

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Monday 23 October 2023 at 5.00 pm**

Present:

Pat Holding (Chair)

LAF Members:

T Bolton, A Johnson (Vice-Chair), M Knipe, A Marshall, N Sharpe, J Stephenson, J Welch and P Westgarth.

Councillor E Scott

Officers:

M Ogden, Rights of Way Team Leader

H Barber, Senior Rights of Way Officer

L Gladders, Senior Committee Services Officer and LAF Secretary

1 Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

The Chair extended a warm welcome to the recently appointed LAF Members and both V Lloyd-Gent and K Rose who were in attendance to provide presentations to the Forum.

In addition, the Chair was pleased to welcome A Patrickson, Corporate Director Neighbourhoods and Climate Change who went on to provide an overview of the areas of work covered by the service and its priorities.

Apologies for absence were received from G Hughes, D Maughan, D Pott, E Wilton and Councillor J Shuttleworth.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 July 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

4 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

5 Update following Chair and Vice-Chairs meeting with Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director Neighbourhoods and Climate Change

The Forum received a joint update from the Chair and Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change which provided a summary of discussion at their most recent meeting. A Patrickson, Corporate Director Neighbourhoods and Climate Change added that he had found the meeting to be very useful and allowed for a greater understanding as to where the forum sat, its purpose and role.

The next Chair and Vice-Chairs meeting would be held in March and a further update would be reported after the following Forum meeting in April 2024.

6 Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs)

The Local Access Forum received a verbal update from V Lloyd-Gent, Senior Active Travel Officer who outlined that LCWIPs were used to help identify improvements that can be made to encourage everyday journeys to be carried out on foot or by cycle.

She advised that the Government recommends that all local authorities prepare LCWIPs (Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy, 2017) and are prioritising funding for those authorities which have developed such plans. She advised that eleven live plans had been adopted for the areas of Bishop Auckland, Chester le Street, Consett, Crook, Durham City, Newton Aycliffe, Peterlee, Seaham, Spennymoor, Shildon and Stanley. The LCWIPs for those towns whilst listed on the website were available on request.

Further details were reported in respect of other schemes being prepared for example in Bishop Auckland which would be the first LCWIP Lite town, with its plan including proposals better suited to the rural nature of the area.

M Knipe asked whether any of the schemes were completed. In response V Lloyd-Gent explained that there was an expected lag between design and funding however went on to note some of the improvements which had already been made for example linking Rivergreen to Newton Hall including the installation of lighting.

Further discussion ensued relating to joining villages and towns and it was noted that areas identified were considered depending upon interest and appetite for what was required in that area. Following a further question regarding the surfacing of the paths, the V Lloyd-Gent advised that they were mostly surfaced with tarmac with some exceptions where planings and dust were used. In commenting further, J Welch noted that he was aware that a lot of car parks used gravel, which for wheelchair users was not easy. He

asked whether consideration could also be given to the car parking areas which provide access onto the routes.

In referencing the A177 in Durham, A Johnson noted that the road markings for cyclists were somewhat confusing and in her opinion, ineffective as the road was too narrow to pass in a vehicle without encroaching into the cycle space / over the line.

V Lloyd-Gent noted that the green dashed lines were advisory and were in place to make motorists aware of cyclists and to provide a level of comfort to those cyclists.

J Welch asked whether there was any monitoring of walkways undertaken to gauge how frequently they were being used and by which types of users. Further to that the Rights of Way Team Leader asked whether the team were aware of any issues or misuse of the improved routes.

In response V Lloyd-Gent advised that assessments on the use of some of the routes was undertaken which helped inform on numbers and types of users, although noted that the project had a strong focus on walking and wheeling. In addition, she noted that the newly upgraded sites did often discourage misuse, however as with many areas scramblers and quad bikes could cause nuisance, however this was ultimately a police enforcement issue and public reporting of these types of anti-social behaviour was key.

AGREED that the update be noted.

7 Moving Together Strategy and Action Plan

The Local Access Forum received a presentation from Kelly Rose including a brief introduction as to her role in leading on healthy weight and movement in County Durham.

The detailed presentation provided information on the Moving Together Strategy focusing on:

- Building blocks of good health
- Barriers to physical activity
- Benefits for the community including, social cohesion and reduced social isolation, healthy growth and development, improved cognitive health, enhanced thinking, learning and judgement skills
- Priority action areas and categorised network mapping
- Trialling social network analysis mapping to help partners see where agenda align and where they can go for funding / resources.

Councillor Scott asked as an individual outside of the council how would they be impacted by the strategy. In response K Rose advised that the strategy

was there to support partners to share their work, encourage engagement, tackling of root problems and restructuring the environment to make it easier to walk, wheel and cycle. She further noted that the next stage was implementation and a lot of work was going on around this to ensure there was an even spread of related activity across the county.

Further discussion took place regarding wider partners and contributors, and ways in which physical activity could be encouraged in more rural areas of county council and on land where public access was de facto.

In conclusion K Rose thanked for Forum for their suggestions and comments and noted that any further input was welcomed.

AGREED that the content of the presentation and update be noted.

8 National/Regional Issues

i) Agriculture Bill – Environmental Land Management Schemes

There was no update available on this item.

ii) Natural England – Sharepoint site for Local Access Forums

M Ogden, Rights of Way Team Leader advised the Forum that Natural England had recently created and shared with the LAF Secretary a link to a shared resource which would be a tool for Forum's to share information. The site was still in development and when more information was available, the link along with user details would be shared.

9 Update from Rights of Way Team

The Local Access Forum received an update from H Barber, Senior Rights of Way Officer who noted recent work within the team including;

- Providing support to the ROWIP to inform its delivery.
- Enforcement action at Trimdon and issues with another site at Castle Eden.
- Lost Ways – team continuing to work through outstanding applications of which there were around 350.

N Sharpe, asked whether there was list available of all Lost Ways and further to that R Evans (observer) asked whether there was an order to how the applications were assessed. In response M Ogden, Rights of Way Team Leader advised that applications were being assessed roughly in the order that they had been received and where possible, grouping into areas and landowners. However, there were some exceptions to this for example where user evidence was relied upon and it was important that this was gathered at the earliest opportunity. In relation to details of Lost Ways, M Ogden advised

that there is a public register of all the applications at <https://www.durham.gov.uk/article/6427/Public-Rights-of-Way-and-Village-Green-Landowner-Deposits?s=§ion=53B>.

AGREED that the content of the update be noted.

10 Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP 4)

The Local Access Forum received an update in respect of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan noting that consultation had concluded with responses now being analysed. M Ogden, Rights of Way Team Leader advised that the next step would be for the plan to be considered by Cabinet in February 2024 and a further update would be provided to the Forum when possible.

AGREED that the content of the report be noted.

11 Public Access to Council-owned Land

The Local Access Forum noted that no response had yet been received in relation to the additional areas of land identified by the LAF. A Patrickson, Corporate Director Neighbourhoods and Climate Change advised that whilst he had also not yet received a response was aware of the workload pressures faced by that team, however, would seek to follow up and report back when an update was available.

AGREED that the update be noted.

12 Northern Saints Trails

The Local Access Forum received an update from M Ogden, Rights of Way Team Leader who explained that some feedback on the trail was now being received which had prompted some tweaks to signage, where there had been some reported confusion over the route.

In addition, he explained that there was significant interest in expanding the route from the wider region, however this would be dependent upon the resources available in those areas to fund any such expansion.

He further noted that counters were to be used on the routes and it was hoped that with increased publicity and wider knowledge of the routes available, increased use would start to be seen.

AGREED that the update be noted.

13 Stockton & Darlington Railway - Walking and Cycling Routes

The Local Access Forum received an update from M Ogden, Rights of Way Team Leader which outlined progress in respect of the project. He advised that almost all land purchases had now been completed and work was ongoing on improving existing and building new routes between now and March 2024.

P Westgarth asked whether the routes would join up with other existing railway paths. In response M Ogden advised that they would not.

J Welch asked what condition and gradient the strips of land which were being purchased were in and in response M Ogden advised that the land was being purchased in whatever state it was in, however noted that as the land formed part of the historic line, it followed the same inclines, however, was being improved to a standard suitable for all users.

AGREED that the update be noted.

14 Bright Water Landscape Project

The County Durham Local Access Forum received an update on the Bright Water Landscape Project and Programme Managers' Report for September – October 2023.

T Bolton provided a summary of the key areas of work and their progress, noting some of the issues which had caused delays to the acquisition of some fen land.

Further details were reported in respect of 'Great North Fen' of which Ricknall Carrs and Bishop's Fen would form the first phase.

Further information was provided around historical data capture, funding and evaluation and T Bolton advised that whilst it was disappointing that there was now to be no planned Board meetings this year, the last meeting would take place in February 2024. A final celebration event, including visits to the wetlands would be held in Summer 2024.

AGREED that the content of the update and Programme Managers report be noted.

15 North Pennines AONB Partnership

AGREED That the minutes of the last of AONB working group held on 9 August 2023 be received and noted.

16 Membership Update

The Local Access Forum noted the recent resignation of J Kirtley and asked that the Forum's thanks and appreciation for her role on the Forum be forwarded to her.

17 Member Training

The Chair asked that any Forum member who has any training requirements or needs forward those to the LAF Secretary for further consideration.

Discussion ensued regarding potential topics of training and it was noted that First Aid for Walk Leaders and basic Rights of Way Training could potentially be of benefit.

AGREED That any training needs be sent to the LAF Secretary for review ahead of the next meeting.

18 Work Programme

The County Durham Local Access Forum reviewed the work programme noting that several areas of work remained unallocated. The Chair therefore suggested that should any member have any interest in any of the topics listed that they make those known to the LAF Secretary following the meeting.

M Knipe commented that he would be interested in representing the LAF on the North Pennines AONB Access and Recreation Working Group alongside J Welch.

J Stephenson further added that he had a particular interest in Lost Ways and would like to form part of the sub-group looking at this area of work.

AGREED that any further expressions of interest be identified prior to the next meeting.

19 Dates of Meetings for 2023

AGREED That the dates for the next cycle of meetings be as follows, all meetings to be held at 5.00 p.m.

Monday 22 January 2024
Monday 22 April 2024
Monday 22 July 2024
Monday 21 October 2024