

Northumberland National Park Authority



Northumberland
COUNTY COUNCIL

**Northumberland National Park &
Countryside
Joint Local Access Forum**

5th Annual Report

1 May 2007 – 30 April 2008

For further information please contact:
Marion Hume, Joint Local Access Forum Administrator
Tel: 01434 611 550 Email: marion.hume@nnpa.org.uk or jlaf@nnpa.org.uk

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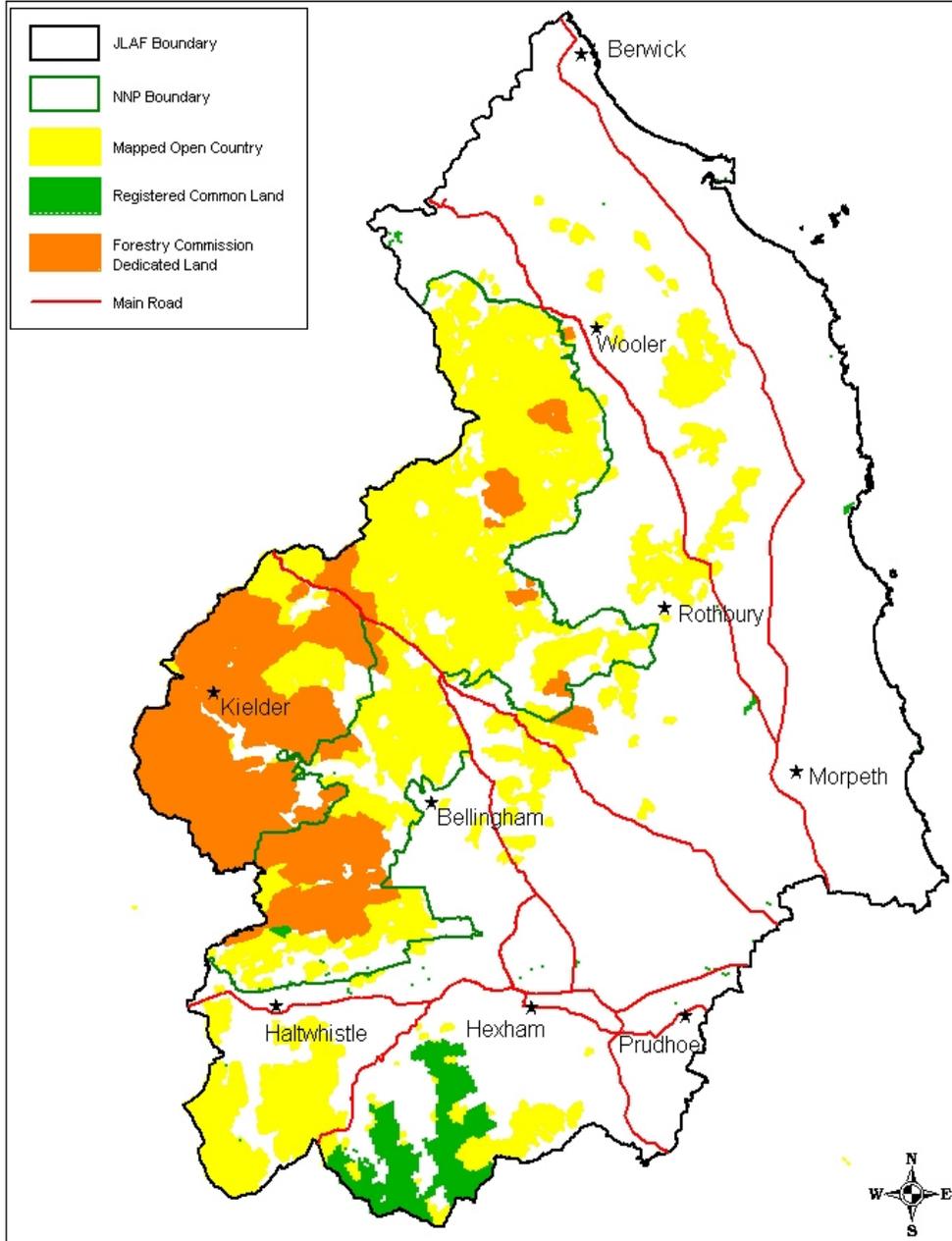
Northumberland National Park & Countryside Joint Local Access Forum Areas of Open Country and Registered Common Land



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 and aspirations and achievements of the Northumberland National Park and Countryside 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 Countryside 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 and Northumberland County Council, the JLAF advises these authorities and other Section 94 (4) bodies including Secretary of State; DEFRA; Ministry of Defence; Natural England; Forestry Commission; English Heritage; Sport England; District, Town and Parish councils in Northumberland.

The JLAF also has member representation on the North Pennines AONB Partnership Access Working Group and the Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership. While the JLAF has no remit to formally advise the two Partnerships it will work with them on relevant access issues.

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, three 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 can examine issues in much more detail than might be possible at larger, more infrequent 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 work towards year-on-year improvement of the percentage of '*rights of way which are easy to use by legitimate users*' defined by Best Value Performance Indicator 178.
4. To advise on consultations and long-term access land closures in a timely manner.
5. To encourage measures which will educate the public on access rights, opportunities and responsibilities.
6. To seek to ensure:
 - a) that all 'access land' is accessible from a public highway (road or PRoW);
 - b) that all routes promoted with public funding are maintained, open and accessible to legitimate users;
 - c) that information on restrictions is accurate, accessible and understandable.
7. To advise on measures to minimise the impact of recreational off-road driving and motorcycling on the landscape and peoples' enjoyment of the countryside.
8. To engage with statutory bodies, access user groups, land managers and members of the public over access matters.

Chairs Remarks

It is now a full five years since the inception of the Joint Local Access Forum, days of careful scrutiny of maps which led to the implementation of Open Access in Northumberland. From such beginnings the JLAF has developed a detailed knowledge of our county and addressed an ever-widening range of issues. Along with the commitment of our members, our vision has received recognition both locally and nationally.

An important development for the JLAF at the end of March 2007 was the formal adoption of the Northumberland section of the North Pennines AONB into the JLAF brief. We have thus become more deeply involved in the environmental issues which lie at the heart of such a sensitive landscape and are pleased to welcome this remaining area of the county into our remit.

The publication of the Northumberland Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) in November 2007 was another major milestone in our work and we would like to congratulate our excellent county team on the wealth of detailed analysis and clear forward thinking that the document contains. We shall look forward to continued close co-operation on implementation and, despite inevitable financial constraints, developing clear priorities for the further improvement of our valuable rights of way network

In recent times the value of this resource has become more widely recognised. As a nation we are increasingly aware of the health issues surrounding both our eating habits and sedentary lifestyles. The north east of England has one the worst records for obesity in the country and life expectancy from related illnesses is disproportionately high. The JLAF has a responsibility to work with partners to encourage open air recreation in all its forms and, looking forward, we see this as an increasingly important aspect of our work. Not only our rural routes, but our urban networks and green spaces must become the focus of our attention, and educating the public on responsible access a priority.

The benefits of being outdoors, both physical and mental, are widely recognised, and another issue which must be at the forefront of our future work is advocating wider access provision for those with a range of disabilities, from mobility problems to visual impairment or mental health issues. As well as the provision of routes and venues we must highlight the need for clearer indications of exactly what is accessible so that a wider range of people can feel confident about accessing the outdoor world, and know which destinations provide a dignified and safe environment which meets their needs.

This has been my first year as Chair of the JLAF and I have relied heavily on the enthusiasm, goodwill and hard work of others to bring us through our busy schedule. Officers of the National Park Authority and Northumberland County Council have been very supportive with their professional advice and members of the JLAF have given their time and expertise unstintingly. I particularly want to thank the members of the Mediation Panel for their hours of patient deliberations. Finally, I wish to offer personal thanks to my vice chair, Richard Cross and our Administrator, Marion Hume, who have assisted me at every turn.

Pamela Brooks, Chair

Joint Local Access Forum Meetings

Forum Members would be delighted to see more members of the public attending future meetings and, as the JLAF covers such an extensive area, it has adopted the principle of holding meetings at different locations throughout Northumberland, to ensure equality of access. The JLAF also endeavours to travel to site visits and meetings by bus. Dates, times and venues are advertised in the local papers and on the website, where meeting agendas and papers are also available.

The Forum met formally on four occasions during 2007-2008 with full afternoon site visits also organised in the area, as a prelude to each meeting. The JLAF year runs from 1 May to 30 April and in that period they met on:

- 19 July 2007: the JLAF met at Allendale in the North Pennines AONB, to examine the local perspective of the conflict between environmental protection and wider public access. This resulted in the JLAF forming a Mediation Panel to examine the problems in detail and to advise the relevant authorities when no agreement was achievable.
- 25 October 2007: the JLAF visited Hadrian's Wall, including Milecastle 38 and Tower Tye, to examine use and maintenance problems of this World Heritage Site and offered advice on maintenance.
- 31 January 2008: the JLAF hosted an afternoon conference in Stannington to examine how well Northumberland is marketed for outdoor recreation and enjoyment.
- 24 April 2008: the JLAF met in Ashington to examine issues in the urban fringe, the role of 'Groundwork Northumberland', the importance of 'Green Exercise' and the use of mechanically propelled vehicles. The JLAF also visited Ashington Community Woods to look at progress made with this development.

The Chair, Vice Chair and Administrator also attend quarterly meetings of the North East Regional Local Access Forums which is attended by representatives from the region's local access forums including Northumberland, Tyne & Wear, County Durham and Redcar and Cleveland. These regional meetings are currently organised, and attended, by Natural England and held at the Quadrant. Any relevant feedback from these meetings is provided to the JLAF members.

Members also meet in three smaller Working Groups which are tasked with addressing individual issues such as consultation documents, access matters, closures and JLAF initiatives such as 'Parish Pride' and to recommend courses of action for the JLAF. Additional ad hoc working groups are set up as and when required to address specific issues at a more detailed level.

Work Plan and Priorities May 2007 to April 2008

No	Area	Action required	Priority
1	Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) - NCC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure NCC RoWIP meshes with LTP • Monitor implementation of NCC RoWIP 	1
2	'Parish Pride'	Engage with parish councils.	1
3	Continue to raise JLAF Profile	Develop and deliver briefings to NNPA, NCC, district councils, parish councils, access organisations, industry, commerce and schools.	2
4	Develop Working Group Projects:	For endorsement by JLAF and delivery to appointing authorities and other bodies. See Para 4 for detail.	2
	• Working Group One	Response to Natural England Coastal Strategy, Access for Cyclists, Access to Water, Mobility Issues and North East Strategy for the Environment (NESE).	1/2
	• Working Group Two	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow up on 'Parish Pride' • Follow up on Wagon Ways • Walking the Way to Health • Identify disconnects on rights of way network 	Ongoing
	• Working Group Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of Statutory right of access • Follow up on Discovering Lost Ways • Comment on DEFRA powers for national park authorities to make TROs • Windfarms – review planning applications 	1/2
5	Continue training members of the JLAF	Combining visits and training; attending conferences and events.	2
6	Continue consultations	Consider and deliver, as and when required, timely responses based on local experience.	Ongoing
7	Closures	Consider and deliver, as and when required, timely responses based on local knowledge and based on least restrictive option.	Ongoing
8	Liaison	Engage with other LAF's, the public, user groups, Appointing Authorities, DEFRA, Sport England, Natural England and AONBs.	2/3
9	Oversight of Regional Routes	Maintenance of National Trails to the standard required for their legal status.	4
10	Decadal Review of Access Mapping	Continue gathering information for NNPA and NCC	Ongoing
11	Continue to monitor development in rural areas	Monitor and advise on proposed developments which might be detrimental to public access.	4
12	Additional tasks	To be dealt with in a timely way by working groups or an ad hoc working group as required.	Ongoing

RoWIP – Rights of Way Improvement Plan. AONB – Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
TRO – Traffic Regulation Order. NNPA – Northumberland National Park Authority.
LAF – Local Access Forum. NCC – Northumberland County Council. LTP – Local Transport Plan.

Members of Northumberland National Park & Countryside JLAF from May 2007 to April 2008

Members can be contacted via Marion Hume, the JLAF Administrator.

George Astbury, Stocksfield

George is a retired farmer and lists his interests as walking, shooting, off-road motorised vehicle use including 4-wheel drive and vintage car trials, tourism, conservation and renewable energy. George represents other interests.

Erica Bamford, Berwick upon Tweed

Erica 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. Erica represents recreational users.

Pamela Brooks, Haltwhistle

Pamela is a retired teacher and OFSTED Inspector. Pamela's areas of interest include long distance walking, cycling, horse riding and conservation. She is a member of the Ramblers' Association, Long Distance Walkers' Association, RSPB, BHS and Wildlife Trust. Pam is the Chair of the JLAF and represents other interests.

James Brown, Hexham

James is a chartered surveyor and amongst his interests he lists water sports, field sports, rural business, conservation, environmental issues and land management. James represents land interests.

Vic Brown, Morpeth

Vic, who was an outdoor education teacher, is a National Park voluntary ranger. She is also involved with the British Canoe Union as a regional committee member and access advisor for Wansbeck and Blyth, as well as being a healthy walks leader. Vic represents other interests.

Eddie Carrington, Hexham

Eddie, who 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, education and health. Eddie represents other interests.

Angus Collingwood-Cameron, Alnwick

Angus is a Chartered Surveyor and Chartered Forester whose work areas focus on forestry, vegetation management and environmental land management. Apart from his young family, his main areas of interest include shooting and fishing as well as regional rural policy issues. Angus represents landowners/managers.

Richard Cross, West Woodburn

Richard is a retired Army Officer. Richard's areas of interest include walking, horse-riding, conservation and environmental issues, hunting and fishing. Richard represents land interests and is Vice Chair.

Gill Featonby, Morpeth

Gill, whose 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. Gill represents recreational users.

Susan Finch, Harbottle

Sue's background is in tourism and general agriculture and her interests lie in the areas of tourism and rural business, as well as education. Sue represents land interests.

Graham Gill, Bellingham

Graham is the Forest District Manager for Forest Enterprise (Kielder) and his areas of interest include walking, cycling, mountain biking, tourism, rural business and conservation. Graham represents land owners/managers.

Bryan Harwood, Newcastle upon Tyne

Bryan's areas of interest include walking, cycling, mountain biking, horse riding, mobility access, tourism, rural business, conservation and the voluntary sector. Bryan was the first Chair of the Local Access Forum and represents other interests.

Lorraine Hershon, Haltwhistle

Lorraine's background is in biological sciences and amongst her interests are mobility access, the environment and education. She is a trustee of ADAPT and the Cumbrian Disability Network. Lorraine represents recreational interests.

Paul Kelly, Northumberland County Council Representative, Ovingham

Paul, who is a County Councillor, lists his interests as walking, cycling and mountain biking. He is an avid rock-climber and mountaineer from university days and enjoys teaching others about the joys of these activities. Paul represents recreational users.

Ted Liddle, Hexham

Ted is involved with the development of cycling in Northumberland. His areas of interest include walking, cycling, tourism, rural business, conservation, rock climbing, canoeing, sailing, fell running and orienteering. Ted represents other interests.

Alasdair Mitchell, Northumberland National Park Representative,

Alasdair owns and lives on a farm within the National Park, raising sheep and organic venison. He is a director of a marketing consultancy and also a freelance journalist. Alasdair represents land interests.

Peter Nicholson, Northumberland National Park representative

Peter is a keen sailor and skier and has a background in outdoor pursuits.

Sue Rogers, Alnwick

Though officially retired, Sue continues to work as a part-time equestrian consultant and as well as riding, her areas of interest include walking, orienteering, tourism and endurance riding. Sue represents recreational users.

Kevin Vigars, Hexham

Kevin is Access Development Officer (Tyne and Wear) at Gateshead Council and lists as his interests walking, tourism, rural business, open access and conservation. He is North East Chair of the Countryside Management Association and represents other interests.