

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

NORTH YORKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

FRIDAY 3 JUNE 2005

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2004/05

INTRODUCTION

This is the second Annual Report of the North Yorkshire Local Access Forum. It covers the period from 1 April 2004 to 31 March 2005.

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Section 94 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 places a statutory duty on the North Yorkshire County Council, as a Highway Authority, to establish a Local Access Forum, as an Advisory Body. The area covered by the North Yorkshire Local Access Forum is the administrative boundaries of the North York Moors National Park and the Yorkshire Dales National Park, because the National Park Authorities in those two areas have established their own Local Access Forums. The primary purpose of the Local Access Forum is to provide advice to North Yorkshire County Council on how to make the Countryside more accessible for open air recreation, including providing advice on the development of access strategy which cater for a wide range of people; improving the rights of way network; and implementation, management and review of the statutory right of access to the countryside.

MEMBERSHIP

The Local Access Forum (England) Regulations 2002 require that the Members of a Local Access Forum should be representative of:-

- (a) Users of local rights of way all rights in relation to access land.
- (b) Owners and occupiers of access land or land over which local rights of way subsist.
- (c) Any other interest especially relevant to the authority's area.

Membership of the North Yorkshire Local Access Forum is made up as follows:-

<u>NAME</u>	<u>INTEREST GROUP</u>	<u>TERM OF OFFICE TO 3 APRIL</u>
Steve Barnes	Other	2006
Leo Crone	User	2006
Edward Dennison	Owner/Occupier	2005
Roland Firby	Owner/Occupier	2006
Edward Flexman	Other	2007
Alison Fuller	User	2005
John Goss	User	2006
Nigel Graham	Owner/Occupier	2005
Max Grant	User	2007
Tim Laurie	Other	2006
Stephen Ramsden	Owner/Occupier	2005
Judith Ratcliffe	User	2007
Rodney Waddilove	User	2005
Derek Welford	Owner/Occupier	2006
Thomas Wheelright	Owner/Occupier	2007
William F Barton OBE	County Councillor	2005
Eric Broadbent	County Councillor	2005
Bill Hoult	County Councillor	2005

DATES OF MEETINGS HELD

The Forum met on the following dates and at the following venues:-

17 June 2004 – The Village Hall, Hovingham.
5 August 2004 – The Council Offices, King Street, Pateley Bridge.
11 November 2004 – Darlington College, Catterick.
17 February 2005 – County Hall, Northallerton.

BUSINESS OF THE FORUM

The agenda and minutes of the meetings held are available for inspection on the North Yorkshire County Council website at www.northyorks.gov.uk. All meetings of the Forum are public meetings. A summary of the main business transacted at the above meetings is set out below.

Launch of the Countryside Service

The County Council's Countryside Service came into being on 1 April 2004, and the Forum received a report from the newly appointed Head of Countryside Services, John Edwards on the formation and structure of the new service. The service comprises a public rights of way section, a heritage section and a countryside management section. Staff appointments to the sections have been made during the course of the year.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan

All Highway Authorities are required to complete Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIPs) by November 2007, assessing the extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public, and issues of accessibility for all types of user. The Government has issued statutory guidance on how to complete the improvement plan process in which a vital part is to be played by Local Access Forums. The Forum considered the County Council's draft inclusive access strategy for public rights of way. Information on publicising the plan was produced during the year, both on the County Council's website as in the form of posters and leaflets, which the Forum considered informative and of a high quality. Specific comments on access issues in the Skipton area were received from the British Horse Society.

Access Management Grant

The Forum received a report and DEFRA draft guidance on the access management grant scheme. This is administered by the Countryside Agency and provides short term financial support and guidance to those managing rights of open access. Information was included on the scope scheme, how to apply for grant and the criteria applied by the Countryside Agency in deciding whether to offer grant.

Presentations Received

The Forum received the following presentations during the year:-

1. A presentation from the Countryside Agency on Access Management Planning. Guidance was given on a range of issues including the scope of Access Management Grant and the last owners responsibilities to erect signs when orders restricting access to their land had been made.
2. A presentation from English Nature on their role in relation to the Countryside and Rights of Way 2000: Part 1 Access to the Countryside and the relationship between access and nature conservation.

Open Access Volunteers

The County Council in conjunction with the Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty office introduced an Open Access Volunteer Scheme Service. The team of volunteers will patrol popular access points and provide assistance and information to visitors. Volunteers will also gather information to assist with the on-going management of access areas, monitor specific sites that have been identified as potentially sensitive in relation to conservation and archaeology and conduct surveys and guided walks. If successful the scheme initially based in Nidderdale will be extended across the County. The Council in association with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers had developed a training programme for volunteers which had been the subject of a great deal of interest from outside bodies.

Voluntary Ranger Service

Details of the County Council's plans to introduce a volunteer warden service were finalised. Initially, the recruits would focus on open access and rights of way access but in time it was hoped to recruit volunteers with specialisms such as conservation, archaeology and education. A development plan for the volunteer ranger service would be considered by the Forum before being implemented.