NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK AND COUNTY JOINT LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Minutes of Meeting held on
Thursday 26 January 2017 1745 – 2035

National Park Offices, South Park, Eastburn, Hexham

Attendance:
Afternoon: A Earnshaw (Chairman), D Rozario, G Astbury, I Jackson, M Bell, N Rossiter, S Rogers, T Liddle, V Brown
Evening: A Earnshaw (Chairman), D Rozario, G Astbury, I Jackson, M Bell, N Rossiter, S Rogers, T Liddle, V Brown, J Farries, M Macgregor
Officers: L Lazzari and M Hume, Northumberland National Park Authority; M Jeffrey, Northumberland County Council
Others: L Bray, Tyne & Wear LAF Chair; A Caine, observer
Apologies: M Allan, T Thorne, A Mitcham, D Brookes

1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

A Earnshaw, JLAF Chairman, welcomed Liz Bray and Anna Caine and apologies were noted.

2 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: none received

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST: none received

4 MINUTES OF JOINT LOCAL ACCESS FORUM 16 October 2016: The Minutes were approved and signed by the Chairman.

5 CHAIRMAN’S UPDATE ON AFTERNOON SESSION

The Chairman provided a brief update of the afternoon session topics; notes on the afternoon session are available for JLAF members:

- Technology and Access: Ed Hudspeth, National Park GIS officer provided a presentation on Viewranger and the promoted routes project.

- Health & Wellbeing agenda (The Sill and the National Park Management Plan): the JLAF Sill Working Group provided input from recent meetings and National Park officers provided information on the health agenda relating to The Sill and the National Park Management Plan. The Sill JLAF working group was building good links with the National Park health agenda and linking this with the Health Accord (Public Health England). M Bell agreed to take forward relevant comments for the Management Plan objective 4.2.5. Members agreed health boards were not a focus for the JLAF at the moment.

- ‘Fly the Flag for Access’: members agreed it was important to raise the profile of the JLAF particularly with regard to the access agenda.

- Development Control and impact on access: members agreed to consider this with a view to preparing some planning guidance in terms of access with input from the National Park and County Council, which might also be helpful to parish councils.
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- Commercial/business operators and Access: it was agreed Ian Jackson would attend the Hexham and Alnwick Tourism Fairs with a view to gaining insight, from their perspective, as to what access issues were relevance to their business and would or could expedite or hinder their business via a questionnaire.

Members thought some questions which might be considered included: does the presence of a public right of way (footpath or bridleway) enhance your business; does the presence of a public right of way prejudice your business; and could the improvement of the condition of public rights of way benefit your business. Members were asked to send I Jackson ideas for questions and a report from the Tourism Fair results would be available for the April meeting.

JLAF Member recruitment: M Hume advised members the recruitment drive for new JLAF members for the period 1 May 2017 – 30 April 2019 would start shortly and all current JLAF members would retire on 30 April 2017 and would be welcome to re-apply. She added that the selection evening was Wednesday 5 April at Eastburn.

JLAF ACTION PLAN ITEM

The Chairman reminded members that the JLAF Action Plan was the vehicle for moving JLAF advice and views forward and although individual areas of expertise and knowledge were very important, the Action Plan should not be a vehicle for individual members pursuing individual interests. It was hoped that going forward, the Action Plan would be more inclusive of all members with lead members for specific topics identified, rather than individual ownership of topics.

6 JLAF Action Plan Objective 1: JLAF involvement in the RoWIP, Open Access, Coastal Access, 2026 and other access projects.

a) Updates from appointing authorities

i. Northumberland County Council update: members noted the tabled report and key points including

- the modification orders update will be provided every six months;
- the coast path was gathering pace – part of the route (Amble to Bamburgh) was about to commence and members asked about long terms restrictions e.g. nature conservation and noted consultation events would be starting soon;
- members noted the National Trails funding for 2017 – 2018 remained as last year;
- Smoutel Ford: members noted the proposals for the ford;
- Stobswood: members were pleased to note the reinstatement of the site was complete, the path network re-instated and enhanced, improving access to the area;
- Doddington Moor: the County Council had prepared their response to the proposals.

Members asked about repairs to flood damage and asked about long term resilience and how repairs were assessed against further anticipated extreme weather and climate change noting that every job was different and assessed by the County Council accordingly. It was suggested that in view of the anticipated County Council’s Rights of Way Improvement Plan review, a different approach to repairs could be part of the discussions on this matter.
ii. **Northumberland National Park update:** members noted the report and key points including:

- **National Trails:** L Lazzari explained that Northumberland National Park were now the lead Authority for the Hadrian’s Wall Path with a trail officer and trail maintenance ranger in post, augmented by seasonal help. Mrs Lazzari explained about her new role with regard to the Hadrian’s Wall path, where she had taken on some of the duties previously undertaken by D McGlade.

- **Off road use:** L Lazzari spoke about the increase in off-road vehicle use over the area of the National Park as well as other areas e.g. Slaley and that instances were being reported of off-road users becoming more hostile when confronted by the public. A meeting with local police was to be arranged as the illegal use of these vehicles was now an increasing concern. She reminded members of the importance of reporting any instances to the police using 101.

b) **JLAF Parish Initiative Progress:** members noted not much progress had been made with this initiative recently, despite members’ endeavours, but felt liaison with parish councils should continue to be pursued. Members agreed raising the JLAF’s profile would help e.g. asking if an item could be put into NALC news, as well as having some other relevant information to hand e.g. development control/planning guidance related to access issues.

The Chairman noted with work Tyne & Wear LAF had done on development control advice and said that consideration would be given to producing some kind of access-related development control/planning advice and that this, and an update on the parish initiative, would be provided at the April meeting.

In this regard a Development Control sub-group was set up of A Earnshaw, L Bray, T Liddle and N Rossiter with any advice produced to be passed to D Brookes, M Jeffrey and the National Park Head of Planning for any input. [See 6 c (iii) below]

c) **Working Group updated and future topics:**

i. **The Sill working group** referred to the notes of their meeting on 10 January 2017 with National Park officers involved with The Sill about the Sill Activities Plan Theme 1: the Health and Wellbeing agenda and links with access and recreation and had found both meetings on this subject (28 November 2016) informative. Members noted the next meeting with Sill officers was on 20 March looking at the Sill Activities Plan Theme 2 topic of Self Led Activities.

ii. **Working Group updates:** Members noted the report of the Working Group North October 2016 and January 2017 meetings and that the Forestry Group had looked at two consultations noting an anomaly as one had mentioned both a 300 and 400 day restriction. G Astbury said he had gone to the Forestry Commission workshop at Wooler and had found this useful with regard to gaining information relevant for reviewing forestry consultations. There was no update from Working Group South.

iii. **Working group future topics:** the current working groups were North, South, The Sill, Communications, Forestry and the new Development Control Working Group. The Chairman said working groups would be re-configured when the new membership was
in place with an emphasis also on shorter term ‘task and finish’ groups and that topics discussed should ideally be relevant to the Action Plan. (See 6 b above)

iv. Communications (internal and external) I Jackson updated members on the article he had written on Access which would be sent to the Courant and on the JLAF Instagram account, inviting members to keep sending his pictures to upload. I Jackson updated members on the JLAF Instagram account, inviting members to keep sending his pictures to upload. M Hume said for the forthcoming recruitment, more use would be made of social media, such as Twitter feeds and Facebook, as well as other traditional communication methods. See also 7 (a) below.

d) Northumberland County Council’s Rights of Way Improvement Plan: A Earnshaw referred to her RoWIP Common Themes report showing areas of common interest and concern if the access infrastructure is to meet the needs of current and future users. Mrs Earnshaw asked for members’ comments particularly what they wanted to see included in a Regional Statement on Access, to help decision makers decide if a rights of way project could be worth supporting. She added she believed that the North East Combined Authority was now responsible for Local Transport Plans and that the RoWIP was due to be reviewed in 2017.

7  JLAF Action Plan: Objective 2: Advocacy, Influence and Partnership working to advance access to the countryside.

a) Communications and Engagement Strategy (external): members noted the draft JLAF Communications and Engagement Plan for external communications, which was needed as a more structured and proportionate process for JLAF communications was required now, to raise the JLAF profile. Members noted the key JLAF themes for 2017, the proposed meeting ground rules and that key events would now be included in the National Park’s Communications calendar. The Plan would be further reviewed at the JLAF April meeting with a view to providing a shorter, final document, which M Bell offered to help with.

b) Members noted brief updates on the National Park Management Plan Partnership, North East Local Nature Partnership including the February conference, Natural England, Northumberland Coast AONB, Kielder Water and Forest Park affiliates meeting (November 2016) and the latest coastal path information.

8  JLAF Action Plan: Objective 3: Communication through the provision of advice and information on issues relating to access to the countryside

a) A1 dualling: members agreed, whilst appreciating the project was still in its early stages, that many different groups would be involved in consulting on this initiative therefore it was important there was a cohesive approach to the consultation and responses provided to Highways England. Members noted that a presentation would be made on the A1 dualling by Highways England at the April meeting which would provide the ideal opportunity for members to ask questions and clarify issues of concern. V Brown spoke about some issues that could arise from the A1 dualling and felt that the involvement of local parish councils in the consultation e.g. Felton, was paramount.

M Jeffrey suggested a meeting with different user groups might be beneficial and agreed to discuss this with D Brookes and V Brown.
b) Review of CROW in its 14th year: M MacGregor spoke about the right to roam under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000 and asked if there was any information available on issues such as how much has CROW been exercised, have there been any issues with users, to what extent were statutory restrictions carried out.

Members discussed this matter and M MacGregor suggested an FOI request be sent to Natural England for answers to key questions such as the number of people exercising the right to roam in 2015-2016 and previous two years; how many acres were recorded as access land under the initial surveys following the Act; number of complaints by farmers and land owners and cause of such complaints; and how many days on average in a year is access land closed or restricted pursuant to statute.

It was agreed members would send in examples of suggested questions to the Chairman with an FOI sent, on behalf of the JLAF, to Natural England, with an update provided for the April meeting.

c) and d): Members noted the updates and information. S Rogers agreed to send M Hume further information on Doddington Moor.

The meeting ended at 2035. Items 9, 10 and 11 were therefore not considered.

9 JLAF ACTION PLAN – actions and agree way forward: not covered at meeting

10 MEMBERS’ SECTION – not covered at meeting

11 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

12 DATES OF FUTURE JLAF MEETINGS:

- JLAF meetings: Thursdays 27 April, 20 July, 19 October and 25 January 2018

JLAF Action Plan Objective 1: JLAF involvement in the RoWIP, Open Access, Coastal Access, 2026 and other access projects
JLAF Action Plan Objective 2: Advocacy, Influence and Partnership working to advance access to the countryside
JLAF Action Plan Objective 3: Communication through the provision of advice and information on issues relating to access to the countryside