

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
NORTH YORKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

24 NOVEMBER 2005

COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY CONSULTATION
EXTENSION OF ACCESS MANAGEMENT GRANT SCHEME

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.2 The purpose of this report is to brief the forum on a consultation request from the Countryside Agency about the future of the Access Management Grant Scheme.

2.0 Background

2.1 The Access Management Grant Scheme (AGMS) was set up to help access authorities (Local Authorities) provide practical management for the new rights of access in England. The scheme is in its second year and is due to finish in March 2006 for most of the country. Areas that have just gone live are in their first year and their scheme will expire in March 2007.

2.2 North Yorkshire County Council has made use of the grant scheme for the last two years. The scheme paid for a Management Plan to be produced and has paid for information boards to be sited at popular places next to access land. The scheme has helped pay for the training and equipping of the new Open Access Volunteer Service. Leaflets, web design and a Fire Plan have also been funded through the grant scheme.

2.3 The County Council has been awarded £121,638 over the last two years. The funding has been awarded at 75% with the County Council matching the remainder.

3.0 Review Objectives

3.1 DERFA has asked the Countryside Agency to review the scheme so far and assess the need for an extension of the scheme. The objectives of the review are:

- Have AMGS objectives and targets been met?
- Are current priority areas of work still relevant?
- Are there any un-met needs for AMGS funding?
- Need and demand for extension of AMGS and funding levels?

4.0 Feedback to Assist the Objectives

4.1 The LAF has been asked to provide feedback to help the review. The Countryside Agency is interested in any information on the following:

- Are you participating in the scheme? If not, why not?
- Current access management issues following commencement of open access.
- Examples of how the current AMGS has been successful.
- What, if any, are the current limitations of the AMGS?

- Are the current priorities of the AMGS correct (i.e. nature conservation, social inclusion etc)?
- If not, what are the other issues that you consider require prioritisation (i.e. linkages between OA sites, isolated OA sites with other access land and PROWs)?
- What resources would be needed to implement these new priorities?

5.0 Suggested Response

5.1 We are participating in the scheme.

5.2 The main issues so far are:

- Very low take up of people using their new rights.
- Isolated incidences involving dogs on areas where dog exclusions exist.
- Misleading signs on access land.

5.3 The grant scheme has paid for fencing to be erected around mine shafts allowing access onto land that may otherwise have been restricted. The grant scheme has helped with the launch of the Open Access Volunteer Service, which has given confidence to landowners that the new responsibilities that came with open access will be adhered to. The information boards and leaflets have encouraged people to use their new rights responsibly.

5.4 The grant scheme is flexible and case officers will look at any sensible idea with an open mind.

5.5 Suggest that nature conservation is kept as one of the priorities of AMGS, if numbers of people using open access land increase next year, some areas may need attention.

5.6 Linkages would be a worthwhile goal in some areas, however they would be very time consuming with no guarantee of success. Other priorities could be funding to help develop the volunteer service and the continuation of the RSS (Rapid Response Service). This would allow us to resolve issues that were brought to our attention.

5.7 To develop projects to create linkages to access land would be potentially costly and would need to consider project officer funding. The volunteer service would require funding to help cover ongoing costs such as travel expenses.

6.0 Recommendations

6.1 It is recommended that the comments set out in section 5 of the report, subject to the views of the Local Access Forum, be used as the basis of a response to the Countryside Agency.