

NORTH YORKSHIRE
LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

23 February 2006

Review of the Local Access Forum

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To summarise modifications that have been put in place to address the recommendations made at the last meeting concerning improvements to the operation of the Local Access Forum.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At the last meeting of the Local Access Forum on 24 November 2005, members debated a range of possible improvements that could be made to the work of the Local Access Forum to make it more effective, following an analysis of good and poor practice produced by a Countryside Agency research report. A number of specific comments and suggestions were made. Members requested a report to the next meeting summarising the modifications that it would be possible to put in place to address the issues raised.

3.0 PROPOSED CHANGES

- 3.1 The comments and suggestions made by the LAF at the last meeting are summarised below, together with a summary of the action that has been taken.

3.2 LAF Comment: That in future a training/induction day for new members is organised following their appointment.

- 3.3 Action: A training day will be held for new members of the LAF following each annual recruitment cycle and before the first meeting of the new LAF. This year, training will take place towards the end of April on a date to be agreed. The induction will aim to cover the following range of issues:

- the purpose, functions and composition of the LAF;
- the LAF agenda and the conduct of business;
- the work of the Countryside Service;
- the Definitive Map and Statement of PROW;
- the Rights of Way Improvement Plan;
- Open Access; and
- the Countryside Volunteer Service.

3.4 LAF Comment: That officers facilitate meetings with specific interest groups and LAF members

3.5 Action: Subject to the availability of time and resources, staff from the Countryside Service will aim to facilitate any meetings needed to further the work of the LAF. It is hoped that the work of the LAF will evolve from being largely reactive to a more pro-active approach, driven by the interests and requirements of the LAF itself. The LAF Forward Plan has now been introduced as a standard agenda item, providing an opportunity for members to give advance notice of issues and topics that they wish to debate at some stage in the future. Given such notice, NYCC officers will aim to facilitate debates on specific topics, invite speakers covering particular issues or convene meetings with particular interest groups outside the main meetings of the LAF, if any of these actions will help to further its business.

3.6 LAF Comment: That the recently introduced practice of holding agenda / briefing meetings with the chair / vice-chair continues

3.7 Action: The Chair and Vice-Chair are now routinely invited to the following meetings:

- A mid-cycle briefing between each quarterly LAF meeting to discuss any access related issues that might have arisen since the last meeting, to consider the Forward Plan and to agree items for the next scheduled meeting of the LAF.
- An agenda briefing during the week prior to each LAF meeting to run through the reports on the agenda and answer any questions.

As well as the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, briefing meetings are normally attended by the LAF Secretary, the Head of Countryside Services and the Access and PROW Manager. It is hoped that this new procedure will provide a more regular opportunity for contact with NYCC staff and will enable the Chair and Vice-Chair to keep up to date with emerging issues.

3.8 LAF Comment: 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.

3.9 Action: Arrangements have been made to place minutes of LAF meetings on the agenda of all NYCC Area Committee meetings.

3.10 LAF Comment: That neighbouring LAFs are informed of the meeting dates of the NYLAF and that there is greater liaison / co-ordination between the three LAFs in North Yorkshire

- 3.11 Action: Copies of future North Yorkshire LAF agendas and minutes will be sent to the Secretaries of the Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors LAFs and a reciprocal arrangement will be requested. These will be copied electronically to North Yorkshire LAF members as they are received. Consideration will be given to extending this procedure to other adjoining LAFs, particularly those covering urban areas. Wherever relevant, the 'North Yorkshire family of LAFs' will be encouraged to attend joint events such as those organised to consider the evolving Rights of Way Improvement Plan.
- 3.12 **LAF Comment: That the NYLAF develop its own identity as an independent advisory body to the appointing body (NYCC). The use of its own letter headed paper would help to achieve this**
- 3.13 Action: All future agendas and correspondence connected to the meetings of the LAF together with its annual Report will use a plain 'anonymous' style to help re-inforce its independent status. Papers will therefore no longer carry the NYCC logo. The current agenda adopts such an approach but further consideration will be given to developing a more individualistic 'house style' which can in future be more readily identified with the work of the LAF.
- 3.14 **LAF Comment: 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.**
- 3.15 Action: A review is currently being undertaken of the remit of the PROW Liaison Group with the objective of simplifying procedures and reducing any duplication of business with the work of the LAF. Further details of the work of the Liaison Group are contained in the separate report on the agenda concerning information on public rights of way. The outcome of this review will be reported to a future meeting.
- 3.16 **LAF Comment: 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**
- 3.17 Action: The revised procedures, outlined in paragraphs 3.5 and 3.7 above, effectively enable the LAF to determine its own agenda and members are encouraged to use this new approach to drive future agendas. The LAF Forward Plan encourages members to discuss any potential agenda items with the Chairman between meetings of the LAF to give officers advance warning of any items arising.
- 3.18 **LAF Comment: The length of the agenda and the volume of supporting papers was on occasion a burden**
- 3.19 Action: Again, the revised procedures outlined in paragraphs 3.5 and 3.7 above, will enable the LAF Chairman to ensure that future business is

planned more effectively. This will provide scope for avoiding excessively long agendas at any one meeting.

3.20 **LAF Comment: That further consideration be given to the establishment of a budget for the LAF and in particular the need for a special responsibility allowance for the Chairman.**

3.21 Action: The LAF Annual Report will in future provide a summary of all expenditure incurred by the LAF in conducting its business. The main items of expenditure include hire of meeting venues, transport for site meeting, catering, members' expenses, recruitment advertising and the annual report. For the forthcoming 2005/2006 Annual Report, an attempt will be made to itemise expenditure under all of these headings, although it may be difficult to disaggregate some items retrospectively. In future, a 'ring-fenced' Countryside Service budget will ensure that financial provision is clearly identified and Committee Services will keep separate accounts of expenditure on LAF business. Members are asked to note in particular that all future claims for expenses should be submitted through the LAF Secretary to enable these to be recorded before they are processed. The need for a Chairman's special responsibility allowance will be kept under review but the view of the current Chairman is that the current level of business does not warrant such provision being made.

CONCLUSION

3.22 It is hoped that the measures taken above will help to make the LAF more effective and more responsive to future needs. Current arrangements will be monitored and an update report brought to the November 2006 meeting to provide another opportunity to improve effectiveness.

4.0 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

a) This report is received for information.

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