

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum** held in on **Monday 22 January 2024 at 5.00 pm**

### **Pat Holding (Chair)**

**LAF Members:** T Bolton, B Hodgson, G Hughes, M Knipe, A Marshall, N Sharpe, J Stephenson, and P Westgarth.

#### **Officers:**

M Ogden, Rights of Way Team Leader

H Barber, Senior Rights of Way Officer

L Gladders, Senior Committee Services Officer and LAF Secretary

P Anderson, Strategic Highways Manager

#### **1 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from A Johnson, D Pott, J Welch, E Wilton and Councillors E Scott and J Shuttleworth.

#### **2 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 October 2023**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 October were confirmed as a correct record.

#### **4 Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

#### **5 David Butler - Talk on Turnpike Roads**

The Chair welcomed D Butler, who was in attendance to provide a presentation on the history of Turnpike Roads in County Durham.

The detailed presentation provided information relating to turnpikes which were a legally defined stretch of road, administered by trustees, on which users were charged tolls, which funded the maintenance and improvement of the road.

The presentation provided historical images alongside information regarding their historical road use, road maintenance, turnpike trusts, opposition, trustees, tolls, infrastructure, capital expenditure, administration and what followed at the end of use of turnpikes.

The Chair on behalf of the LAF thanked Mr Butler for his very interesting presentation and for taking time to attend the meeting.

## **6 National/Regional Issues**

### **a A66 Northern Trans-Pennine Project**

It was noted that a decision had been postponed on this and no further update was available.

## **7 Update from Rights of Way Team (including Lost Ways)**

The Local Access Forum received an update from H Barber, Senior Rights of Way Officer who noted recent work undertaken / ongoing and included an update on Lost Ways which advised the Forum that the team were continuing to work through outstanding applications of which there were around 350. H Barber noted challenges to applications access to records and archives and the impact that this had on progressing work. She further noted that the team had been working with the police in a recent enforcement case which had been time-consuming.

G Hughes noted that the assessment of Lost Ways was a time-consuming process and he queried whether the LAF had a view whether priority should be given to the assessment of community routes as a strategic importance. M Ogden explained that this was happening to some extent already as value to the public was an important factor to consider. He added that a number of other factors were also considered including public benefit, when the application was received and where landowners could be grouped or applications connected with others.

Confirmation was also provided that the deadline for applications to be received was 2031 which was an extension to the previous deadline of 2026.

Registers were available online [here](#).

**AGREED** that the content of the update be noted.

## **8 Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) 4**

The Local Access Forum received an update in relation to the RoWIP(4) noting that notes of the most recent Steering Group meeting held on 8 November were included in the papers pack for information.

It was noted that following the conclusion of the consultation period, the plan was to be considered by Cabinet on 14 February 2024 and if agreed would be adopted by the Council.

G Hughes asked whether the LAF should also formally adopt the ROWIP (4) once agreed by Cabinet along with other organisations / statutory bodies.

T Bolton further asked whether the council's overview and scrutiny committees had had the opportunity to input into the process. M Ogden confirmed that the plan had not been considered by Overview and Scrutiny.

M Ogden noted the points raised by G Hughes in relation to the Forum's formal adoption of the plan and noted that this would be followed up with a view to placing on the next meeting's agenda for either endorsement or approval whichever was appropriate in line with the Forum's Terms of Reference.

**AGREED** that the update be noted and that the item be placed on the agenda for the next meeting.

## **9 Stockton and Darlington Railway - Walking and Cycling Routes**

The Local Access Forum received an update from M Ogden, Rights of Way Team Leader which noted that work was till progressing well on the project, noting recent land acquisitions, physical works and those acquisitions nearing the end of negotiations. More work was expected to progress in the next few months and a further update would be provided at the next meeting.

**AGREED** that the update be noted.

## **10 Public Access to Council-owned Land**

The Local Access Forum noted that a formal response had yet to be received in relation to the outstanding queries raised by the Forum.

G Hughes expressed his dissatisfaction with how he felt the LAF was regarded and that a response should be sought without further delay. P Anderson, Strategic Highways Manager who was in attendance agreed that he would take this matter up as a priority with the Corporate Director Neighbourhoods and Climate Change who had attended the previous meeting and was aware of the issue.

**AGREED** that should a response not be forthcoming a further letter would be sent on behalf of the LAF requesting a formal written response.

## **11 National Trust – Crook Hall Gardens**

The Local Access Forum received an update from M Ogden, Rights of Way Team Leader in relation to progress following the recent acquisition of Crook Hall Gardens by the National Trust. He went on to explain that the site which lay within Durham Green Corridor was accessed by many recorded and non-recorded walking routes. A National Trust Officer had indicated that they would gladly welcome the LAF to the site during the Summer to provide an update on the work taking place and to provide a site visit.

**AGREED:** that the July meeting be held at Crook Hall Gardens.

## **12 Northern Saints Trails**

The Local Access Forum received an update on progress which included details around maintenance and progress against meeting developmental milestones including a proposed Walking Festival.

Details were also reported regarding longer-term maintenance work with reference to Chester-Le-Street and riverside routes.

**AGREED** that the update be noted.

### **13 Bright Water Landscape Project**

The Local Access Forum received an update from T Bolton on the Bright Water project noting progress against various aspects of the project and areas involved. A further Board meeting was expected to be held on 7 February and further information would be shared at the next LAF meeting scheduled to be held in April 2024.

G Hughes raised a number of queries, including asking for clarification regarding Holdsworth Bridge to Fishburn and whether this was to be designated Bridleway. He further asked for information relating to Bishops Fen and how that was planned to be improved going forward.

T Bolton noted the comments and agreed to raise with Paul Black ahead of the next Board meeting.

**AGREED** that the update be noted.

### **14 North Pennines Protected Landscape**

The Local Access Forum noted feedback from the last meeting of the Working Group which had been held on 6 December. Notes of the meeting had been sent to the LAF ahead of the meeting for information.

### **15 Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs)**

An update from the Senior Active Travel Officer had been provided to the LAF Secretary prior to the meeting which advised that:

Delivery was now taking place on LCWIP routes in Bishop Auckland through the Stronger Towns Fund and Durham City through the Transforming Cities Fund.

Design works for LCWIP priority routes were also underway for:

Spennymoor

Peterlee

Crook

Bishop Auckland

Seaham

Stanley

Consett

2 x Cycle Super Routes

**16 Membership Update**

**AGREED** to note the resignation of D Maughan.

**17 Member Training**

M Knipe expressed interest in receiving some further information / training around Lost Ways. M Ogden, Rights of Way Team Leader agreed to make arrangements for the Forum to receive a presentation on this topic.

**18 Work Programme**

**AGREED** that the work programme be noted.

**19 Date, Time and Venue of Next Meeting**

Monday 22 April 2024, 5.00 p.m. Venue to be confirmed