

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL  
**NORTH YORKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**

5<sup>th</sup> August 2004

Draft Access Plan

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 0.1 Under the CROW Act 2000, the Countryside Agency requires the access authority (which, for the area outside the National Parks, is North Yorkshire County Council) to produce an Access Plan outlining how it intends to manage open access, when it comes into force over the next 18 months.
- 1.2\_\_\_ The purpose of the report is to explain the methodology behind the preparation of the draft Access Plan and to outline what form the consultation will take.

2.0 PREPARATION OF THE DRAFT ACCESS PLAN

- 1.1 The first stage in the preparation of the plan was to use existing data to record how land identified as access land is used at present. This included identifying information on issues such as land use, nature conservation, archaeological features, any existing access and any public safety issues. This information has been gathered from a wide range of sources, but mainly through consulting with land managers, rights of way and conservation officers and user groups.
- 2.2 The next stage in the process was to ask the same individuals to predict where people might want to go and to identify areas where there could be a significant increase in demand. There are many factors that are likely to influence the extent to which the public will use new access land and, to some extent, this relies upon educated guess work. One assumption that has been made is that most people will not just walk at random over open moorland, but will be attracted to specific features. These features have been identified as 'attractors' and include trig points, ridge lines, boundary walls and water features such as tarns. On the other hand, it has also been assumed that some features such as bogs will deter people and these have been termed 'detractors'.
- 1.2 In preparing the draft Plan, a number of 'access points' have been identified. These are points where people can enter access land, mainly through public rights of way. In some cases a public road intersects access land, and this then becomes a linear access point. Access points are important places to pass information on to the public about the land they are entering. An attempt has been made to identify each access point and to rank its importance on a scale of 1-3, based upon its predicted level of use. For a 'primary' access point (ranked as '1'), it is recommended that a large information board should be provided with a facility to add notices about any restrictions in force in the area and to put across seasonal messages, such

as during the ground bird nesting season. It is recommended that 'secondary' access points (ranked as '2') should have a smaller board on a single post, again with a facility to interchange information and messages. Access points that have been ranked as '3' are thought unlikely to be very busy and therefore will only need a small disc showing the national access symbol.

- 2.4 Areas that are protected as SPAs (Special Protection Areas), will also be separately assessed by the Countryside Agency and English Nature. A large proportion of the Nidderdale AONB is designated as SPA and will be subject to such an assessment. This will identify any extra measures necessary to limit any adverse impact on nature conservation. When the results of this assessment are published, it will be necessary to incorporate them into the Access Plan.
- 1.5 The County Archaeologist has been consulted to determine whether there are any known archaeological features on access land and if there are any potential conflicts with the new open access provisions. In some instances it will be necessary to undertake monitoring to ensure that historically important features are not damaged.
- 1.6 In some areas there are thought to be potentially serious public safety risks on access land where historically it has been subject to mining activity. These issues are discussed in a separate report on the agenda. They have been raised formally with DEFRA and the Countryside Agency and further guidance is awaited. When this is available, separate consideration will need to be given to the issue.
- 1.7 Due to the detailed nature of the information required for plan preparation, the large geographical area to be covered and the tight timescale involved, the services of a consultant, Simon Lees, have been engaged to assist with drawing together the above information. This has been assisted by grant aid made available by the Countryside Agency. The consultant has covered areas to the east of the A1, which are relatively small in scale and fragmented in nature, together with areas in Richmondshire. This has enabled the County Council's Access Officer to concentrate on the main areas of open access land in Nidderdale, the South Pennines and the Forest of Bowland. Following the information gathering stage, the data has been integrated to form one set of comprehensive maps for the whole County.

### 3.0 THE DRAFT PLAN AND THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

- 2.1 The first draft of the Access Plan, showing the results of the above analysis, will be available for members to examine at the meeting. The Local Access Forum will therefore have an early opportunity to provide input into the Plan preparation process.
- 2.2 The Access Plan will take the form of a set of maps produced by GIS showing the features described above. The purpose of the consultation is for Local Access Forum members to examine the plans and comment on any features they think are missing or any features shown with which members

disagree. To make this assessment easier, each map will be numbered and grid lines will allow specific features to be identified more accurately. Members will also have an opportunity to raise any other points they think are missing from the access plan.

- 3.3 Due to the high cost of producing the maps it will only be possible to make one set available at the meeting. Members may feel that the limited time available at the LAF meeting does not provide sufficient opportunity to examine the maps thoroughly. Should this be the case, one option might be for the sub-committee formed at the last LAF meeting to meet at a later date to examine and comment on the maps in more detail on behalf of the Forum.

#### 4.0 CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT ACCESS PLAN

- 3.1 Consultation with the Local Access Forum marks the first stage in a wider consultation programme that will also include landowners, land managers and user groups.
- 3.2 Consultation will be undertaken through a series of 'roadshows' to be carried out during August. As a result of these consultations, it may be necessary to amend the draft plan. The Local Access Forum may therefore wish to meet again to examine the final plan before it is agreed to ensure members are satisfied with any alterations made.

#### 5.0 IMPLEMENTATION

- 5.1 When consultation on the draft Plan is complete, it is proposed to produce a covering report to a professional standard explaining the legislative context for open access and describing the plan preparation process and the consultations undertaken.
- 5.2 The Countryside Agency has indicated that funding will be made available during the current financial year to implement any high priority works identified in the Plan. These must be completed by the end of March 2005 and will be eligible in principal for assistance at up to 75% of cost.
- 5.3 For all other works, the Countryside Agency has indicated that it will consider the possibility of assisting with the costs of implementation during 2005/2006, if further funding is made available, although at this stage there is no guarantee that this will be the case.

#### 6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Local Access Forum:

- (a) Examines the draft Access Plan at the meeting and submits comments as appropriate;

- (b) Decides if the Local Access Forum Sub-Committee needs to meet at a later date to further examine the detailed plans on behalf of the Forum; and
- (c) Decides if another meeting of the Local Access Forum is needed to approve the final Access Plan after the consultation period is over.

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