

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

NORTH YORKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held at the Village Hall, Hovingham, on Thursday, 17 June, 2004.

PRESENT:-

County Councillor Bill Barton OBE, Steven Barnes, Roland Firby, Ted Flexman, Mrs Alison Fuller, John Goss, Nigel Graham, Max Grant, Bill Hout, Stephen Ramsden, Judith Ratcliffe, Rodney Waddilove, Derek Welford and Thomas Wheelright.

Officers in attendance:- John Edwards, Angela Flowers, Chris Jones, Stephen Knight, Paul Roberts and Keith Watkins.

Five members of the public attended the meeting.

COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED ARE IN THE MINUTE BOOK

56. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED –

That Derek Welford be appointed as Chairman of the Forum to hold office until the first meeting of the Forum after 1 April, 2005.

57. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 18 March, 2004, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

58. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED –

That Tim Laurie be appointed Vice Chairman of the Forum to hold office until the first meeting of the Forum following 1 April, 2005.

59. MEMBERSHIP OF THE FORUM

RESOLVED –

That the new Members of the Forum, Bill Barton, Ted Flexman and Judith Ratcliffe be welcomed and that the Chairman write to Mrs Penelope Avison and David Gibson expressing the thanks of Forum Members for the contribution they had made to the work of the Forum in its first year.

60. PUBLIC QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS

Gill Woodhead, a member of the public and Clerk to a local Parish Council referred to a number of walks using public rights of way around Castle Howard which required walkers to use public highways, in part. She questioned whether it would be possible to create links in the footpath network to obviate the need to walk on public roads. In response, the Chairman said that if Parish Councils wished to put forward specific recommendations they could be considered by the Forum as part of the consideration of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Another member of the public referred to the network of rights of way close to Malton which were used by a variety of user groups and asked whether criteria would be agreed for appropriate surfaces for footpaths. Attention was also drawn to the difficulty of accessing blue bell woods between Hovingham and Slingsby because of the surface of the available rights of way and inadequate parking provision. In response, Angela Flowers indicated that these were the type of issues which she was looking at in the public rights of way improvement plan survey and asked that such suggestions be forwarded to her. Keith Watkins added that, if public rights of way were being made impassable, contact should be made with him so that maintenance could be arranged.

Another member of the public, David Gibson, commented that it had been difficult to obtain information on the Forum's meeting from the County Council's website.

61. LAUNCH OF THE COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE

CONSIDERED –

A report of the Director of Environmental Services presented by John Edwards, Head of Countryside Services for North Yorkshire County Council. In response to questions, he said that the new service had been put in place from 1st April but the full improvements would show later in the year and confirmed that the improved service was fully funded for the current financial year. He also promised a full report on the budgetary situation for Countryside Services at the autumn meeting of the Forum. He also indicated that there would be a formal inspection of the Countryside Service by the Audit Commission, in the autumn and said that he recognised there were a lot of long standing issues which needed to be resolved. In response to a further question he confirmed that no additional staff had come into post at the time of the meeting but he expected those posts to be filled within the next few months. In response to a question from Stephen Barnes, John Edwards said that it was not the intention to use voluntary rangers to resolve difficulties on unauthorised use of public rights of way.

In response to a question from John Goss about whether the needs of the disabled were being taken into account when improvements to public rights of way were under consideration, Keith Watkins said that such needs were taken into account but could not be satisfied, in all cases. Sometimes it was possible to leave a gap or install a gate, but such changes needed the co-operation of landowners. He said that it would be helpful if good practical opportunities for providing access for the physically disabled were to be identified and drawn to his attention and John Goss undertook to do that.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That a report on the budgetary position be received at the autumn meeting.

62. ACCESS MANAGEMENT PLANNING

CONSIDERED –

A presentation was made by Chris Pope of the Countryside Agency. She said she hoped that the Local Access Forum would be involved in the County Council's bid for grant funds. She stressed that consideration needed to be given to practical ways of accessing open access land, but also acknowledged that much of that land was amongst the most beautiful and sensitive land in the country. English Nature had produced mapping identifying vulnerable features and, whilst there was no wish to constrain public rights, she believed it would be possible to manage access, since members of the public did not want to cause damage. She said that she believed that the Access Management Grant Scheme would only fund paid wardens as an exception, but that funding should be available to meet costs of volunteer wardens. In response to a question from Max Grant, Chris Pope confirmed that £2m was available in the current year.

In response to a question from Rodney Waddilove about whether guidance to staff had now been published and whether the role of land managers had been clarified, Chris Pope confirmed that the guidance had been published.

Tom Wheelright commented that in respect of the Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the County Council had been encouraged to draw up a plan without reference to land owners but, in response, Chris Pope indicated that this had only been input into English Nature's work on vulnerable features and she agreed that it was absolutely essential that landowners and public were kept informed of processes.

In response to a question from Mrs Alison Fuller, John Edwards said that preparing the bid had had an impact on the workload of the countryside service and consideration had been given to the use of consultants to undertake it.

Stephen Ramsden asked whether the English Nature mapping could be made available to Members of the Forum but Chris Pope said she was unsure how far that could be provided, because of licensing issues. Nigel Graham commented, however, that information was, nevertheless, being stored and it was necessary for English Nature to respond. Thomas Wheelright said it would be unfortunate if it was necessary to use the rights in the Freedom of Information Act to obtain disclosure of this information. In response, however, Chris Pope pointed out that, as the information was being stored for nature conservation grounds, it would be necessary for a relevant agency to be submitting a request for information.

There was a suggestion that current mapping for Area 2 might be available at the next meeting of the Forum.

In response to a question from Stephen Ramsden about whether signage will have to be paid for by the landowner, or the County Council, Chris Pope said that, if it was a landowner applying for restrictions to access, it would be their responsibility to erect signs. In response to a question from Max Grant, Chris Pope agreed to try to make arrangements for a restrictions case worker to attend a meeting of the Forum to make a presentation on restrictions issues.

RESOLVED –

That a restrictions case worker from the Countryside Agency be asked to attend the next meeting of the Local Access Forum and make a presentation on their work.

63. ACCESS MANAGEMENT GRANT SCHEME

CONSIDERED –

A report by Rodney Waddilove.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

64. ACCESS TO OPEN COUNTRY AND APPLICATIONS FOR RESTRICTIONS ON ACCESS TO OPEN ACCESS LAND – PROPOSED SUB-GROUP

CONSIDERED –

A report by Chris Jones on Access to Open Country and a report from the Secretary on proposals for a sub-group to consider applications for restrictions.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That an informal sounding group of Forum Members be established to advise on the development of the Access Management Plan, whether by correspondence, e-mail or meetings, but that final proposals for the plan be brought back to the Forum. The Membership of the informal sounding group to comprise:-

Ted Flexman (other interest group)
Max Grant (user interest group)
County Councillor Bill Hoult (other interest group)
Stephen Ramsden (land owner/occupier interest group)
Rodney Waddilove (user interest group)
Tom Wheelright (land owner/occupier interest group)

- (b) That proposals for a sub-group to deal with applications for restrictions on access to open access land be an item on the agenda for the Forum meeting when it receives a presentation, by the Countryside Agency, on restrictions on access.

65. COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY FEASIBILITY STUDY ON IMPROVING ACCESS FOR CANOEING BY VOLUNTARY AGREEMENT

CONSIDERED –

Research note CRN79, issued by the Countryside Agency.

RESOLVED –

That the paper be noted.

66. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

CONSIDERED –

A progress report by the Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan Officer, together with a good practice guide; report of a citizens panel; and a consultation draft on inclusive access strategy for public rights of way.

Angela Flowers, the Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan Officer, introduced her report saying that information was now being made available on the County Council's website, although it was not yet fully operational and she was also working on poster campaigns, to encourage wider use of the network whilst also undertaking a survey of land owners, businesses and parish councils. Paul Roberts then addressed the Forum on cycling plans, stressing the links between the public rights of way network and cycling networks, although Rodney Waddilove observed that surfaces suitable for cycling might be less appropriate for walkers and horse riders. In response to a question from Judith Ratcliffe about cyclists and horseriders crossing major roads, for example the Black Swan Crossroads on the A19, Paul Roberts stressed that the County Council was not the Highways Agency for trunk roads but, if it were planning cycle routes which crossed primary roads, appropriate crossing points would be investigated.

Max Grant expressed disappointment at the Good Practice Guide on Rights of Way Improvement Plans which had been published so far, saying that he had hoped that these would provide much more in a way of useful ideas and suggesting that awaiting this guide had merely delayed matters for 18 months.

In response to a question from Mrs Alison Fuller, County Councillor Bill Hoult suggested that specific references to people from socially excluded groups in the draft access strategy arose because all survey work showed that the public rights of way network was generally not used by minority ethnic groups. In response to a question from Max Grant, John Edwards confirmed that the National Park Authorities were not producing their own Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan, but were looking to the County Council to include the National Park areas in their plan. In response to a question from Stephen Ramsden, Angela Flowers confirmed that it would still be possible to respond to the survey, through the web page, up to the end of the week.

RESOLVED –

That the Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan Progress Report; Good Practice Guide; Report of Citizens Panel; and Consultation Draft on an inclusive access strategy for public rights of way be noted.

67. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN – SKIPTON SECTOR

CONSIDERED –

The papers setting out the comments of the British Horse Society on improvements to the public rights of way in the Skipton Area discussed at an earlier meeting of the Forum.

Rodney Waddilove informed the Forum that David Gibson would now serve on the group developing these proposals, in place of Harry Jeavons. Max Grant asked whether it might be possible for an officer of the County Council to act as co-ordinator for user groups and John Edward said that could be considered, if the necessary funding could be identified and the brief finalised. Mrs Alison Fuller said that representatives of the Ramblers Association and British Horse Society had put forward proposals but the view had been taken that this could not be implemented solely with volunteer efforts and it was hoped that a part time paid co-ordinator might be appointed, with possible funding coming from the private sector because of the benefits in tourism promotion.

Tom Wheelright commented that it would be very helpful to have coloured plans in the future.

RESOLVED –

That the item be noted.

68. DEFINITIVE MAP MODIFICATION ORDERS – NEW DEDICATED ROUTES

The Forum received a report from Keith Watkins.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

69. WEBSITE ADDRESSES OF NEIGHBOURING LOCAL ACCESS FORUMS

CONSIDERED –

A report of the Secretary.

It was suggested that the website addresses of Local Access Forums in Redcar and Cleveland and in Durham should also be obtained.

70. DATES AND VENUES FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the next meeting of the Forum be at 1.00 pm on 5 August, 2004 at a venue in Pateley Bridge, preceded by a buffet lunch at 12 Noon.
- (b) That the meeting of the Forum, thereafter, be on Thursday, 11 November, 2004 and that the Secretary arrange a geographically appropriate venue, once key items for the agenda had been identified.