

COUNTY DURHAM LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

At the Annual Meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Monday 17 July 2023 at 5.00 pm**

Present:

Pat Holding (Chair)

LAF Members:

Tom Bolton, Pat Holding, Angela Johnson, and Jim Welch

Officers:

Mike Ogden, Helen Barber, and Lucy Gladders

1 Election of Chair

Resolved: That Mrs P Holding be elected as Chair for the ensuing year.

2 Appointment of Vice-Chair

Resolved: That Mrs A Johnson be elected as Vice-Chair for the ensuing year.

3 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mr G Hughes, J Kirkley, D Maughan and E Wilton.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 April 2023

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2023 following amendment were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

6 Matters Arising

All matters arising were to be picked up under the subsequent agenda items.

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 advised that there were no major updates to report. She explained that work continued to relocate the team from County Hall, noting that the two Definitive Map Officers now having been made permanent was hugely positive for the team.

A further update was provided in respect of Lost Ways, noting that whilst the bulk of applications had now been received some were still being filtering through, however the British Horse Society from whom many of the applications had been received, were understanding of the process and time required to deal with them.

AGREED that the content of the update be noted.

8 Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) 4

The Local Access Forum were provided with an update from A Johnson regarding the LAF's proposed response to the consultation which was to conclude on 26 July 2023. It was noted that the sub-group of Local Access Forum members who were allocated this area of work had now provided their comments on the draft plan and the response would be finalised by the Local Access Forum Secretary in conjunction with the Chair.

A copy of the full and final response would be circulated following its submission.

AGREED that the content of the update be noted.

9 Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs)

It was noted that this item would be deferred until the next meeting.

10 Stockton and Darlington Railway - Walking and Cycling Routes

The Local Access Forum received an update from M Ogden, Rights of Way Team Leader who explained that further to the update provided at the previous meeting, work continued to progress well, with works now started on existing bridleways and negotiations taking place with individual landowners to ensure that the route could follow as closely as possible to the historic line route, with land being purchased so as to establish, create or upgrade the route.

He furthermore provided an update on the timeline in respect of funding, also noting that it was anticipated that work would be completed on time in line with Levelling Up Funding, with expected completion in March 2024. M

Ogden explained that the route would form part of the 2025 bicentenary celebrations of the original railway.

AGREED that the content of the update be noted.

11 Northern Saints Trails

The Local Access Forum received a verbal update from M Ogden, Rights of Way Team Leader which provided detail around the projects ambitious plans to expand the trail into North Yorkshire.

Further information was provided regarding staff resources, noting that attractions such as Durham Cathedral and key tourism authorities would need to remain committed to investing in the trail and maintaining standards to ensure ongoing interest.

AGREED that the content of the update be noted.

12 Public Access to Council-owned Land

The Local Access Forum noted that they were yet to receive a response regarding the additional areas of land identified by the LAF and the group noted their frustration at the lack of communication between the service and the group given the time which had lapsed since the first list of areas had been assessed.

It was suggested that a further request be made via the relevant Head of Service to provide a response and or attend the next meeting to provide and update.

AGREED that the content of the update be noted.

13 Bright Water Landscape Project

The Local Access Forum received an update from T Bolton regarding the latest report which had been issued by the Bright Water Programme Manager, to the Board for the period covering July / August 2023.

T Bolton explained that the report focused upon several areas of work, namely, Wetland Habitat Creation at Bishop's Fen and Ricknall Carrs, Access and Environment Projects, Archaeology and Heritage and Community Engagements and Training.

The report further highlighted several events which Bright Water were involved in, of interest to the group was the Darlington Heritage Trail with its links to the Stockton and Darlington Railway.

Further details were reported in respect of the programme legacy planning, noting matters around funding and evaluation. It was expected that a final Board meeting would take place in October and a further update to the Local Access Forum would be provided at that time.

AGREED that the content of the update be noted.

14 Notification of Open Access Restrictions

AGREED that the following open access restriction notifications be received for information:

Birk Hatt Moor
Cotherstone Moor
Wemmergill Close House Mine and environs

15 Membership Update

M Ogden, Rights of Way Team Leader noted that following the informal group interview which had taken place ahead of the meeting, he would seek to make appointments to those successful candidates in the following week. Details would be provided of those newly appointed Forum members in due course.

AGREED that the content of the update be noted.

16 Member Training

The Local Access Forum were reminded where a training need was identified to raise this with the Chair or Secretary who would were possible endeavour to facilitate.

It was noted that there may be some opportunities also for some refresher training in the future alongside those newly appointed LAF members.

AGREED that the content of the update be noted.

17 Work Programme

The Local Access Forum considered and reviewed the Forum's work programme noting that it had been updated to reflect recently completed areas of work and those which were still outstanding or unallocated.

In discussing the topic of DCC Liaison, the Rights of Way Team Leader advised that as the topics covered by the Forum were cross-cutting across

several council teams, he had approached the Corporate Director with a view to him attending either a meeting with the Local Access Forum or meeting on a twice-yearly basis with the Chair and Vice-Chair to which he had agreed. He explained that this would provide an excellent reporting mechanism between the service and the Forum and arrangements would be made for the first meeting to be set up ahead of the next meeting in October.

AGREED that the content of the update be noted.

18 Annual Report 2022/23

The Local Access Forum considered the Annual Report which outlined the activity of the Forum for the period 2022/23 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The report which had been circulated in advance of the meeting would, subject to any further amendments be sent to Natural England and other interested parties.

Discussion ensued regarding the publication of the report and whether the Local Access Forum could be doing more to promote the work of the Forum. T Bolton suggested that the report could be circulated more widely, to include for example Parish and Town Councils who would likely have an interest in the document, given their role in local matters.

It was further suggested that an update article to that recently published in the County Durham News would help to raise the profile and highlight this as a good news story.

AGREED That the County Durham Local Access Forum Annual Report for 2022/23 be approved for publication.

19 Date, Time, and Venue of Next Meeting

The next hybrid meeting would be held at 5.00 p.m. on Monday 16 October 2023.