



# Northumberland National Park & County Joint Local Access Forum

## 9th Annual Report

1 May 2011 – 30 April 2012



JLAF members visit the College Valley October 2011

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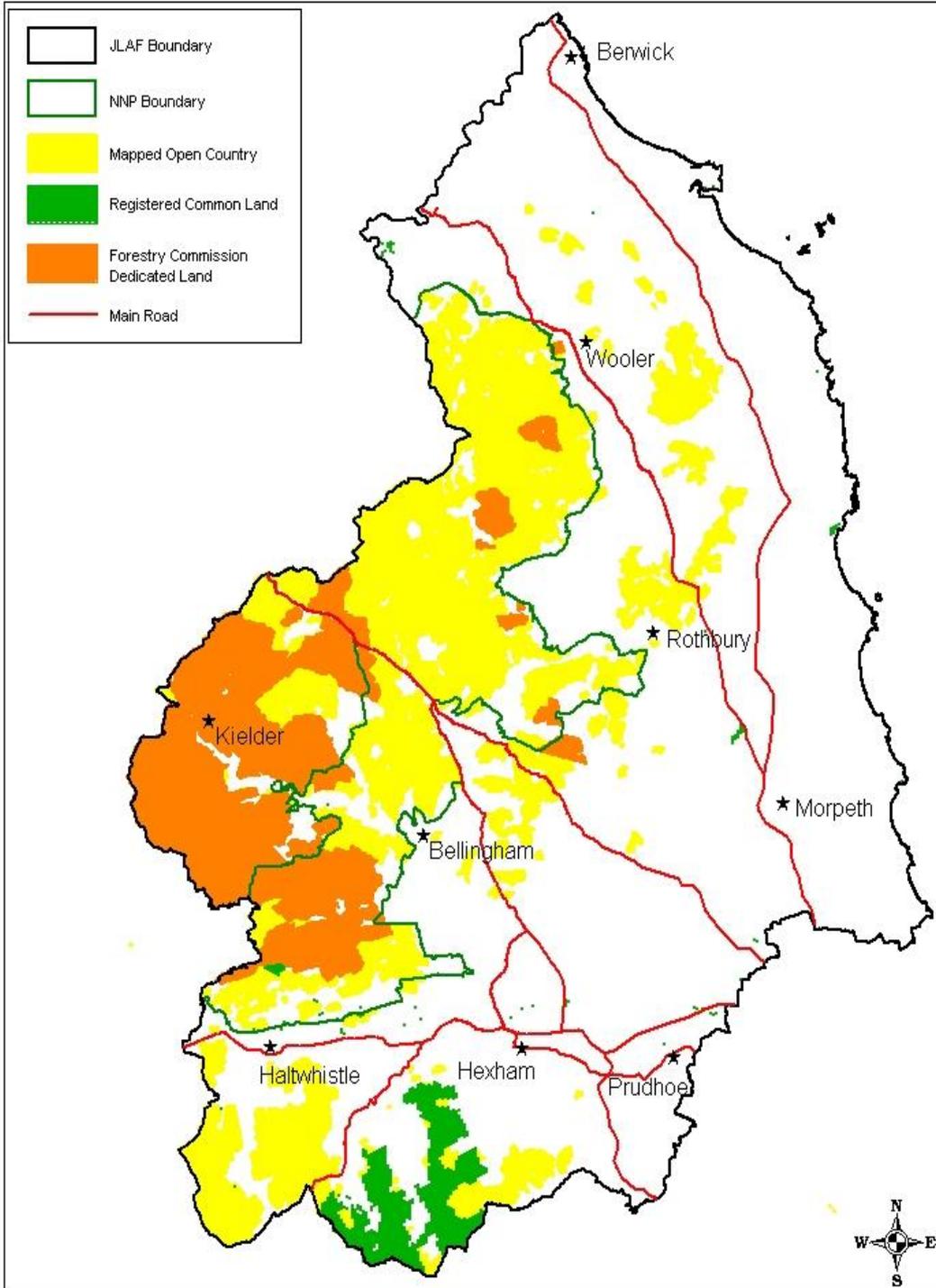
# Northumberland National Park & Countryside Joint Local Access Forum Areas of Open Country and Registered Common Land



Scale 1:501790

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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.

## Chairman's Remarks

This is my final Annual Report as Chairman having stepped down at the end of July 2012. I have very much enjoyed my time as Chairman, specifically due to the drive and expertise of the members of the Joint Local Access Forum (JLAF) who continue to impress me with their dedication and knowledge regarding access issues. Gill Featonby assumed the role of Chairman from August 2012.

It was another busy year for the JLAF and as always I would like 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!

Whilst the JLAF covers the whole of Northumberland I do feel that we have sometimes struggled to get a wide geographical range of members, this has been of particular issue regarding members from within the National Park itself and may have contributed to the Review undertaken by the Park this year. You will all no doubt be pleased with the findings of the report which acknowledged our wide and detailed range of knowledge and also identified that we were not made best use of by the Park, hopefully this will change in the year ahead.

The reduction in budget has also had an impact in how the JLAF is run, particularly impacting in a significant reduction in our JLAF Administrator Marion's time which has caused some issues, nevertheless she tirelessly deals with as much as she can and we may have to find smarter ways of working to help with the reduced admin support.

During the year we have visited a wide variety of places and considered a wide variety of issues including Potland Surface Mine to understand the long and short term impacts from surface mining which is a regular feature within the Northumberland Coastal Fringe, the College Valley to see an iconic part of Northumberland and understand the access issues faced by a remote area, with little facilities and a desire to improve and increase public access, our usual January meeting at National Park offices in Hexham when this year we were joined by representatives from all our neighbouring LAF's plus Natural England and the Northumberland Coast and North Pennines Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, to consider issues which crossed all of our boundaries and our final meeting of the year at Kielder when we considered 'Kielder – the Big Picture' including the development of the mountain trail bike routes, initiatives at the Kielder Viaduct, an introduction to the 'Dark Skies' initiative and an update on the Kielder Forest and Water Park Development Trust

I wish to thank both George Astbury and Gill Featonby who acted as vice chairs during the year and also Marion who works so hard to make sure that the JLAF is an effective and efficient volunteer organisation. I wish Gill well in her role as Chair and hope to be able to continue to assist her and the JLAF and to represent those interests which first brought me to the Forum.

Although this Annual Report is for the year 2011 – 2012 we should also remember Peter Nicholson who sadly passed away in August 2012. He was a vital member of the JLAF who provided insightful views during our meetings and was our ambassador within the National Park Authority. His knowledge and understanding will be sadly missed.

*James Brown, Chair of the JLAF 2011-2012*

## **Joint Local Access Forum Meetings 1 May 2011 – 30 April 2012**

The JLAF holds four meetings a year throughout Northumberland to ensure equality of access, with themed afternoon site visits prior to evening meetings; as far as possible the JLAF meet in village halls using local suppliers for refreshments. Information is available on the website.

### **21 July 2011: Venue: *Potland Surface Mine and the Country Barn, Widdrington* Theme: *“Access through surface mining”***

Members had a guided visit by UK Coal/ input from NCC, round mine site and asked questions e.g. how much input to improved access comes from members of public and how; how is wider picture of whole Rights of Way network and adjacent sites considered when the restoration plans are drawn up; are plans ‘written in stone’ or can they be amended before restoration begins?’ In the evening members discussed a variety of issues including correspondence from the Minister, effects of the austerity cuts on NCC and NPA and topics for the new working groups which would include use of cycle tracks by riders and parish council liaison.

### **20 October 2011: Venue: *College Valley Estate and Cuddystone Village Hall* Theme: *“Managing public access within a large country estate”***

Members held a site visit with College Valley Estate and the National Park and considered issues including: does opening up a country estate for public access cause any major management problems; what are financial implications; what benefits are brought to estate; what are pros and cons of providing open access to estate?; how committed is estate to encouraging/welcoming visitors, and balancing this with other interests; how estate could make valley more attractive to cyclists/riders. The evening meeting considered issues including regional and national developments with local access forums; research on unrecorded ways through Northumberland countryside; new wind farm proposals in Northumberland; and updates from working group meetings. Following the meeting a report was prepared by JLAF members for College Valley Estate management suggesting ways in which public access to the College Valley could be improved.

### **26 January 2012: Venue: *In-house meeting at the National Park offices, Hexham* Theme: *“Working together”***

A joint meeting was held with representatives of Cumbria, Durham and Tyne & Wear local access forums, the two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Durham County Council and Natural England which included sharing ideas and ‘best practice’; identifying and agreeing areas where we can work together in future across current boundaries; consider ways to enhance existing working relationships in light of increasing budgetary constraints and an introduction by Natural England to ‘Huddle’. The evening looked at preliminary results of the review the national Park Authority had carried out on the functionality and purpose of the JLAF plus input from members on diverse range of issues.

### **26 April 2012: Venue: *Kielder Forest and Water Park and the Duke’s Pantry* Theme: *“Kielder – the Big Picture”***

The afternoon site visit was led by the Forestry Commission North England Forest District and gave members an opportunity to see how work at Kielder had progressed since their last visit in April 2010. This included the enhanced mountain trail bike trails including the Deadwater trail; the new Lakeside linkage, local circular walk development- interpretation on history and linkages to Dark Skies; access for the less able; promoting activities at different times of the year to suit the climate at Kielder including the impact of midges; and general access issues. In the evening members benefitted from a presentation about the Kielder Water and Forest Park Development Trust and learned more about the Dark Skies initiative including the role of the National Park Authority in this initiative and the aim of achieving ‘Dark Skies’ protected status and create Europe’s largest dark sky preserve.

## **Other areas of work the JLAF have undertaken or considered during the year:**

As well as their quarterly meetings and their statutory responsibility to respond to consultations regarding directions to restrict access under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, the JLAF undertook many other activities during the year. The JLAF also has two working groups which address specific issues at a more detailed level and although assigned to one group, members can switch between these as and when specific expertise is required.

Other areas of work undertaken throughout the year included:

### Consultations including:

- Defra's Public Forest consultation
- Northumberland County Council's Slaley Experimental Traffic Regulation Order
- Northumberland National Park Governance Review
- Northumberland National Park Review of the Joint Local Access Forum
- Forestry Commission closures

### Participation including:

- Independent Panel on Forestry visits
- Regional Local Access Forum meetings
- National Local Access Forum Conference
- Local Nature Partnership meetings
- 'Huddle'
- Proposed Government changes to National Policy Planning Framework (NPPF) workshop
- North Northumberland Tourism 'Working in Tourism – How to be Sustainable' workshop
- Northumberland National Park Management Plan Action Plan meetings

### Representation on:

- North Pennines AONB Access and Recreation Working Group
- Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership
- National Park Management Plan Action Plan Focus Group
- Local Nature Partnership
- Kielder Water and Forest Development Trust

### Others topics covered including

- Looking at recording unrecorded Rights of Way
- 'The Great Outdoors' – improving access
- Horse Riders and cycle tracks
- Revisiting 'Parish Pride'
- Working more closely with parishes in the County
- Natural England's 'Paths for Communities' initiative
- Northumberland County Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan Annual Action Plan
- Responding to issues raised in correspondence from the Minister, Richard Benyon
- Long distance trails and routes in Northumberland
- Permissive Access (Defra)
- Impact of Wildfires
- Impact of Localism Bill and access related areas
- Local Development Framework and issues arising
- Defra – 'Paths 4 Communities' initiative

Abbreviations: CRoW – Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000; RoWIP – Rights of Way Improvement Plan; AONB – Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; DEFRA – Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

## JLAF Work Plan and Priorities 1 May 2011 – 30 April 2012

| 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 throughout Northumberland including meetings with the North Pennines AONB and Northumberland Coast AONB.</li> <li>• Organise targeted site visits relevant to current access and recreational issues; input from appointing authorities.</li> <li>• Ensure follow-up activities are actioned.</li> </ul>  | Ongoing; targeted; noting key/relevant issues                           |
| <b>Working Groups</b><br>Working Group North   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parish Pride and working with parishes.</li> <li>• CROW closures and consultations.</li> <li>• Horse riders and track usage.</li> <li>• Policy statements as required.</li> </ul>   | Ongoing<br>Ongoing<br>Ongoing<br>Ongoing                                |
| Working Group South  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parish Pride and working with parishes.</li> <li>• CROW closures and consultations.</li> <li>• Policy statements as they arise.</li> <li>• Smoutel Ford consultation.</li> </ul>  | Ongoing<br>Ongoing<br>Ongoing<br>Ongoing                                |
| <b>Continue to raise JLAF Profile</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building contacts/liaison opportunities with neighbouring LAFs and Section 94/4 bodies.</li> <li>• Promote county-wide 'joined-up-thinking' on access and recreation including urban areas.</li> <li>• Improving/enhancing liaison with appointing authorities</li> <li>• Continue to recruit members from varied backgrounds.</li> <li>• 'Parish Pride' and working with Parish Councils.</li> <li>• Attend Regional meetings and training events to foster networking and exchange of information.</li> </ul> | Ongoing<br><br>Ongoing<br><br>Ongoing<br>Annually<br>Ongoing<br>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> <li>• Increase 'Huddle' activity.</li> </ul>  | Ongoing<br>Ongoing<br>Ongoing<br>Ongoing<br>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<br>As required<br>As required<br><br>As required                |
| <b>Monitor developments</b>  | Monitor proposed developments which can be detrimental to public access as required.   | As required   |
| <b>Closure consultations</b><br>Open Access<br>Centre/Forestry Commission                        | 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   |

## Members of the JLAF from 1 May 2011 to 30 April 2012

JLAF members can be contacted via the Administrator or you can meet them at the quarterly meetings. The JLAF has a Chairman and two vice chairmen.

**George Astbury, Vice Chair** *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 (till Jan 2012)

**Steve Beverley, Prudhoe** (recreational interests) works for Capital Shopping Centres as Sustainable Travel Manager. Steve is an active cyclist and walker and, being a non-car owner, is interested in access issues to allow people into the countryside.

**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.

**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 (till Feb 2012)

**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 in agricultural zoology, is a partner in the family firm of chattels auctioneers and valuers and is a 'very small farmer'. Gill's interests include Parish Councils, equestrian access, fell walking 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 (till Mar 2012)

**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.

**Anne Lowrie, Longframlington (recreational user)**, retired from paid work in rural community development now works as a parish councillor and member of the Northumberland Uplands Local Action Group allocating EU funding. Interests include sailing, walking, swimming, cycling and forestry.

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

**Alan Mitcham, Ponteland (recreational user)** retired engineer; experienced cyclist, rambler and hillwalker and also with a keen interest in orienteering and bird watching.

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

**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. Sue is the Working Group North Chairman.

**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. Nick is the Working Group South Chairman.

**Annie Sanders Allenheads (other)** was a vet and now a social enterprise manager; interests include mobility access, 'access for all', riding, rural business and conservation.

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

**Lindsay Wilson Alnwick (recreational user)** has a degree in human geography and her interests include equality of access, the environment and tourism.