



## Northumberland National Park & County Joint Local Access Forum

### 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Report

1 May 2010 – 30 April 2011



JLAF members visit the rare and wild Chillingham White Cattle April 2011 (courtesy of P Nicholson)

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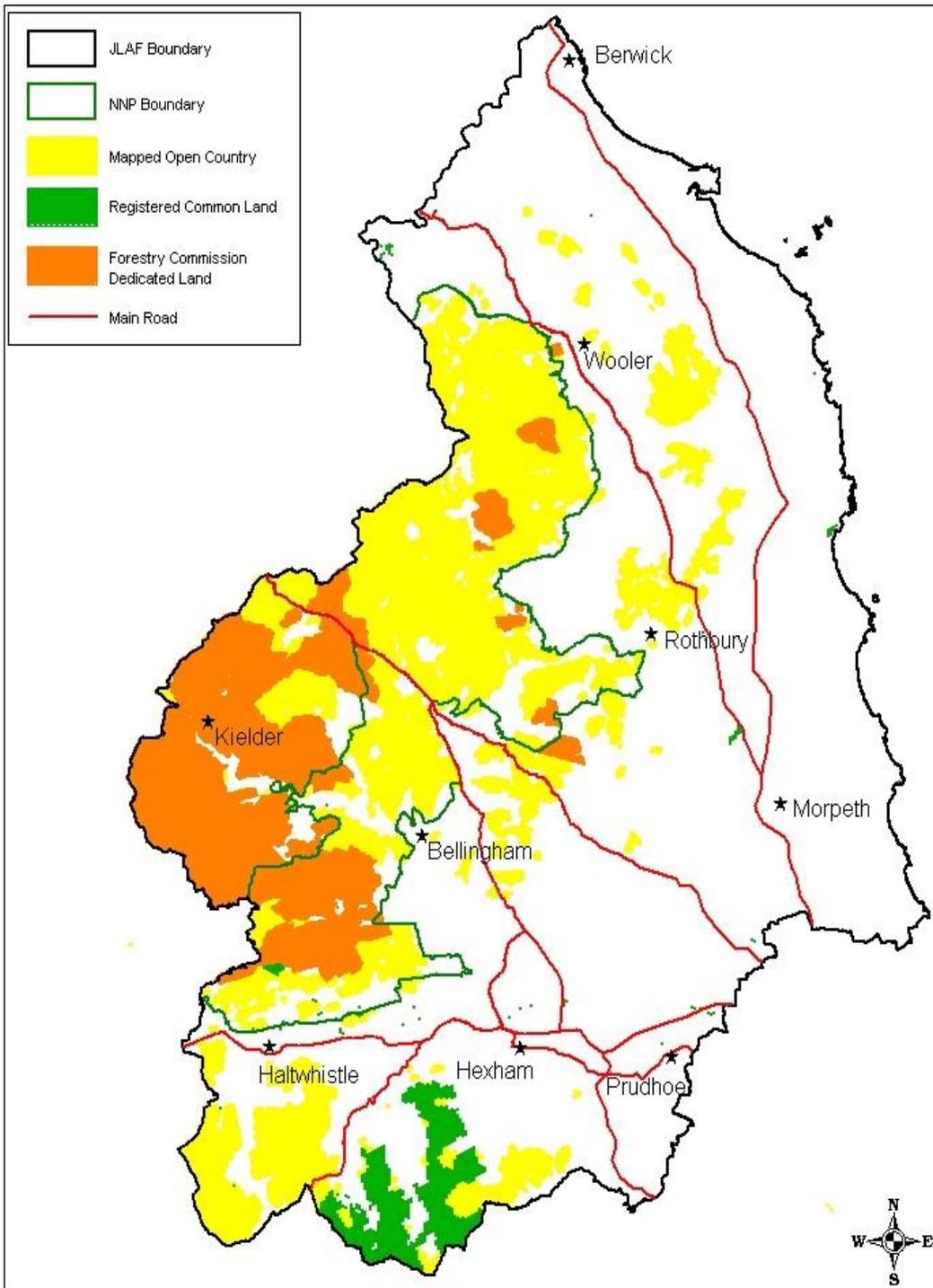
## Northumberland National Park & Countryside Joint Local Access Forum Areas of Open Country and Registered Common Land



Scale 1:501790

Compiled by Northumberland National Park Authority on 24 September 2007

Northumberland National Park Authority



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## Purpose of the Annual Report

The purpose of this annual report is to inform the public, as our stakeholders, of the aims, aspirations and achievements of the Northumberland National Park and County Joint Local Access Forum (JLAF) over the past year and to also discharge our statutory duty within the Local Access Forum Regulations.

### Background to the JLAF and Objectives as derived from the DEFRA Guidance on Local Access Forums in England (published February 2007)

The Northumberland National Park and County Joint Local Access Forum (JLAF) is a statutory advisory body established by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Appointed by the Northumberland National Park Authority (NNPA) and Northumberland County Council (NCC), the JLAF advises these authorities and other Section 94 (4) bodies including the Secretary of State; Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA); Ministry of Defence; Natural England; Forestry Commission; English Heritage; and town and parish councils in Northumberland.

The JLAF also covers the part of the North Pennines in Northumberland. It has representation on the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership Access Working Group and also the Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership. The JLAF has a remit to formally advise the two Partnerships and will work with them on relevant access issues (DEFRA Guidance Para 3.2.2).

Membership of the JLAF has been carefully balanced to avoid dominance by any single interest group or coalition of like interests and includes a cross-section of local interests in the countryside, such as recreational use, land management, education, nature conservation, tourism, business, transport and access for all. Members are appointed on an individual basis according to their knowledge and expertise of issues relating to local access. They are neither representative of, nor responsible to, any single interest group.

From within the membership of the JLAF, working groups have been formed which examine specific issues and recommend a course of action for the JLAF membership as a whole. These working groups meet between the main meetings and can examine issues in much more detail than might be possible at the larger, more infrequent main meetings.

### Objectives

1. To advise the Access Authorities, Natural England (NE) and all other Section 94 (4) bodies on all access related matters.
2. To encourage wider public access and recreation in the countryside.
3. To advise on consultations and long-term access land closures in a timely manner.
4. To encourage measures that will educate the public on access rights, opportunities and responsibilities.
5. To advise on ways towards ensuring:
  - that all 'access land' is accessible from a public highway road or public rights of way (PRoW);
  - that all routes promoted with public funding are maintained, open and accessible to legitimate users;
  - that information on restrictions is accurate, accessible and understandable.
6. To advise on measures to minimise the impact of recreational off-road driving and motorcycling on the landscape.
7. To engage with statutory bodies, access user groups, land managers and members of the public over access matters.

During the year, Northumberland County Council has sought the advice of the JLAF on a number of issues including its Rights of Way Improvement Plan and Capital Works priorities. The advice from the JLAF helps to ensure that the resources allocated to improve the rights of way network in Northumberland meets, as far as possible, the needs and aspirations of the public. (*David Brookes Countryside Support Team Manager, Northumberland County Council*).

## Chairs Remarks

This is my second Annual Report as Chair and I have very much enjoyed another year which has been very busy for the Joint Local Access Forum. As always my first priority is to thank our members who willingly give their time and expertise to ensure that the JLAF is such a vibrant and interesting group of individuals with so much combined knowledge of the County and access issues generally. I am extremely appreciative of their input during the year both at our quarterly meetings and in attending other meetings on behalf of the JLAF as well as their background work in preparing items for our all too busy agendas!

The JLAF covers the whole of Northumberland which encompasses the Northumberland National Park, parts of the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the Northumberland Coastal AONB as well as the rest of Northumberland which includes a number of urban and urban fringe areas. We have members from across the County which helps give a balance to our group although I am always conscious of our lack of representation in the very North of the County, especially following the retirement of Erica Bamford the farthest travelled member from Berwick, who has been a member since the very first JLAF meeting.

As well as a wide geographical area to cover we have also dealt with a wide variety of access related issues during the year including; liaison with the Police and the National Park regarding illegal mechanically propelled vehicle (MPV) activity, looking at new access provision under Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) (the good and the not so good) helping Corbridge Parish Council develop their ideas for creating new access, seeing how the private sector can create, provide and promote public access and hosting a meeting with Natural England, Northumberland County Council, Northumberland National Park Authority, the North Pennines AONB Partnership and the Northumberland Coast AONB to discuss how those organisations would cope with the spending review and the positive impact which volunteers and volunteering could have.

Due to the spending review we appreciate that our appointing authorities have had a very difficult year and we would like to think that we have been aware of this in our dealings with them whilst continuing to promote the importance of access during their difficult deliberations. Northumberland National Park Authority conducted a major review of their performance as part of that process which included interviews with us as one of their partner organisations, the review highlighted the need for close working between us and we look forward to better integration with Northumberland National Park as their new systems, staff and responsibilities settle into place.

I am also pleased to report that the Regional Access Forum has been revitalised and appears to be a more focused and useful forum following the demise of the England Access Forum and the Stakeholder Working Group, which, disappointingly failed to produce much in the way of useful conclusions or recommendations and was obviously impacted by the economic climate in which it produced its final comments.

Looking forward, I am enthused by the new members who have recently joined us, and grateful to those who have departed. I believe that the JLAF remains a vital mouthpiece for access and has helped enormously in breaking down the 'barriers' between the various interest groups; it really is a great example of education and understanding helping to reduce conflict and making access work better for everyone.

I look forward to continuing the important work of the JLAF during the coming year and having the opportunity to visit many more of the beautiful and interesting places within the County.

Finally I wish to thank both David Baines and Nicola Thompson who acted as vice chairs during the year and also Marion Hume, our JLAF Administrator who works so hard to make sure that the JLAF is an effective and efficient volunteer organisation, proving us to be an excellent example of the 'Big Society' in action.

*James Brown, Chair of the JLAF 2010 - 2011*

## Joint Local Access Forum Meetings 1 May 2010 – 30 April 2011

The JLAF covers an extensive area and has adopted the principle of holding meetings throughout Northumberland to ensure equality of access. They met on four occasions with themed afternoon site visits held prior to evening meetings; as far as possible the JLAF meet in village halls and use local suppliers for refreshments. Information is available on the [website](#) and all are welcome to attend.

Some of the JLAF highlights included helping the National Park towards the completion of the project at Milecastle 38 on Hadrian's Wall Path National Trail; providing support during the planning and negotiation stage for the development of an 'easy access' path at Steel Rigg; inputting into the [National Park Management Plan](#); having an active role with the National Park and Northumbria Police Land Managers' Liaison Group; publishing three position statements on: '[Access to Water](#)', '[Mechanically Propelled Vehicles](#)' and '[Surfaces](#)' and their contribution to the County Council's consultation on Slaley Forest.

### **22 July 2010 – Elsdon: '*Working together for Access*':**

Members met to look at varied access issues within the Darden Lough and Eastern Boundary Path and walked a large part of this diverse route led by the National Park Senior Ranger (North), who highlighted the key features of a number of areas. Members considered questions posed by the National Park including: '*new dedications: how do we manage the increase in path upkeep and maintenance with a shrinking resource alongside a large access network*' and "*are diversions the answer to providing sustainable surfaces on delicate soils*"? Updates in the evening came from the Police Liaison Group regarding liaison with them and other users on illegal use of mechanically propelled vehicles including reporting incidents; the work of parish councils and how to liaise with them regarding access issues; and a presentation on the work of the Park's northern rangers.

### **21 October 2010 – National Park, Hexham: '*Volunteering, the Big Society and the JLAF*':**

Members had an interesting afternoon of presentations from, and discussions with, the National Park's [Ranger](#) service, the National Park [Volunteer](#) co-ordinator, Northumberland County Council, Natural England and the Northumberland Coast AONB on the various aspects of volunteering that take place within these organisations. The presentations highlighted the management of volunteering, the pros and cons of volunteering, new initiatives in volunteering, working with young people and the diverse range of volunteering activities available (including being a member of the JLAF) - and how these fitted into the new 'Big Society' agenda. The evening included discussions on the afternoon session and actions to take forward with partners; the '[Coal and Coast](#)' project; outcomes from the National Park's [National Park Forum](#) and Members' review of the JLAF.

### **27 January 2011 – Corbridge: '*Liaising with Parish Councils*':**

The afternoon meeting was organised following a request from Natural England to help Corbridge Parish Council with issues surrounding access and land owners and their Heritage Trails project. Members were pleased to note the JLAF's "Parish Pride" initiative had been a catalyst in setting this project up. Members met representatives of the Trails project and Parish Council, walked a significant part of the trail and offered advice on the varied, and quite specific problems, the Group were facing. Evening presentations continued on the parish liaison theme with an introduction to working with parish councils and how their responsibilities will be changing from Northumberland Association of Local Councils and an introduction to the '[Walk4Life](#)' initiative including an interactive presentation.

### **14 April 2011 – Chillingham and Chatton: '*Permissive Access and Living Heritage*':**

One of the aims of this site visit was to consider access from a landowner perspective, including the impact on access when there are dangerous wild animals to consider as well as access for visitors who would provide income to help preserve the environs for the famous [Chillingham White Cattle](#). Members also discussed how to increase awareness of HLS permissive access; what level of interpretation people would like to see and, relating to access, any improvements to the experience of visiting wild cattle they could suggest; and how to improve linkages to other walks in the area. The evening meeting included updates on [St Oswald's Way](#) and [St Cuthbert's Way](#), open cast site restoration and the National Park Authority Performance Assessment review (2010) which recommended a closer working relationship between the National Park Authority and the JLAF.

## JLAF Work Plan and Priorities for 2010 – 2011

The work of the JLAF continued as far as practicable within the imposed constraints of budget cuts

Area	Task/Action required	Progress
<b>Rights of Way Improvement Plan implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comment on RoWIP annual work plan.</li> <li>• Monitor implementation of RoWIP.</li> <li>• Ensure RoWIP meshes with the Local Transport Plan</li> </ul>	Ongoing regular liaison with County Council
<b>Quarterly meetings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select venues/themes for meetings.</li> <li>• Organise targeted site visits relevant to current access and recreational issues; input from appointing authorities.</li> <li>• Ensure follow-up activities are auctioned.</li> </ul>	Ongoing; targeted; noting key/relevant issues
<b>Working Groups</b> Working Group One	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• JLAF Progress Review.</li> <li>• NNPA Management Plan consultation/actions/follow-up.</li> <li>• Open Access Restriction closures and consultations.</li> <li>• Other consultations e.g. Defra</li> </ul>	Ongoing Ongoing Ongoing Ongoing
Working Group Two	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• JLAF Progress review.</li> <li>• Parish Council liaison.</li> <li>• Disconnects.</li> <li>• Higher Level Stewardship/Permissive Access.</li> </ul>	Ongoing Ongoing Ongoing Ongoing
Working Group Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• JLAF Progress Review.</li> <li>• Healthy Walks/ Education /Dogs and Livestock</li> <li>• Urban users/Ethnic issues.</li> <li>• NCC RoWIP actions – progress/updates.</li> </ul>	Ongoing Ongoing Ongoing Ongoing
<b>Continue to raise JLAF Profile</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building contacts/liason opportunities with neighbouring LAFs and Section S94/4 bodies.</li> <li>• Promote county-wide 'joined-up-thinking' on access and recreation including urban areas.</li> <li>• Improving/enhancing liaison with appointing authorities e</li> <li>• Recruiting members from varied backgrounds.</li> <li>• Working with Parish Councils</li> </ul>	Ongoing  Ongoing  Ongoing Annually Ongoing
<b>Continue training members of the JLAF</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help identify individual/forum training needs</li> <li>• Take part in training events, workshops etc.</li> <li>• Monitor training needs e.g. Rights of Way legislation.</li> <li>• Targeted visits for JLAF members e.g. site visits</li> </ul>	Ongoing Ongoing Ongoing Ongoing
<b>Oversight of regional routes; monitor CROW open access and PROW for ease of use by public</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examine choke points.</li> <li>• Advice on priorities for maintenance.</li> <li>• Ensure that National Trails are maintained to standard required for their legal status.</li> <li>• Meet statutory requirement re consultations</li> </ul>	Ongoing As required As required  As required
<b>Monitor developments</b>	Monitor proposed developments which can be detrimental to public access as required.	As required
<b>Closure consultations</b> (Open Access Centre)	Give timely responses based on JLAF expertise and local knowledge.	Ongoing as required
<b>Additional tasks</b>	Dealt with in a timely way by working groups or an ad hoc working group as required.	Ongoing as required

In addition to their statutory responsibility to respond to consultations regarding directions to restrict access under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, working group tasks this year included writing position statements; JLAF members themselves reviewing the progress of the JLAF and identifying a way ahead for the future; improving parish council liaison; looking at disconnects and reviewing consultations including the open access restrictions. Additional ad hoc working groups are set up to address specific issues at a more detailed level. Working group meetings are arranged between the main JLAF meetings and members can switch between working groups as and when specific expertise is required.

## Members of the JLAF from 1 May 2010 to 30 April 2011

For the period 2010 – 2011 there were 22 members with five members retiring at various times through the year. An annual county-wide recruitment drive is held each spring. JLAF members can be contacted via the Administrator or you can meet them at the quarterly meetings.

**George Astbury**, *Stocksfield (other interests)* is a retired farmer and lists his interests as shooting, off-road motorised vehicle use including 4-wheel drive, and renewable energy.

**David Baines, Vice Chair**, *West Woodburn (other interests)* interests include walking, conservation, agriculture, the environment and health.

**Erica Bamford**, *Berwick upon Tweed (recreational interests)* is a former social worker and lecturer in Social Work. Erica's areas of interest include walking, mobility access, conservation, 'Walking for Health' and local history.

**Pamela Brooks**, *Haltwhistle (other interests)* retired OFSTED Inspector whose areas of interest include long distance walking, cycling, horse riding, conservation, the Ramblers' Association, Long Distance Walkers' Association, British Horse Scoeiry and Wildlife Trust (till June 2010)

**James Brown, Chair**, *Hexham (land interests)* is a chartered surveyor and amongst his interests he lists water sports, field sports, rural business, conservation, environmental issues and land management.

**Vic Brown**, *Morpeth (other interests)* was an outdoor education teacher; also a National Park voluntary ranger. Interests include canoeing, water sports and being a healthy walks leader.

**Michael Catlin**, *Blyth (recreational interests)* has several outdoor interests including walking and access for less abled users; since joining the JLAF he has been working with the national park rangers in developing paths for use by less abled visitors (till July 2010)

**Conrad Clayton**, *Alnwick (recreational interests)* is semi-retired but still works in agriculture. His interests include mountain biking, walking, camping and riding (till Jan)

**Edward Carrington**, *Hexham (other interests)* is a retired head of an outdoor centre, has a wide range of interests including being co-ordinator of an informal walking group, climbing, conservation and health.

**Angus Collingwood-Cameron**, *Alnwick (land interests)* is a Chartered Surveyor and Chartered Forester whose work areas focus on forestry and environmental land management. Apart from his young family, his main areas of interest include shooting, fishing and regional rural policy issues.

**Gill Featonby**, *Morpeth (recreational interests)* has a background is agricultural zoology, is a partner in a firm of auctioneers and valuers, as well as an IT manager and a 'very small farmer'. Gill's interests include horse riding and taking her dog into the countryside.

**Graham Gill**, *Bellingham (land interests)* is the Forest Management Director for the Forestry Commission's forests in North East England. He is interested in walking, cycling, mountain biking, tourism, rural business and conservation.

**Graeme Ferguson**, *Slaley (recreational interests)* a keen mountain biker, walker, fell runner, and (in the right conditions) skier and climber; he joined the JLAF to get a better understanding of access and recreational issues that affect Northumberland's diverse landscapes and to help with resolving these.

**Cllr Edward Heslop**, *Northumberland County Council appointee (from November 2010)* is a third generation tenant farmer who, apart from being sports mad, has a keen interest in encouraging responsible access for all to the countryside.

**Ted Liddle**, *Hexham (other interests)* is involved with the development of cycling in Northumberland. His areas of interest include cycling, tourism, rural business, conservation, rock climbing and orienteering.

**Peter Nicholson**, *(Northumberland National Park appointee)* is a keen sailor and skier and has an extensive background in outdoor pursuits.

**Sue Rogers**, *Alnwick (recreational interests)* continues to work as a part-time equestrian consultant. As well as riding, her areas of interest include walking, orienteering, tourism and endurance riding.

**Nick Rossiter**, *Hexham (other interests)* returned to the JLAF after a few years absence; interests include bird watching and his areas of expertise include extensive knowledge of ecological and conservation issues.

**Richard Seaman**, *Whitfield (land interests)* is a land manager (till October 2010)

**Cllr Alan Sharp** *Haltwhistle (Northumberland National Park Appointee)* is a land agent/estate manager with interests in land management, the National Trust and walking.

**Nicola Thompson, Vice Chair, Hexham (land interests)** is a research fellow with a background in rural development and countryside management. Interests include running, rural business, conservation and education

**David Towns, Morpeth (NCC appointee)** is a solicitor in the property department of a law firm and is interested in all legal matters relating to property and access (till September)

**Susan Vaughan, Newcastle (recreational interests)** background is sports education, grant making and fund raising. She has a keen interest in rock climbing, urban issues, advocacy and working with diverse groups.

