

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

NORTH YORKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held at the Council Offices King Street, Pateley Bridge, on Thursday, 24 November 2005.

PRESENT:-

Derek Welford in the Chair.

North Yorkshire County Council: County Councillors Eric Broadbent and Michael S Knaggs.

Other Members: Diane Baines, Leo Crone, David Currie, Edward Dennison, Edward Flexman, John Goss, Nigel Graham, Stephen Ramsden, Judith Radcliffe and Thomas Wheelwright.

Officers: Sarah Glover, Chris Jones, Keith Watkins and Jane Wilkinson.

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor John Fort BEM, and David Gibson.

COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED ARE IN THE MINUTE BOOK

24. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 August 2005, having been printed and circulated be taken as read and confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the following amendments:-

- That the names of Nigel Graham and Edward Flexman be deleted from the list of those named as being present at the meeting.
- Minute No 23 – Date and Time of Next Meeting – the Chairman stated that what he had requested was that in future meeting dates are not altered to accommodate the availability of Officers and/or Members.

25. MATTERS ARISING

Minute No 17 – Management and Maintenance of the Green Lane Network

County Councillor Michael S Knaggs reported that the North York Moors National Park Authority had recently granted a licence authorising the use of green lanes in Dalby Forest for recreational purposes. Thomas Wheelwright stated that the Chief Constable for North Yorkshire had recently been quoted as saying that limited resources meant that the Police are unable to enforce traffic regulation orders in rural and urban areas.

Leo Crone related the details of a recent police enforcement operation in Settle regarding the illegal use of green lanes which had yielded poor results but had been costly to organise. He advocated that Police resources should target at those green lanes subject to Traffic Regulation Orders. On behalf of the user group he

represented he stated he was happy to assist the Police by providing information so as to improve the effectiveness of their future operations.

Members suggested holding a joint meeting with the two other Local Access Forums in North Yorkshire and inviting the Police to attend. The meeting would consider the enforcement of the illegal use of green lanes in North Yorkshire. Inviting representatives from the two other Local Access Forums in the County would help ensure the consistency of the management of green lanes.

RESOLVED –

- (i) That a letter be sent to the Secretary of the North York Moors and Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority's Local Access Forums and to North Yorkshire Police inviting them to participate in a joint local access forum meeting to consider enforcement of the illegal use of green lanes in North Yorkshire.
- (ii) That an item on the role of recreational vehicles in the countryside be referred to a future meeting of the Forum.

26. PUBLIC QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS

The Head of Committee Services reported that he had received no indications of any public questions or statements prior to the meeting.

27. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan Officer updating Members with progress since the last meeting regarding preparation of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan for North Yorkshire.

Members were requested to reply to the letter of invitation they had been sent in respect of the workshops to be held on 9 January 2006.

Members commented that the language used in the draft Humanby Service Centre report was not user friendly and invited officers to use plain English so as to make Service Centre reports easier to understand. They also suggested that the content was strengthened so as to form the basis of successful applications for grant aid and that this was discussed further at the workshops on 9 January 2006. Whilst at present the draft service centre report did contain key issues it was unfocused and failed to reach any conclusions. The draft report also made no specific reference to consideration having been given to people with disabilities.

Members suggested that the format of final Service Centre reports should be a series of bullet points that identified those access needs that would create the biggest difference/improvement in terms of the capital outlay expended and that priorities were established on 9 January by the steering group.

Members also requested that at the workshops on 9 January 2006 officers indicate a timetable for when the routes referred to in the Service Centre reports would be accessible.

Members were in support of the event to be held on 9 January 2006 and looked forward to discussing the content of Service Centre reports in further detail.

RESOLVED –

- (i) That Members of the Local Access Forum together with representatives from the District Councils and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in North Yorkshire and neighbouring highway authorities be invited to attend an all day series of workshops on 9 January 2006 to review Service Centre reports for the Rights of Way Improvement Plans for North Yorkshire.
- (ii) That the comments made by Members at the meeting regarding the content and format of Service Centre reports are referred to the Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan Officer.
- (iii) That the content of the report be noted.

28. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN – RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (ROWIP) IMPLEMENTATION GRANTS

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan Officer informing Members of the creation of funds to support the delivery of Rights of Way Improvement Plans.

Members sought clarification of the process whereby funds were received from the Countryside Agency and how they were prioritised by the County Council. The RoWIP Officer agreed to investigate and report back to forum members.

Members were advised that in conjunction with the National Parks a GIS Audit of all Rights of Way in North Yorkshire had been undertaken with regard to looking in more detail at routes which are available to people with different abilities. The Audit had identified the gradient on each route and therefore provided a starting point to do a more detailed physical audit to identify other routes which could be improved which may not have been considered in the RoWIP assessment. This information would assist in route promotion and information for users.

Members suggested that individual user groups are contacted and invited to identify those routes most in need of improvement. The Rights of Way Officer agreed to undertake this work. He also confirmed that the resource of the Volunteer Task Force would also be utilised to identify those routes in need of improvement.

RESOLVED –

- (i) That the content of the report be noted.
- (ii) That the RoWIP Officer contacts all stakeholders including users, land interests, and volunteers regarding the Draft RoWIP, inviting them to comment and provide suggestions for local route improvements.

29. OPEN ACCESS VOLUNTEERS

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Access Officer summarising feedback from volunteers and progress made developing the Open Access Volunteer Service.

Members congratulated the Access Officer on the production of a clear, concise and informative report.

In response to a question from Leo Crone, Chris Jones reported that he had no immediate plans to produce maps and leaflets promoting the use of open access land. The limited literature he currently produced referred the public to material

produced by the Countryside Agency. A number of self guide books had been published recently and he had organised and planned a programme of guided walks.

Members referred to Appendix 2 of the report and the actions identified by volunteers and asked whether missing/damaged signs and furniture were replaced on a like for like basis. Members were advised that it was County Council policy to replace stiles with gates in appropriate circumstances.

Stephen Ramsden related his personal experiences of people using independent guide books and suggested that the situation should be monitored. Recently he had encountered several members of the public on his land who whilst in possession of such books had nevertheless lost their way. He urged the use of Ordnance Survey maps at all time and asked if the County Council could give consideration to educating the public in this regard.

Members commended the work carried out by the volunteers who had proved an invaluable asset.

RESOLVED –

- (i) That the content of the report be noted.

30. COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY CONSULTATION EXTENSION OF ACCESS MANAGEMENT GRANT SCHEME

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Access Officer on a consultation request received from the Countryside Agency regarding the future of the Access Management Grant Scheme.

Members considered the suggested response set out in the report and made the following comments. That the second bullet point in paragraph 5.2 be amended so as to reflect that it is possible for a landowner to grant permission to local people to walk their dogs on access land where an exclusion exists. That a further bullet point be included as follows “the on going maintenance/upkeep of safety fencing” and that paragraph 5.5 be amended by deleting the following words “if numbers of people using open access land increase next year, some areas may need attention”.

RESOLVED –

That the comments set out in Section 5 of the report be used as the basis of a response to the Countryside Agency subject to incorporating the comments made by Members of the Local Access Forum at the meeting.

31. COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY CONSULTATION PROPOSAL FOR A LONG TERM DIRECTION – ACCESS LAND AT RAISTHORPE ESTATE

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Access Officer briefing the Forum on an application for exclusion to access land at the Raisthorpe Estate, South of Malton, North Yorkshire.

Despite have some reservations about the possible “snowballing” effect consent would have on the numbers of future applications submitted Members nevertheless agreed the suggested response as set out in Section 4 of the report.

RESOLVED –

That the comments as set out in Section 4 of the report be agreed and be sent to the Countryside Agency as the response of the North Yorkshire Local Access Forum to the application for exclusion to access land at the Raisthorpe Estate, Malton.

32. **REVIEW OF THE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Head of the Countryside Service on the effectiveness of the Local Access Forum and suggesting options for change.

Members remarked on the poor attendance levels by Members of the public at Forum meetings which could be viewed as an indicator in itself.

Members considered the current operation of the North Yorkshire Local Access Forum against the check list of good and poor practice contained in table 7.1 of the research report and made the following additional comments.

Paragraph Number	LAF MEMBER COMMENTS
1.8	That in future a training/induction day for new members is organised following their appointment.
3.4	That officers facilitate meetings with specific interest groups and LAF members.
4.2	That the recently introduced practice of holding agenda/briefing meetings with the chair/vice chair continues.
4.4	That a regular item be placed on the agenda of all NYCC Area Committees informing them of the items discussed at LAF meetings that are relevant to their area.
4.7	That neighbouring LAFS are informed of the meeting dates of the NYLAF and that there is greater liaison/coordination between the three LAFS in North Yorkshire.
4.8	That the NYLAF develop its own identity as an independent advisory body to the appointing authority (NYCC). The use of its own letter headed paper would help achieve this.
5. Chairmanship	That there is confusion regarding the role of the Forum due to the existence and overlapping remit with the Public Rights of Way Liaison Group. NYCC officers control the LAF agenda which is reactionary. Members agreed that in future the Chair should have more control/participation in the selection of agenda items. All members of the Forum were encouraged to have their say. The length of the agenda and volume of supporting papers was on occasions a burden.

6.1	That further consideration is given to the establishment of a budget for the LAF and in particular the need for a special responsibility allowance for the chairman.
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RESOLVED –

- (i) That a report is submitted to the next meeting of the Forum summarising the modifications that had been put in place.
- (ii) That a further review of the operation of the Local Access Forum is undertaken in November 2006.

33. DEFRA CONSULTATION RELATING TO THE AMENDMENT OF THE LOCAL ACCESS FORUMS (ENGLAND) REGULATIONS 2002

CONSIDERED –

Report of the Head of the Countryside Service formulating a response on behalf of the Forum to the DEFRA consultation paper on amendment of the Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2002.

RESOLVED –

That the comments as set out in Section 4 of the report are endorsed by the North Yorkshire Local Access Forum and are submitted to DEFRA as the response of the North Yorkshire Local Access Forum to the consultation paper.

34. GEOCACHING

The Forum received a presentation from Jon Beavan, Chairman of the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority Local Access Forum on the new rapidly growing recreational activity of geocaching. He described the management issues surrounding this new activity and suggested that the Forum may like to consider providing advice on these issues to their appointing authority. Due to the popularity of geocaching some local authorities had taken the step of organising their own trails as a means of encouraging the public to access the countryside. In his opinion appointing authorities should:-

- (i) Recognise and acknowledge geocaching as a recreational activity.
- (ii) Ensure that the geocaching website and relevant trails and cache locations within the area of the appointing authority are monitored regularly.
- (iii) That a pro-active approach is adopted regarding the contacting of “cache owners”.
- (iv) That local landowners are made aware of the activity.

Whilst acknowledging the difficulties, Members recognised the potential educational benefits the activity presented as well as potential business opportunities to landowners. The Chairman thanked Jon Beavan for an excellent and informative presentation. County Councillor Mike Knaggs suggested that a report/presentation on geocaching be referred to the County Council’s Area Committee’s.

RESOLVED –

- (i) That the content of the presentation be noted.
- (ii) That Officers at North Yorkshire County Council are made aware of geocaching and take steps to monitor and manage the activity within North Yorkshire.

35. ORDERS RELATING TO PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY AND THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Access and Public Rights of Way Manager on diversion applications in the vicinity of farmyards and the role of the Ramblers Association.

Members thanked Keith Watkins for producing the report.

Members debated at length the role of the Local Access Forum and agreed that as an advisory body the Forum could only provide the County Council with advice from a position of knowledge. Members stated that they would find it very useful if they could be provided with regular information regarding what the County Council was doing on rights of way. In particular Members were interested in statistical information on the number of stiles repaired/replaced, numbers of complaints, diversions and creation applications received together with relevant performance indicator information.

Keith Watkins stated that the Department did not have the resources available nor was the information requested readily accessible so as to be able officers to comply with the request. Members stressed that they did not want copious amounts of detailed information on individual applications/complaints received merely an overview so as to be able to identify hot spots and problem areas.

The Chairman stated that the Forum was keen to see what was happening on the ground. The Forum received regular progress reports on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan but that it was impossible for Members to retrieve from this what actual improvements had been made and the process whereby works had been identified, prioritised and completed. With the development/establishment of the Open Access Volunteers Programme Keith Watkins was confident that this was an area that would improve in the future. He emphasised that an analysis of the type of statistical information requested by Members was dealt with by the Public Rights of Way Liaison Group. Members were confused at the over-lap/duplication of the role and remit between the Local Access Forum and the Public Rights of Way Liaison Group. Members requested sight of the statistical information produced for the Public Rights of Way Liaison Group and any other available information that the Access and Public Rights of Way Manager considered relevant and that it be referred to the next meeting for Members to take a view on whether the Forum wanted to receive regular reports of this type.

RESOLVED –

- (i) That a report containing performance management type information on Countryside Services be referred to the next meeting of the Forum.
- (ii) That the content of the report be noted.

36. LOCAL ACCESS FORWARD PLAN

Members received the draft future Work Programme for the Forum.

RESOLVED –

- (i) That the North Yorkshire Local Access Forum Forward Plan be noted and approved bearing in mind the comments made by Members earlier in the meeting.

37. ACCESS NEWSLETTER ISSUE NO 14 DEFRA

The Access Newsletter issue No 14 was received and its content noted.

38. DATES AND TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Chairman noted that the date of the next meeting was February 2006 and in view of the possibility of bad weather at that time of year suggested that the venue for the meeting be County Hall, Northallerton.

RESOLVED –

That the following meeting dates of the North Yorkshire Local Access Forum are agreed as follows:-

- Thursday, 23 February 2006 – County Hall, Northallerton at 1.00 pm
- Thursday 18 May 2006 – Commencing at 1.00 pm venue to be agreed.
- Thursday 17 August 2006 – Commencing at 1.00 pm venue to be agreed.
- Thursday 16 November 2006 – Commencing at 1.00 pm venue to be agreed.