



Northumberland National Park & County Joint Local Access Forum

13th Annual Report

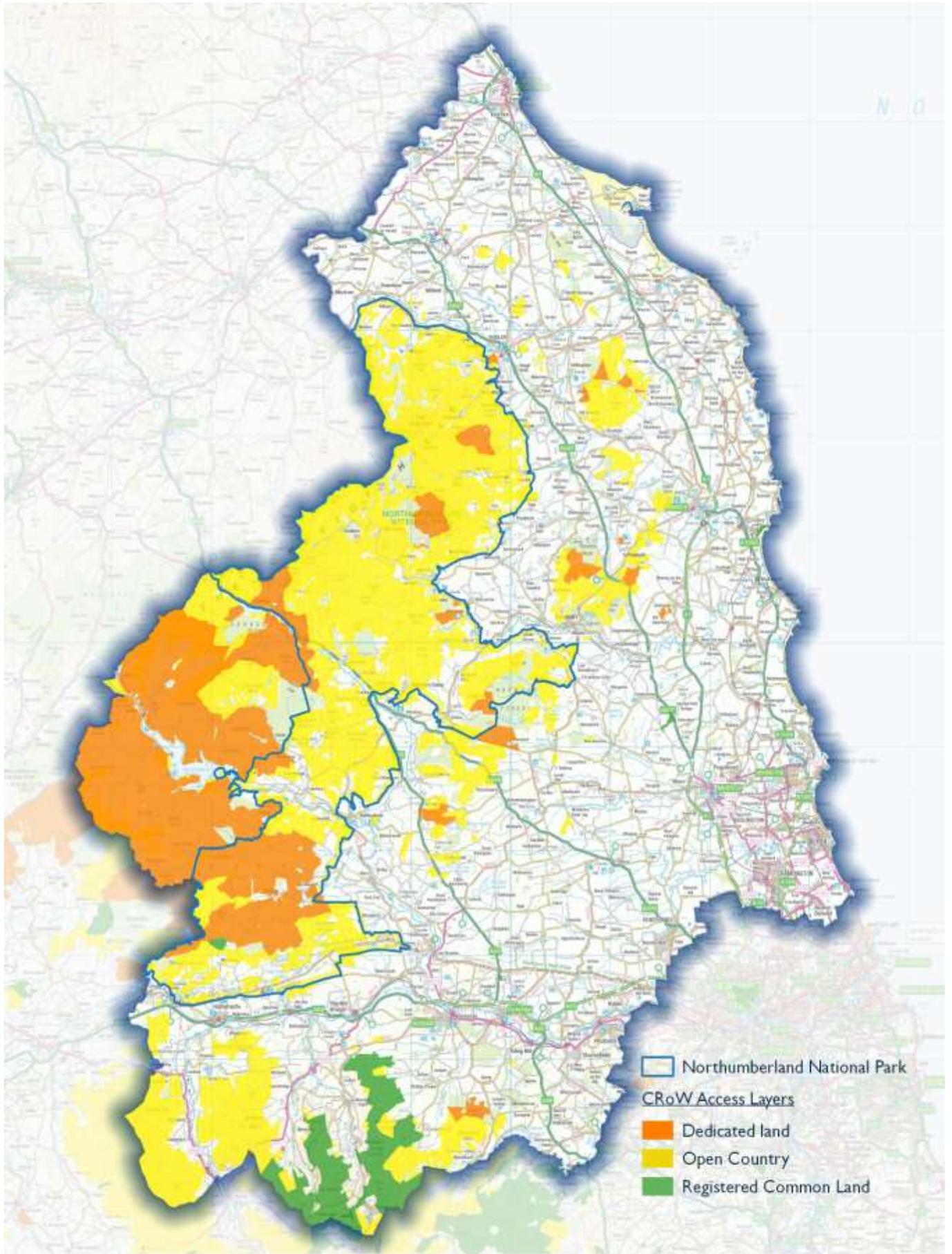
1 May 2015 – 30 April 2016



"... mmm, how do we continue on our walk now!" Example of a ploughed-out footpath (2016 © A Earnshaw)

"... at least we can carry on this bit of the walk!" An example of a restored footpath (2016 © S Rogers)





Access in Northumberland

1:450,000

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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

JLAF CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 1 May 2015 – 30 April 2016

In my first meeting as chair of JLAF we visited Allen Banks and Staward Gorge, owned and managed by the National Trust, to discuss the Trust's approach to managing and maintaining this popular beauty spot. We were particularly impressed by the work done to repair flood damage though JLAF members expressed concern about the future problems the National Trust could face if the extensive work to stabilise the bankside path and replace the suspension bridge suffered further significant damage.

Little did we know that only five months later Storm Desmond would wreak havoc and Allen Banks along with many other paths and footbridges in the county would be severely damaged. Initial estimates made by the county, in the months following the floods, suggested that in the region of £500,000 would be needed to undertake the necessary repairs.

The county's rights of way officers do an amazing job with the resources available to them but in such situations do we need to rethink the approach to the repair and maintenance of rights of way prone to environmental damage, This will be a focus of debate for JLAF in the coming year as we work closely with the county on the review of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). We would welcome the views of users and land managers on the prioritisation of rights of way and improvements to the network.

Thankfully, our two other site visits this year were less prophetic.

A visit to the Wylam Waggonway gave us the opportunity to share views and ideas with Liz Bray, Chair of Tyne and Wear JLAF, on multi user routes and access for all. On the Northumberland coast we looked at the impact the routing of the England Coast Path could have on businesses that provide services to walkers currently using the Northumberland Coast Path.

The north east regional LAF chairs continue to have joint meetings despite the loss of the regional co-ordinator post and any dedicated input from the Natural England regional team. The focus of our work is on the development of a regional access statement that will inform the activities of the Local Nature Partnerships and Landscape Partnership projects.

Members of JLAF are appointed for two years and there will be a new recruitment round in 2017. JLAF membership is at the lowest it has been for several years and we are keen for everyone with an interest in accessing the Northumberland countryside and coast, as well as rights of way in urban areas, to consider applying. This is a particularly interesting time for JLAF with the review of the ROWIP, the development of our Action Plan and our efforts to be more proactive in influencing decision makers and working in partnership.

Finally, I would like to thank Marion Hume who, despite all the conflicting demands on her time, has provided excellent support to ensure the JLAF functions efficiently.

Amanda Earnshaw
Chair of JLAF

Joint Local Access Forum Meetings 1 May 2015 – 30 April 2016

The JLAF holds four meetings a year throughout Northumberland to ensure equality of access, with themed afternoon site visits prior to evening meetings. The JLAF continued its aim, as far as possible, of meeting in village halls and using local suppliers for refreshments. Information on JLAF meeting is available on the website or via the Administrator. Although the JLAF tries to hold meetings throughout the County, due to budget constraints, meetings may sometimes have to be held at Northumberland National Park offices.

Members of the public are very welcome to attend meetings or send in relevant questions for JLAF members' consideration.

7 July 2015: Theme: **Liaison with National Trust:** Members held an interesting and informative site visit to Allen Banks and Staward Gorge. Members had a number of questions for the National Trust including how they informed people with up-to-date info, payment of upkeep of the site, maintenance e.g. banks, bridges and paths due to weather variances; the SSSI status; and interpretation e.g. the dormice. The evening at Haydon Bridge, concentrated mainly on progress with the Action Plan and actions arising from that and feeding into it. Members also discussed the Big Pathway survey and the impact of media exposure on the National Park e.g. Robson Green TV programmes.

15 October 2015: Theme: **Accessing the Urban Fringe:** visit to Wylam Wagonway with D McGlade (Hadrian's Wall National Trail) and Liz Bray (Tyne & Wear LAF Chair) to consider issues around multi-user paths, accessibility standards, how different users interact, signage, how an urban-focussed LAF approaches access issues. The evening concentrated on the feedback from the afternoon visit, progressing and maintaining momentum with the Action Plan, closures and consultations, woodland management plans, North East Combined Authority and the NCC Core Strategy consultation.

28 January 2016: Theme: **Information provision:** the afternoon comprised of a talk from Natural England on Coastal Access so far, an introduction to the Green Lanes Association, meeting the new Sill Manager and seeing how the JLAF could help with access issues and the Sill, and some information provision from J Farries on forestry matters to help members with responses to consultations. The evening concentrated on the Action Plan, Realising 'New Commons' discussion, communication, which included a frank discussion on progressing a communications plan including social media and updating the JLAF website, and closures and consultations.

21 April 2016: Theme: **Alignment of the Coastal Path:** JLAF visited Belford and Galiheugh Bank and provided feedback to Northumberland Coast AONB on the potential alignment of the Coast Path. The aim was to gain information to help the JLAF provide constructive comments for responding to Natural England coastal consultations. Also considered was when Coast Path is designated closer to the coast should they continue to promote the inland alternative route via Belford (currently the Northumberland Coast Path), the England Coast Path or both; and consider economic impact on Belford. In the evening members discussed matters including JLAF Action Plan, questions from the public e.g. mobility scooters and access, bridleways and diversion of a footpath, Huddle, JLAF communications, Wildlife Trust consultations, NCC RoWIP and Transport Manifesto, dangers of cows in countryside and the Land of Oak and Iron.

Representation during 2015-2016 includes:

- North Pennines AONB Access and Recreation Working Group (Ted Liddle)
- Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership (Vic Brown)
- National Park Management Plan Action Plan Group (Amanda Earnshaw)
- Local Nature Partnership (Ted Liddle)

New JLAF Action Plan and Priorities 1 May 2015 – 30 April 2016

In January 2015 the JLAF held a workshop to discuss revisiting the Action Plan, to bring it more up to date and strategic. The new JLAF Action Plan and Priorities was devised, which would be a dynamic document into which all JLAF members would be required to contribute.

The Action Plan would help structure meeting agendas and working group discussions and be updated regularly. There are three working groups – North, South and Forestry sub-group.

JLAF members agreed that initially, the three main objectives, with actions assigned to each objective, would be:

1. JLAF involvement in the RoWIP and changes in Open Access;
2. Advocacy, influence and advancing access to the countryside; and
3. Review and advise on access related issues in the countryside and improve engagement with statutory authorities.

| Objective | Num | Action |
|--------------|---|--|
| One | 1.1 | Review RoWIP strategy and policy with NCC officers |
| | 1.2 | Assess RoWIP progress and effectiveness to inform updated version |
| | 1.3 | Input to updated RoWIP action plan in light of updated strategy to include consultation with Parish Council's, user groups, landowners, JLAF input |
| | 1.4 | Identify realistic wish list / small projects list for JLAF action |
| | 1.5 | Identify extensions or modifications to open access that may be possible |
| | 1.6 | Work with NCC/NPA re new 'local access' website pages (see also 2.2 – 2.4) |
| | 1.7 | Encourage the widening of use of open access land to horse riders and cyclists where sustainable routes available |
| | 1.8 | Check problems with open access e.g. access footpaths, do bridleways actually exist c |
| | 1.9 | Information gathering to inform RoWIP and push forward access agenda |
| Two | 2.1 | Involvement in local projects with pro-active approach to developing access related issues (e.g. The Sill – propose routes to promote access and use of countryside) |
| | 2.2 i | Campaign to raise JLAF Profile by appointing responsible person(s). |
| | 2.2 ii | Greater interaction/use of press, TV, radio, social media |
| | 2.3 | Campaign to raise JLAF profile with tourism industry through engagement and involvement |
| | 2.4 | Campaign to raise JLAF profile and importance of RoW with decision makers and influencers including MPs (see also 1.6) |
| Three | 3.1 | Engage with coastal access programme to ensure protection of sensitive areas, increased public access without landowner alienation, to bring additional benefits |
| | 3.2 | Set up working group tasks to identify possible lost ways and plan a strategy to ensure claimed prior to cut-off date |
| | 3.3 | Develop and maintain contacts with parish councils |
| | 3.4 | JLAF to be proactive in specific areas in consultation with NCC and NPA |
| | 3.5 i | Respond to consultations promptly with allocation to members. |
| | 3.5 ii | Develop guidelines for responses – members take responsibility for response. |
| | 3.6 | Set up engagement meeting with relevant bodies and staff at appropriate levels – identify greater JLAF involvement |
| | 3.7 | Pro-active involvement with landowners and estates to consider new and improved RoW and access |
| | 3.8 | Improve co-ordination and communication between JLAF members |
| | 3.9 | Identify improvements and extension to RoW through consideration of repairs, safety, multi-user routes, national trail extensions |
| 3.10 | Look at access to paths/bridleways to reduce road usage in vulnerable areas | |

JLAF Recruitment 2016

Following a decision made by Northumberland National Park Authority several years ago, it was agreed that JLAF recruitment would be on a biennial basis. Consequently there was no recruitment drive in March 2016; the next recruitment will be in early 2017 for membership from 1 May 2017.

During the year to 30 April 2016 JLAF membership significantly dwindled, unfortunately, due to member resignations due to ill health and work related issues. Thanks are recorded to those members for their valuable input during their period of membership and particularly, thanks to Gill Featonby, who was JLAF Chairman for a number of years.

Members of the JLAF from 1 May 2015 to 30 April 2016

Moray Allan, Morpeth (recreational user): retired Director of Nursing; keen hill walker and qualified Mountain Leader with a strong interest in promoting responsible access to the countryside.

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

Mike Bell, *National Park Authority appointed member*

Trevor Thorne, *Northumberland County Council appointed member*

Vic Brown, *Felton (other interests)*: manages a Community Water sports centre on a voluntary basis; a National Park voluntary ranger and healthy walks leader; other interests include canoeing.

Amanda Earnshaw, **Chairman**, *Hexham (recreational user:)* worked at Natural England, prior to retirement and is interested in promoting better understanding of access rights and responsibilities.

Jonathan Farries, Rothbury (land interests) works for the Forestry Commission

Ian Jackson, *Vice Chairman, Hexham (other)*: ex British Geological Survey Chief of Operations. Enjoys walking cycling; interested in ensuring access information is available via digital spatial media.

Ted Liddle, *Hexham (other interests)*: involved with cycling development in Northumberland; also enjoys cycling tourism, rural business, tourism, conservation, rock climbing and orienteering.

Michael Macgregor, Tarsset (land interests): is a solicitor, part time hill farmer and keen fell walker

Alan Mitcham, *Ponteland (recreational user)*: retired engineer; experienced cyclist, rambler, hill walker and has a keen interest in rock climbing, cross country ski-ing, orienteering and bird watching.

Sue Rogers, *Alnwick (recreational interests)*: works as an access volunteer with an emphasis on training other volunteers. As well as recreational riding, her areas of interest include walking, orienteering, tourism and endurance riding. Sue is Working Group North Chairman.

Nick Rossiter, *Hexham (other interests)*: interests include bird watching and has an extensive knowledge of ecological and conservation issues. Nick is the Working Group South Chairman.

Donella Rozario, *Greenhead (recreational user)*: was a volunteer walk leader for County Council and National Park; runs small family farm and is a regular fell walker. A particular interest is access to the countryside, with consideration for traditional farming and land use'.

Resignations: Michael Smith, Chris Foster and Gill Featonby

Rights of Way Officers November 2013

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