

NORTH YORKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held at The Grand Committee Room, County Hall, Northallerton, on 28 February 2008.

PRESENT:-

Tony Turner in the Chair.

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

Other Members:- Alan Aspden, Diane Baines, Rachel Connolly, Edward Dennison, Nigel Graham, Stephen Ramsden, David Swabey, John Taylor and Paul Tibbatts.

Officers:- Iain Burgess, John Edwards, Penny Noake, Aidan Rayner, Phil Strand and Jane Wilkinson.

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of County Councillor John Fort BEM, Paul Chapman, Leo Crone, David Gibson and John Goss.

One member of the public.

COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED ARE IN THE MINUTE BOOK

102. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2007, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and confirmed and be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

103. MATTERS ARISING

Minute No. 92 Trans Pennine Trail

The Rights of Way Manager said that he would give the Secretary a copy of the letter he had written on behalf of the Forum that requested the County Council to allocate resources to enable improvement works to be completed on the route in the Selby area.

Minute No 94 - Open Access – Links to Isolated Access Areas

The Forum was informed that a report on this item would be referred to next meeting.

Minute No. 97 – Wharfdale Trail

The Forum was informed that a report on the consultation results was still awaited. The delay was due to the theft of the original ballot papers. A full report on the consultation results would be referred to the next meeting.

Minute No. 98 – LAF Website

The Forum was informed that the County Council's new look website was now in operation. The Rights of Way Manager was working with Officers in Environment and Heritage to develop new web pages for Countryside Services which would be linked to a website for the Forum. A full report would be referred to the next meeting.

104. PUBLIC QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS

None received.

105. COUNTRYSIDE STRATEGY

The Forum received a presentation from Phil Strand (Project and Policy Co-ordinator) on the development of a Countryside Strategy for North Yorkshire.

Members were informed that the concept behind this evolving Strategy was for the County Council to agree with its partners a shared vision for countryside management which would be used to guide decisions for the parts of the County outside the National Parks and Areas of Outstanding National Beauty. The aim was for this shared vision in due course to be incorporated into a single document for use by the County Council and its partners. By layering information received from partner organisations on a GIS mapping system users could see details of all countryside management projects in a specific geographical area. This would enable sites of potential conflict and benefit to be identified. The Strategy document would also be used to prioritise and integrate individual projects as well as serving as a framework for their delivery. The advantage of the Strategy was that it would enable the overall impact of a project on the landscape to be viewed. Traditionally sites had been viewed on an individual basis.

The presentation described the four key themes of the Strategy namely landscape, sustainability, environment and community. In time the Strategy would be made available to the public via the County Council's website. The Forum was advised that The Vale of Pickering had been chosen as an initial pilot area to test the viability of the Strategy.

Members raised a number of questions and in the ensuing debate the following points were made:-

1. That the responsibility and accountability of all parties must be clearly defined within the Strategy document.
2. That sustainability should include improvement works that are responsive to climate change as well as restoration projects.
3. That Strategy information be made available to planners to enable them to forecast the impact upon the landscape of development applications submitted.
4. That when engaging with local groups they be given advice about potential funding opportunities for projects.

Members of the Forum acknowledged that the development of a Countryside Strategy for North Yorkshire represented a major step forward in the delivery of an integrated approach to countryside management. Members however expressed reservations about the ability of the County Council and its partners to procure the resources that would be required to ensure that the Strategy became a reality.

Members were informed that the County Council's partners had already expressed their support for the Strategy. The adoption of a partnership approach was potentially very powerful. A great deal of information about existing green infrastructure was already known. The consultation undertaken on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan had identified many potential projects. If the County Council was able to coordinate centrally access to that information then not only would everyone be better informed but the outcomes from project delivery would also be enhanced. Now that partners had expressed their support for the Strategy the next stage was to get an understanding of what was happening on the ground and to start to channel resources. The pilot in the Vale of Pickering would be used to test the Strategy.

The Chairman thanked Phil Strand and John Edwards for an interesting presentation and looked forward to receiving further progress reports on the Strategy in due course.

Rachel Connolly expressed her disappointment at the Forum not being formally consulted on the County Council's new Minerals and Waste Policy which she considered relevant to the work of the Forum. The deadline for receipt of responses was the following day. The Rights of Way Manager said that this was an oversight and gave assurances that he would take steps to ensure similar occurrences did not happen again in the future.

RESOLVED –

That the information provided at the meeting be noted.

106. FEEDBACK REPORTS FROM SUB GROUPS

The Forum debated the start time of future sub-group meetings and agreed that it be brought forward to 9.45 am.

RESOLVED –

- (i) That the start time of future Forum Sub-Group meetings be revised to 9.45am

Access for All

In the absence of John Goss, Diane Baines reported that the Sub-Group had agreed that identification and publicity of routes that were accessible to all users was its main priority. The Sub-Group were keen to identify ten routes within the County that were suitable for all users and for them to be actively promoted via the County Council's website and in the North York Times. Members of the Forum were asked to come forward with their suggestions to be included in the list of ten routes. Forum Members were advised not to discount routes that required minor improvement works to be completed in order to make them suitable. The Rights of Way Manager agreed to circulate a list of criteria (in descending order of priority) for use by Forum members to assess the suitability of routes. He stressed that it was unlikely that ten ideal routes that met all of the listed criteria would be identified. The criteria would however enable routes to be prioritised.

RESOLVED –

That Forum Members forward their suggestions for inclusion in the list of ten routes that are accessible by all users to the Rights of Way Manager to be the subject of discussion at the next Sub-Group meeting held in April.

Improving Rights of Way

Alan Aspden presented his report on the meeting of the Improving Rights of Way Sub-Group held on 24 January 2008. It was noted that many of the suggestions made by the Sub-Group were under consideration for inclusion in the Countryside Strategy the subject of the previous agenda item. Members of the Sub-Group were keen to adopt a proactive approach and said that they had enjoyed the site visit to the Croft Estate and were keen to be involved in this type of work in the future. The Rights of Way Manager said that there were models of engagement available the Sub-Group could utilise. The County Council was responsible for processing diversion applications and the adoption of a more strategic approach could have a positive impact upon the ROW network. The PROW Team Leader said that many improvement projects had been identified by parishes in their response to the ROWIP consultation.

The Chairman said that it would be interesting to see if a greater understanding amongst landowners about the flexibility surrounding the cost of diversions was known would result in more improvements to the network being proposed.

RESOLVED –

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

Definitive Rights of Way Sub-Group

Rachel Connolly presented the Minutes of the Rights of Way Sub-Group meeting held on 24 January 2008. She said that the Sub-Group was keen to promote the activities of the Forum and for the Forum to be formally consulted by local District Councils when formulating their Local Development Plans.

Edward Dennison stated that he was unconvinced about the effectiveness of the Sub-Group whose time he considered would be better spent carrying out research work in the archives. Unless the remit of the Sub-Group was revised he said he would tender his resignation.

Forum Members agreed to discuss the remit of the Sub-Group at its next meeting.

RESOLVED –

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

107. UNSURFACED, UNCLASSIFIED ROADS LIAISON GROUP

Rachel Connolly presented her notes of the meeting of the Group held on 28 January 2008 and summarised the proceedings of a further meeting held on 18 February 2008. Both meetings she said had not been well attended. At the second meeting a list of prioritised routes had been circulated. Twenty eight routes had been identified as being most at risk. Individual reports on each of the 28 routes would be considered at the next meeting of the Group. A further meeting of the Group was planned for the end of March 2008. It was anticipated that the Group would shortly be disbanded once a maintenance policy had been agreed.

RESOLVED –

That the content of the minutes and information provided at the meeting be noted.

108. MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF NORTH YORKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUMS

CONSIDERED

The minutes of the meetings of the Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors National Park Local Access Forums held on 7 December and 4 December 2007 respectively.

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meetings of the Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors National Park Local Access Forums held on 7 December and 4 December respectively be noted.

109. PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY DEFINITIVE MAP MODIFICATION ORDER APPLICATIONS

CONSIDERED -

Report of the Definitive Map Officer on progress processing definitive map modification applications since August 2007.

RESOLVED –

That the content of the report be noted.

110. NIDDERDALE AONB IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

The Public Rights of Way Team Leader, Aiden Raynor, reported orally on progress achieved in the Nidderdale AONB Improvement Project. He said that the Project whilst slow to reach the delivery stage was now making steady progress. Countryside Rangers had identified those structures in need of upgrade and replacement and he was pleased to report the cooperation of the affected landowners. Plans were in place for the works to take place during March/April 2008. In order not to lose the project funding already granted in the current financial year the monies would be used to purchase materials before the end of March 2008. He reported that some substantial works had been identified which mainly involved the repair/replacement of bridges. These works would be tackled separately in the future.

The next stage of the project was to secure funding for 2008/2009 and to continue to roll out further improvements further up the Dale from Bewerley. Parish Councils would be consulted in due course. He was of the opinion that in Upper Nidderdale there would be less works identified than had been the case in Lower Nidderdale.

Members noted that delivery of the project had been held up for seven months due to access being prohibited because of the presence of foot and mouth disease.

RESOLVED –

That progress made to date in delivering the Nidderdale AONB Improvement Project be noted.

111. CROFT SITE VISIT

CONSIDERED –

The report of Alan Aspden summarising a site visit made by the Improving Access Sub-Group to the Croft Estate on 13 February 2008. The site visit was in response to

diversion applications that had been submitted. It was noted that Members of the Forum were keen to adopt a proactive approach and to do more of this type of work in the future.

A Member expressed concern that the conclusions of the site visit could set a dangerous precedent for the future. He said that the insistence that higher rights be granted together with a significant increase in the overall length of the diversion route would have serious financial implications for landowners who may as a consequence be dissuaded from making similar applications in the future.

The Rights of Way Officer was confident that the outcome of the Croft site visit would not set a precedent as each application was he said considered on its individual merits.

RESOLVED –

That the content of the report be noted.

112. FORWARD PLAN

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Access and Rights of Way Manager requesting Members to consider future agenda items, with a view to establishing a forward work programme for each meeting to cover the year ahead.

Details of suggested agenda items for forthcoming meetings were set out in the Plan and it was agreed that the items referred to earlier in the meeting would be incorporated.

Members discussed the forthcoming recruitment campaign and suggested that the questions in the application form and at the interview be updated. Forum Members supported the process used in previous years and agreed that ten should be the maximum number of people involved in a group interview.

The Chairman referred to the recent appointment of Richard Flinton as the new Corporate Director of Business and Environmental Services and suggested that he be invited to attend the next meeting of the Forum so as to raise the profile of the Forum.

RESOLVED –

- (i) That the information contained in the Forward Plan is noted and approved and the matters referred to in earlier agenda items be incorporated.
- (ii) That the new Corporate Director - Business and Environmental Services, Richard Flinton be invited to attend the next meeting of the Forum.

113. FUTURE MEETING DATES

RESOLVED –

That the following future meeting dates are agreed:-

- Thursday 15 May 2008 at 10.00 am followed by afternoon site visit – Venue Stokesley area.

- Thursday 21 August 2008 at 10.00 am followed by afternoon site visit – Venue Craven area.
- Thursday 20 November 2008 at 1.00 pm at County Hall, Northallerton.

JW/JD/ALJ