### **15. Hadrian's Wall Bus Service.**

Further to the meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> September, it was felt it would be beneficial for Forum Members to have more information on the Hadrian's Wall Bus Service. Duncan Wise, Team Leader Visitor Services, gave a very informative presentation to the Forum regarding the bus service, a copy of which is attached to these minutes.

The Chair thanked Catriona Mulligan and other NNPA staff involved with the project for the work undertaken to make the Bus Service a success and hoped that the bid to secure additional funding would be successful.

#### **16. Engagement of Members – Membership of Working Groups**

The Vice Chair suggested to the Forum, that it may be beneficial to sub-divide the Forum into smaller working groups to tackle specific issues. At their original conception, Local Access Forum's had been tasked with looking at specific issues, which included:

- Development of a recreation and access strategy.
- Improving Rights of Way Networks.
- Implementation of Statutory Right of Access.

Members of each group would represent interests of Forum Members. A secretariat service would be provided by Karen Fallon and the groups would report back to the main Forum at each meeting.

It was agreed that forum members should serve on at least one of the working groups, with the optimum size for each group being 8. Although each sub-group would be formed of Forum Members, they could co-opt expertise from a variety of sources. The Chairman would not belong to any particular group, but would be able to attend all groups.

The details of the groups will be circulated with the minutes and Forum Members will be invited to complete the form identifying their first and second choice as to the preferred group. Appointments will be confirmed at the meeting in March 2004.

#### **17. Tenure of Forum Membership.**

There had been some discussion at the Regional Chair's meeting regarding tenure of Forum Members. Suggestions had been made that a variety of tenures should be available, ranging from 1 to 3 years. Members for the Northumberland National Park and Countryside Joint Local Access Forum had initially been appointed for a one year term, which would be due to complete at the end of March 2004. It was generally agreed that as members were just starting to settle into their roles, it would be more sensible to continue for a further year, before looking at a mix of tenures and re-elections. The question was raised as to the maximum size of the Forum, as there may be additional people who would wish to join the Forum. The group were advised that the maximum limit for the group was 22. NCC and NNPA would be responsible for selecting new people to sit on the Forum, should positions become available.

It was agreed that this situation needed to be clarified in more detail by the appointing authorities.

It was agreed that an annual report would need to be produced in conjunction with an AGM. It was felt that rather than a very formal document, a Chairman's Report would probably be sufficient for the first year.

**Recommended that:** Chair, Vice Chair and Secretariat to produce Chairman's Report and organise AGM.

#### **18. Future Training Issues**

Agreed that a future meeting should include a visit to an area that encompasses a variety of issues related to Open Access. Suggested venue was Blagdon Estate.

Once individual working groups had been established, training needs may be identified as a result.

**19. RPS Consultation on Otterburn.**

The Forum was advised that RPS Consultants had been retained to look at Public Access on MOD Land. The Final Draft of the report has been out to consultation with interested parties.

The group were advised that a Recreation Officer, Phillipa Jackson had been appointed at Otterburn, and was working successfully with the National Park Authority and other organisations in promoting access to the area.

With the onset of CROW up to a third of Otterburn will be under Open Access. MOD and Defence Estates are putting together a clearer picture with regard to public access, with a view to improving the visitor welcome image and managing access.

Although the consultation date has now closed comments are still being accepted and it was agreed that forum members should have sight of the report and comment where appropriate.

Concerns were voiced that some interest groups had not been consulted, including horse related interests and some businesses, including tourist based businesses, in the immediate area of Otterburn, had not been invited to comment.

**Recommended that:** Chair to draft initial response and then pass to Kevin Heymann, Jo Deniel-Rowe, Richard Cross and Trevor Hardy for further comment.

**20. Such Other Business which, in the opinion of the Chair, should be considered as a matter of urgency.**

The Forum was advised that a new consultation document had just been released from DEFRA on 'Use of mechanically propelled vehicles on Rights of Way'. It had originally been hoped that the implementation of Section 34A of the Road Traffic Act, could have been used to tackle the illegal and irresponsible use of mechanically propelled vehicles. Unfortunately, on legal advice, the Government had been advised that it would not be possible to implement Section 34A and therefore the consultation paper had been issued to try to resolve the situation for all parties concerned. The consultation period for which ends on March 19<sup>th</sup> 2004.

The Forum were advised of the work of the Recreational Motorcycles in the Cheviot Group, whose membership consisted of representatives of the NNPA, LARA, TRF, Scottish Borders Council, Northumbria Police, MOD, Defence Estates, NCC and Forest Enterprise.

Concerns were raised that although there had been a lot of police activity in response to complaints by residents in the Cheviots, some of the complaints were coming from particularly vociferous residents who were constantly complaining about people. This was felt, by some individuals, to be harassment of legal road users.

**Recommended that:** Copies of the document be circulated with the minutes, with comments to be returned to Karen Fallon by the end of February 2004. This would then be pulled together into a draft comment for the meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2004.

**21. Update on Forum Member's Activities.**

None were given.

**22. Date and Time of Next Meeting.**

As previously circulated, the next meeting will take place on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2004. Venue to be confirmed.

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Following the completion of the agenda, the provisional maps for Area 5 were available and Forum Members were given copies of the Countryside Agency's Response to the Representations submitted by the Forum in June 2003. The response details each site for which a comment had been submitted by the Forum and the decision reached by the Countryside Agency in relation to that site.

There are still anomalies with the Response, regarding specific areas such as Lordenshaw, which although it has an Access Agreement already in place, has not been designated Open Country. The mapping of mires in Kielder is another area of concern, with no consistency in the mapping methodology.

The closing date for appeals, by those with a legal interest in the land, against the designation is 20<sup>th</sup> February 2004.

**Recommended that:** A summary sheet of the responses be circulated with the minutes.

Chair/Vice Chair to produce draft comment on the provisional maps, to be circulated to LAF members for comment for submission to Countryside Agency.