

## DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Monday 21 October 2024 at 5.00 pm**

**Present:**

**Angela Johnson (Vice Chair in the Chair)**

**Members of the Forum:**

A Johnson, M Knipe, A Marshall, N Sharpe, J Stephenson and Councillor E Scott.

### **1 Election of Chair**

**Agreed:** that the item be deferred until the next meeting.

### **2 Appointment of Vice Chair**

**Agreed:** that Angela Johnson be appointed as Vice-Chair.

### **3 Welcome, Introduction and Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from T Bolton, P Holding, G Hughes, J Welch, P Westgarth, E Wilton and Councillor J Shuttleworth.

Site Visit: Crookhall Gardens

Prior to the meeting, Members of the Forum had attended a site visit and short walk at Crookhall Gardens. M Knipe and N Sharpe along with representatives from the Wolsingham Wayfarer's were in attendance. Members of the Forum had found the visit very interesting. Thanks was given to M Ogden and the National Trust for facilitating the visit.

### **4 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **5 Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 April 2024**

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 April 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

### **6 Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

## **7 National/Regional Issues**

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

The Access and Rights of Way Team Leader referred to a letter which had been circulated prior to the meeting to Forum members which referred to the A66 Northern Trans-Pennine project legal challenge to the Secretary of State's Development Consent Order decision.

Further updates would be reported once received.

## **8 Agriculture Bill - Environmental Land Management Schemes**

There was no update to provide under this item.

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

The Local Access Forum received an update from the Senior Rights of Way Officer which provided details around current workload, staffing and progress in relation to the processing of Lost Ways and Definitive Map Modification Orders.

She advised that Lost Ways applications were still being received, however work around this was now made somewhat easier following the relocation and reopening of the Records Office. The process of reviewing the applications and evidence still however continued to be time consuming.

The team had recently welcomed Alan Farrimond to the team as Rights of Way Officer and this provided further resilience within the team in order to progress applications.

In response to a question the Access and Rights of Way Team Leader advised that approximately 12 DMMOs had been through the Highways Committee, noting that some of those were now sitting with the Planning Inspectorate for review.

A Johnson asked whether there had been any recent government updates in relation to the cut-off date. The Access and Rights of Way Team Leader advised that he was aware of fresh lobbying to remove the cut-of date completely however the fact would still remain that there was still a significant amount of work to be undertaken in order to process over 350 applications.

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

The Local Access Forum received an update from the Access and Rights of Way Team Leader which provided details relating to sections of work which were underway on existing PROW, a further 2 new sections had now been dedicated PROW and a number of sites were still subject to discussions with landowners via land agents. It was reported that the Bi-Centenary was in 2025 and therefore there was around 1 year left to complete the works. Following a question from M Knipe regarding the Definitive Map, The Access and Rights of Way Team Leader advised that those sections of the route which were newly dedicated were included on the

Definitive Map but Ordnance Survey maps would not yet be updated to reflect the changes.

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

The Local Access Forum were provided with an update which had been provided to the Chair in April from the Head of Corporate Property and Land via email.

The response had been provided further to correspondence sent on behalf of the Local Access Forum seeking an update on additional sites which had been identified as being suitable for public access.

The email advised that some of the sites which were identified highlighted further issues that need to be considered and unfortunately, due to other priority work load the Corporate Property and Land team were not able to progress with any further sites at this time.

Discussion then ensued regarding the initial sites which had been agreed by DCC and whether there was any known progress in this regard. Councillor Scott commented that it would be appropriate for the Secretary to contact the Head of Corporate Property and Land to seek an update and clarification in this regard.

**Agreed:** that the Secretary contact the Head of Property and Land in order to provide clarification to the Local Access Forum around progress on those already approved sites.

## **12 Northern Saints Trails**

The Local Access Forum received an update from the Access and Rights of Way Team Leader on recent development and progress in respect of the trails. He noted work being undertaken by a Steering Group which had been established to look at the 'Way of Hope' on the Weardale Way, which included involvement with the Weardale Churches.

Cllr Scott mentioned a potential County Walking Festival based around the Northern Saints Trails. The County Council had also hosted a delegation from Spain looking at the Camino Ingles which follows some of the Northern Saints Trails, and the scope for tourism.

## **13 Bright Water Landscape Project**

The Local Access Forum received a brief update from the Access and Rights of Way Team Leader following the celebration event which had taken place on 9 October 2024 at Hardwick Hall Hotel followed by a site visit to Bishop's Fen.

Unfortunately, G Hughes who had been in attendance at the event was unable to attend the meeting this evening and provide his feedback, however the Access and Rights of Way Team Leader noted points relating to the rising water table, the impact upon bridleway and the replacement bridge, which, with Active Travel

Money would be completed to link up bridleway at Bishop Middleham. A further update would be provided once the bridleway was completed.

Members also thanked T Bolton for his input and time in attending Board meetings of Brightwater and providing regular updates to the Forum.

#### **14 North Pennines National Landscape**

The Forum received an update from the Access and Rights of Way Team Leader following the last meeting of the North Pennines National Landscape Access and Recreation Working Group & Pennine National Trails Northern Working Group held on 1 October 2024. He further went on to provide the Forum with details around planned celebrations for the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Pennine Way. The 'Trail of Inspiration' exhibition which would showcase artwork, music, poetry and film inspired by the Pennine Way would be taking place next year. Forum members who had information, stories or photos which they would like to share were encouraged to do so via the National Trails website.

#### **15 Health**

There was no update to provide at this time.

#### **16 Membership Update**

The Local Access Forum noted the resignation of Mr David Pott and that thanks on behalf of the Forum and its members had been sent to him.

#### **17 Member Training**

The Local Access Forum were asked to consider any training requirements or to suggest any areas of work or interests which may be useful to the Forum and its members in order to fulfil their role.

M Knipe asked whether the Forum would consider a presentation from the Crook and Weardale Ramblers Association on the new strategy which they had recently developed. Members of the Forum agreed that this would be interesting topic and it was suggested that this be scheduled for the next meeting of the Forum in January 2025.

It was further suggested that a presentation from the Wolsingham Wayfarers could also potentially be arranged for the summer meeting next year.

Further discussion took place around membership and whether there was any scope to welcome further interested individuals to the Forum. Members agreed that it would be beneficial to have representatives from groups such as cyclists, runners and landowners and the Access and Rights of Way Team Leader agreed to look into this further.

## **18 Work Programme**

The Local Access Forum considered the work programme as attached to the papers circulated.

**Agreed:** That the work programme be amended to reflect work now completed and include new areas of work along with Forum members allocated to represent or lead on tasks.

## **19 Dates of Meetings for 2025**

**AGREED:** that following meetings be approved for 2025.

Monday 27 January 2025

Monday 14 April 2025

Monday 21 July 2025

Monday 20 October 2025