

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

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

Present:

P Holding (Chair)

Members of the Committee: T Bolton, B Hodgson, M Knipe, A Marshall, N Sharpe, J Stephenson and P Westgarth

1 Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from A Johnson, D Pott, 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 22 January 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 April were confirmed as a correct record.

4 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5 Bright Water Landscape Project

The Local Access Forum received a presentation by Paul Black, Landscape Partnership Manager, Brightwater which provided an overview of the legacy projects planned and how they were being delivered.

P Black explained that projects were funded via National Lottery Players, along with generated or leveraged additional funds through Section 106 grants and charitable donations which had been essential. Fundraising had taken place over the last year which had helped to achieve sufficient funds to meet the original specifications of the project.

The presentation went into detail around partners, the area covered and strands of work such as river improvements, wetland creation, access and heritage.

In terms of evaluation of the project P Black explained that there had been

- 12km of riparian improvements
- 8ha wetlands complete (+70ha)
- 10 Walks published
- 3 Cycle routes via website
- 8 Village Atlases + 3 Heritage Trails
- Darlington Heritage Trail
- Fishburn to Holdforth access improved
- Great North Fen Legacy

In addition, a number of events, shows, talks and presentations had been delivered along with training and publications and advertising.

The presentation further provided information around the project's legacy, with specific reference to the Eco-Museum and Great North Fen and went on to highlight future opportunities around the Great North Fen and River Skerne.

At this point P Black referred to a number of questions which had been submitted in advance of the meeting by G Hughes and details of those questions and answers were circulated to LAF members. The questions focused around Holdforth Bridge and the associated costs of the repairs. He advised that the total cost was £244,476.53 plus VAT, which was considerably over the original budget due to a number of factors. The additional costs were borne by Durham County Council.

T Bolton at this point added his thanks to P Black for the presentation and explained that he had very much enjoyed his time on the Board.

J Welch raised a query regarding wheelchair accessibility at the sites and P Black advised that as many of the existing footpaths were being used many were not wheelchair suitable however, work was ongoing to address this issue and look for ways to make existing routes more accessible for all. J Welch further made reference to mobile apps for the visually impaired and P Black noted that there was some work ongoing in Darlington based on that technology.

AGREED: that the presentation be noted and slides shared with the Forum.

6 Lost Ways

The Local Access Forum received a presentation by the Access and Rights Team Leader and Definitive Map Officer which provided an overview of the history of the definitive map, legislation, Modification Order cut off dates, applications process, research and processing.

Further discussion ensued around the prioritisation process, noting that this would be done depending upon public benefit, public interest and strength of evidence along with consideration of user evidence and the age of the individuals submitting evidence. In addition, information was provided around determination of applications and the updating of the definitive map, ordnance survey and digital mapping.

AGREED: That the presentation be shared with forum members.

7 National/Regional Issues

a A66 Northern Trans-Pennine Project

There was no further update to provide following the projects approval in March.

b Environmental Land Management Schemes

B Hodgson advised that there was no specific updates however whilst commenting that the scheme took good land out of production there was a place for it in some areas where the land could not be farmed for food.

8 Update from Rights of Way Team (including Lost Ways)

The Local Access Forum received a verbal update by the Access and Rights of Way Team Leader regarding activity within the Rights of Way Team and progress in relevant work areas.

M Ogden explained that 1 member of staff had left the team in February with interviews just recently taking place. An appointment had been made and it was hoped that they would be able to start within the next few months.

In addition, he provided an update in relation to some enforcement action which had recently been taken in relation to a shipping container blocking a PROW.

AGREED: To note the update.

9 Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) 4 2024-2034

The Local Access Forum considered Durham County Council's ROWIP4, which was a 10-year plan setting out a strategic vision of how to improve the county's public rights of way network. Having provided comments on the draft plan during its consultation phases the Local Access Forum now having been presented with the approved plan, were asked to consider endorsing the plan.

T Bolton commented that whilst he appreciated that the plan had now been agreed and adopted by Durham County Council, he was disappointed regarding the lack of Overview and Scrutiny involvement.

AGREED: that the Local Access Forum endorse Durham County Council's ROWIP4.

10 Stockton and Darlington Railway - Walking and Cycling Routes

The Local Access Forum received an update from M Ogden, Access and Rights of Way Team Leader who updated on the projects working group and funding available via the Area Action Partnership. A further update would be provided at the next meeting.

11 Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs)

This item was deferred as there was no update to provide.

12 Northern Saints Trails

The Access and Rights of Way Team Leader reported updates in respect of the working group and AAP funding and suggested that a more detailed update could be provided at the next meeting.

13 Public Access to Council-owned Land

The Local Access Forum were advised that further to previous discussions regarding public access to council owned land, the Secretary had emailed the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change seeking an update on previous correspondence sent from the Chair of the LAF. No response had been received at the time of the meeting and a follow up would therefore be required. A further update would be provided if possible at the next meeting.

AGREED: that the Secretary requests a response from the service before the next meeting.

14 North Pennines National Landscape

The Access and Rights of Way Tea Leader advised that the group had met last week however there had been no minutes of the meeting circulated as of yet.

15 Health

There was no update to provide under this item.

16 Notification of Open Access Restrictions

AGREED: To note the following open access restrictions under Section 22 and 23(1) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000:

- i) 2024030114 - Sand Edge Common
- ii) 2024020154 – Birk Hatt Moor
- iii) 2024040153 – Cotherstone Moor

17 Member Training

There were no identified training requirements at this time.

18 Work Programme

AGREED that the work programme be noted.

19 Date, Time and Venue of Next Meeting

Monday 22 July 2024, site visit to Crookhall Gardens to be followed by meeting, timings to be confirmed in due course.