

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

**Minutes of Meeting held Thursday 14 April 2005 at 1800**

**at National Park Headquarters, Hexham**

JLAF Members Present:	Richard Cross	James Boulton
	Pamela Brooks	Alison Carter
	Jo Deniel-Rowe	Gillian Featonby
	Trevor Hardy	Kevin Heymann
	Pam Neal	Janet Robinson
	Nick Rossiter	Graham Gill
Officers (NNPA and NCC):	Catriona Mulligan, Northumberland National Park (NPA)	
	David Brookes, Northumberland County Council (NCC)	
	Rob Mayhew, Northumberland National Park	
	Marion Hume, Northumberland National Park	
	Lorna Lazzari, Northumberland National Park	
	Linda Pinkham, Northumberland National Park	
Others:	Lindsay Perks	Maggie Keyte
	Chris Livesey	Neville Geddes
Apologies:	Erica Bamford	Sue Bolam
	Peter Clark	Bryan Harwood
	Ted Liddle	Pat Scott
	Michael Walton	Michael Wood

**1 Welcome and Apologies**

Richard Cross acted as Chairman in the absence of Bryan Harwood who had been unable to attend the meeting. Other apologies, as detailed above, were noted.

He welcomed Marion Hume to her first meeting as JLAF Administrator. He also welcomed Lindsay Perks, Tyne & Wear LAF, Maggie Keyte, North Pennines LAF, Chris Livesey, ATE Otterburn and Neville Geddes, Forestry Commission.

**2 Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

**3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2004 were agreed as a true record and signed by Richard Cross, on behalf of the Chairman.

**4 Matters Arising**

Members noted the research paper '*Demand for Outdoor Recreation in the English National Parks*' from Sheffield Hallam University. This had been previously mentioned at the JLAF meeting on 8 September 2004.

Richard Cross said he would be asking the working groups to look at various access issues over the coming months and accordingly, Working Group One would be asked to look at this paper in more detail and make a report to the next meeting of the JLAF.

## **5 Public Participation**

Maggie Keyte, a member of the North Pennines LAF and Lindsay Perks, Chairman of Tyne and Wear LAF introduced themselves.

## **6 Budgets**

Members noted correspondence between the Chairman and Northumberland County Council dated 20 January and 1 February 2005.

### 6.1 Northumberland County Council Update

D Brookes updated members on issues surrounding budgets. He said that the original proposal for £297,000 savings to the Countryside Service Budget had been finalised at £213,000 which had been achieved by, amongst other things, deletion of posts and the reduction of non-essential budget heads. Income targets were to be achieved by, amongst other things, increasing parking charges in country parks and 'salami slicing' other budget heads. He assured members that whilst cuts had been made, front line services such as Rights of Way maintenance and the country parks had been protected.

### 6.2 National Park Authority Update

6.2.1 ROW - Catriona Mulligan informed members about the National Park Authority's priorities for the next three years which will focus on the ROW network now that the major projects to launch the National Trails are complete. She confirmed that £40,000 had been ploughed into the ROW Network in 2004/05 due to concerns about a deterioration in quality, with a further £120,000 planned over the next three years.

6.2.2 ROWIP - Members noted the National Park Authority's PID (Initiation and Definition of Project) on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP).

### 6.3 North Pennines LAF

D Brookes notified the meeting that Northumberland County Council had decided to disband the North Pennines Local Access Forum imminently, as they now wished to consider operating a single Local Access Forum for the whole of Northumberland. This would potentially change the status of the Northumberland National Park and Countryside Joint Local Access Forum and would be discussed with Northumberland National Park Authority over the coming weeks. He added that feedback had already been obtained from Durham and Cumbria LAFs on this proposal.

## **7 Closures and Restrictions**

### 7.1 Presentation by Neville Geddes – Kielder Forest and anticipated long term closures and restrictions

Neville Geddes, District Planning Forester, provided a short Powerpoint presentation on '*Dedicating Forest Land as Access Land*'. Members received a copy of the slides and a coloured map of the forest area. He drew members' attention to the fact that, due to necessary tree felling, over the coming months there would be a need for long-term closures and restrictions (of over six months). This would roughly equate to 1.4% annually of the Forestry Commission land in the Kielder forest area, which is

roughly 200 square miles and provides over 7% of UK timber production of 400,000 tonnes per annum.

He handed out a diagrammatic map which detailed the possible affected areas and said that some applications for short-term closures were currently lodged with the Open Access Contact Centre (OACC) in Belfast. He said that timber harvesting had an impact on public access for health and safety reasons and this would be why long term closures would be sought for certain areas. Areas to be closed would be clearly indicated and every effort made to provide practicable alternative routes. Full information would be available on the OACC website. It was envisaged, however, that there would be minimum impact on recreational use of the forest and the diversity of routes for the public to use would be maintained.

He explained about the Kielder forest design plans, including areas of conservation, paths, bridleways, ancient monuments, public rights of way and the need to maintain these and the habitats of native species, particularly red squirrels and black grouse. Accordingly, when re-plantings were undertaken, maintaining and even enhancing habitats would be taken into consideration as well as maintenance of rights of way.

## 7.2 Presentation by Rob Mayhew on choosing a process for dealing with long term closure and restriction consultations

Rob Mayhew, Team Leader Access & Communications at NPA, provided a web-based presentation on '*Choosing a process for handling future long term closure consultations*', using the website [www.openaccess.gov.uk](http://www.openaccess.gov.uk) and opening the pages on Consultations. He hoped that by doing so, members would be encouraged to use the web to access information themselves as it was hoped to develop the use of IT when contacting JLAF members and in accessing information in the future. He also spoke about the OACC in Belfast which was accessible via the above website under 'Consultations on local restrictions and closures'.

Under Section 27 of the CROW Act 2000 closure applications of over six months duration were subject to a consultation exercise, with the JLAF being one of the statutory consultees contacted by the relevant authority prior to the OACC making a decision within a four-month period. The relevant authority guidance pages were highlighted as the 'bible' to determine how to handle applications and reference was made to the maps available on the Countryside Agency website [www.openaccess.gov.uk](http://www.openaccess.gov.uk) and opening the pages on Maps.

The difference between 28-day closures, which the OACC in Belfast were handling on behalf of the relevant authority, and closure applications of over 6 months which would be notified to the JLAF, was highlighted and members were urged to check the website regularly for updates on closures and restrictions.

Reference was also made to the probable closures and restrictions at Kielder during harvesting and Graham Gill was asked if he could forecast how many closures and restrictions there might be and if occasional site visits might be needed. It was agreed that Kielder site visits would need to be restricted and only done if absolutely necessary. A suggestion was made to hold a JLAF meeting in Kielder so members could see the forestry land.

The committee were asked to decide on a process for dealing with the closure and restrictions consultations as this is likely to be an ongoing activity. It was agreed that a sub-committee was a good way to proceed in the first instance. It was therefore agreed that:

- when the next consultation request for a long-term closure or restriction is forwarded to the JLAF, a volunteer sub-committee including the Chair and Vice Chair be formed ensuring the right levels of knowledge/experience are included;
- the sub-committee to set its own meeting dates and arrange any site visits;
- quorum consists of a minimum of two people – Chair and Vice-chair;
- other members to make comment via writing/e-mail if unable to attend meetings but agreed that if members were genuinely interested they would make every attempt to attend the meetings;
- all members of the JLAF be notified when notice is given of a closure and restriction consultation;
- consultations be made with all relevant interested parties including land managers;
- each closure and restriction consultation is to be treated on its own merit.

It was agreed to formalise this procedure at the next meeting. It was noted there was no specific budget within the JLAF budget for closure work.

### 7.3 Chillingham White Wild Cattle

A full background to this case was given and the file of documentation noted. The committee unanimously agreed to recommend the closure application be upheld but that if circumstances changed within Chillingham White Wild Cattle Park, and the cattle were removed, then the closure restriction should be revisited by the relevant authority. Marion Hume was asked, on behalf of the JLAF, to write to Anne Glover and the OACC before the closure deadline on 29 April 2005.

## **8. Membership issues**

It was agreed to formally approve the JLAF year as being from 1 May to 30 April. It was noted that this meeting was thus the last meeting of Year 2 of the Forum.

Due to the recruitment procedure for JLAF members, annual recruitment for new members would be necessary. This was because in Year 2 members had been randomly elected for a period of either one year, two years or three years. An update was given on the forthcoming recruitment drive which would be advertised in local newspapers and on the National Park web site [www.northumberland-national-park.org.uk](http://www.northumberland-national-park.org.uk) and then opening the 'Open Access' pages. It was anticipated that the annual recruitment drive would be held during the months of April/May.

Richard Cross thanked members whose one year membership tenure had expired - Erica Bamford, Bryan Harwood, Trevor Hardy, Pam Neal, Michael Walton and Pat Scott - for their input to the JLAF to date. It was noted that Peter Clark had resigned as he was emigrating, Sue Bolam was no longer able to serve on the JLAF due to other commitments and Trevor Hardy was not re-applying.

As Bryan Harwood's membership tenure had expired at the end of April and therefore his period of office as Chairman, members noted that Richard Cross would act as Chairman until the election of a new Chairman at the July meeting.

## 9. Publicity and Events

An update was given on the draft arrangements for the launch of Open Access in areas 4 and 5 on Saturday 28 May 2005. Members noted the main event would be held in the Yorkshire Dales. The National Park event would be held at the Rose & Thistle in Alwinton and members were asked to sign up for the event.

## 10. Updates

10.1 CROW update – there was nothing significant to report.

### 10.2 Conclusive Maps and Signage

The Conclusive Maps had been issued at the end of March 2005 and paper copies were available for members' perusal at the end of the meeting. 41 appeals were submitted during the consultation process, of which 30 were allowed, 4 allowed in part and 7 dismissed for land in the national park. Copies of the conclusive maps are available at County Hall, Morpeth as well as National Park offices. The maps are due for revision in ten years.

Samples of signage being used on open access land, including examples from other National Parks, were passed round for information. Investigations were underway into producing tactile signs for some locations. A6 sized signs will also be investigated. There would be no specific signs for AONB's.

### 10.3 Working Groups

As the Working Groups were a fundamental part of the JLAF, Richard Cross advised member he would be writing to them with regard to revising the three working groups, and each group would be set a specific task from which a verbal report would be given at the next meeting in July. Whilst it was noted that some working groups had depleted numbers, all members were urged to participate in the exercise and regain some focus on the work of the Forum. New members to the Forum would be allocated a working group once elected.

### 10.4 Update from other LAFS

Lindsay Perks spoke briefly about the activities in his LAF area, which were mainly transport plans and urban issues, which were very different to our own issues. Members also noted the Report from North East Region Local Access Forums Workshop held in February 2005 and attended by Bryan Harwood and Lorna Lazzari.

### 0.5 Alun Michael statement on BOATS

D Brookes provided an update on the paper '*Use of Mechanically Propelled Vehicles on Rights of Way*' December 2003. He said there had been over 14,000 responses to the paper. The framework document included an annexe on the use of motor vehicles on byways open to all traffic (BOATs) and roads used as a public path (RUPP's). In summary, the main recommendation of the document agrees that the Government should bring in legislation about rights of way on historic evidence which will result in restricted byways.

In summer 2005 DEFRA will publish a circular/guidance on current enforcement to manage use of existing ROWs by motor vehicles as there is a lot of confusion surrounding this issue. He referred to recent case law (Bakewell) which could mean

that motor vehicles can acquire rights through 20 year use and indicated the Government intended to legislate to prevent this. There were also issues surrounding existing BOATs and there would be no retrospective legislation to remove these as their use can be controlled by local authorities and police powers. He concluded by saying that, as a highway authority, Northumberland County Council would look at rights of way problems on a case-by-case basis.

## **11. Members section**

Seeding Change - Members noted the National Park hoped to appoint a Seeding Change officer in the next few months to look at hay meadows, verges etc.

Training - Regarding training, a suggestion was made that Anne Glover, Countryside Agency, be invited either to a meeting or a separate training event to provide JLAF members with some training/familiarity on closure and restriction procedures.

Safety - safety issues surrounding mines were briefly discussed.

## **12. Any Other Matters Arising**

Annual Report – this will be issued during the summer.

Format of meetings – members established that the current format of meetings was agreeable to those present. Some confusion had arisen over meeting dates previously proposed but those present agreed that the new dates suggested were suitable as they concurred with the new JLAF year (1 May – 30 April). It was suggested that paper copies of reports and papers be kept to a minimum and this was noted by the Secretary; as much as possible, communications with JLAF members would be made by e-mail or via the web in future.

Members noted the forthcoming celebrations for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Pennine Way which were being widely publicised.

## **13. Date of next meeting**

The meeting closed at 2030. The proposed dates for future meetings were agreed by those present. These were:

1. Thursday 21 July 2005
2. Thursday 20 October 2005
3. Thursday 19 January 2006 and
4. Thursday 13 April 2006.

The next meeting would therefore be held on Thursday 21 July 2005. It was agreed the meeting would include a visit, possibly to Once Brewed/Housteads Fort in the afternoon with the meeting being held locally in the early evening.