

NORTH YORKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held in the Grand Committee Room, County Hall, Northallerton on 14 May 2009.

PRESENT:-

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

Other Members:- Paul Chapman, Rachel Connolly, Leo Crone, Edward Dennison, Janet Dowling, Tom Halstead, Ian Jakulis, David Shaftoe, Hugh Spencer, John Taylor and Terry Williams.

Officers:- Iain Burgess, Aidan Rayner, Penny Noake (Countryside Services) and Jane Wilkinson (Secretary).

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of County Councillor John Fort BEM, David Gibson, Tony Martin and Tony Turner.

One member of the public.

COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED ARE IN THE MINUTE BOOK

173. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

The Access and Rights of Way Manager read out a letter of resignation from Tony Turner he had the previous day. In view of his sudden and unexpected departure it was suggested that the appointment of a chairman be deferred to the next meeting.

It was agreed that a letter of thanks be sent to Tony Turner thanking him for his service and dedication.

The Access and Rights of Way Manager said that a member of the National Farmers Union had expressed an interest in joining the Forum. Members agreed that he be contacted and invited to join the Forum.

RESOLVED –

That County Councillor Eric Broadbent is elected as Chairman of the North Yorkshire Local Access Forum to hold office for one meeting.

174. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED -

That the appointment of a Vice Chairman of the North Yorkshire Local Access Forum be deferred to the next meeting.

175. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION OF NEW MEMBERS

The Chairman introduced and welcomed the four new Members of the Forum to their first meeting and welcomed the return of Leo Crone and said that he looked forward to working with them in the future.

176. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2009, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and confirmed and be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

177. MATTERS ARISING

None

178. PUBLIC QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS

The Forum was advised that no notice had been received of any public questions or statements to be made at the meeting.

179. ORAL REPORT FROM FORUM SUB-GROUPS

Wider Access & Improving Rights of Way – 16 April 2009

It was reported that only three members had attended the sub group meetings. The general consensus was that if the sub-groups were to continue and be successful a chairman and note-taker should be appointed from within each group. This would enable the groups' activities to be better co-ordinated.

The Access and Rights of Way Manager agreed to provide administrative back-up to each of the sub-groups to support the chairmen and note-takers.

It was also suggested that a more effective use of the time that was available would be for the sub-groups to meet on the same day as the Forum itself and for future Forum site visits to be temporarily suspended until such time as proper structures were in place that enabled the Forum to fully engage with Section 94 Bodies. By meeting on the same day it was hoped that attendance levels would improve. Members suggested and discussed at length various options regarding the content of the Forum's future work programme as well as the meeting arrangements for both the sub-groups and the Forum.

Members noted that if sub-groups meetings were held on the same day as Forum meetings the rules surrounding publication of agendas would only allow those topics listed on the Forum's agenda to be considered.

RESOLVED –

That the August 2009 site visit be cancelled.

That John Taylor is appointed as Chairman and David Shaftoe Note-taker to the Wider Access Sub-Group.

That Rachel Connolly is appointed as Chairman of the Improving Rights of Way sub-group.

That future meetings of the Wider Access and Improving Rights of Way Sub-Groups be held on a trial basis on the same day as Forum meetings.

180. MINUTES - NORTH YORK MOORS NATIONAL PARK LAF

The Forum received the Minutes of the meeting of the North York Moors Local Access Forum held on 3 March 2009.

In respect of Minute Number 08/09 'Update on Discovering Lost Ways' the Forum was advised that the project had now been shelved by DEFRA. As an alternative way forward Natural England had established a group that was seeking to change the relevant legislation.

Members noted that the Yorkshire Dales LAF was not due to meet until the following week.

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the North York Moors LAF held on 3 March be noted.

181. YORKSHIRE AND HUMBER REGIONAL LAF

John Taylor gave an oral account of his attendance at a meeting of the Yorkshire and Humber Regional LAF.

He reported that a presentation given by English Access Forum on the different models of operation used by Forums nationally had been extremely interesting and said that some areas of suggested best practice could perhaps be adopted in North Yorkshire. One suggestion was to use the Forum to act as an initial filter on all Definitive Map applications. The session on how LAFs could best support appointing authorities achieve their objectives, had also been extremely informative and he suggested that the minutes/notes of the regional LAF meeting be circulated to North Yorkshire LAF Members.

The Access and Rights of Way Manager said that the Regional Forum was still relatively new and was still in the process of "finding its feet". He said that he had been surprised to discover that it included representatives from North Yorkshire as he had no knowledge of how they had been nominated. He agreed to contact the organisers and find out the dates of future meetings and if any minutes/notes were available which he would then circulate. He also suggested that it would be useful if an item on the Yorkshire and Humber Regional LAF be included as a standing item on all future agenda. Members supported his suggestion

RESOLVED –

That an item on the Yorkshire and Humber Regional LAF be included as a standing item on all future agenda.

NORTH YORKSHIRE JOINT LAF

In the absence of Tony Turner Forum Members reported how much they had enjoyed the day.

The day had been well-structured and Members were appreciative of the preparation work that had been done that had led to interesting debate in the project groups. Members particularly welcomed the opportunity the event had provided for them to meet with fellow National Park LAF Members and the insight and different perspective this had given them.

In view of the success of the event it was proposed that a joint North Yorkshire LAF event be held annually.

RESOLVED –

That a joint North Yorkshire LAF event be held annually.

182. ENGLAND ACCESS FORUM

The Forum received the Minutes of a meeting held on 11 March 2009 and a copy of presentation slides on Diversity and Equality given by Natural England.

Members noted the item on Gating Orders and asked whether it was appropriate for them to undergo specialist training in this area so that they would be able to give proper advice when an application was received.

The Access and Rights of Way Manager said that whilst many urban authorities were very busy processing Gating Orders he did not anticipate anywhere near the same level of activity in North Yorkshire. The legislation was complicated and he said it would be better if training was provided if and when an application was received.

The Access and Rights of Way Manager agreed to circulate copies of newsletters and details of forthcoming training events to Members.

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of a meeting of the English Access Forum held on 11 March 2009 and a copy of presentation slides on Diversity and Equality given by Natural England be noted.

183. WORK COMPLETED 2008/09

CONSIDERED

The report of the Public Rights of Way Team Leader providing details of the work undertaken by the Ranger Teams during 2008/09.

The Forum received a power-point presentation slideshow comprised of 'before' and 'after' photographs of the various projects that had been undertaken. The Forum was advised that the Ranger Teams always evaluated an entire route, taking into account the number of users when prioritising improvement works.

Members noted from the report that 'obstructions' were the cause of the greatest number of the complaints received. Consequently, the Public Rights of Way Team Leader said that this year, efforts would be focused on distinguishing between those complaints received that related to historic obstructions and those relating to new obstructions. Members were advised that firm action would be taken on all new obstructions. To support this work Natural England had granted the County Council access to one of its databases that contained details of landowners in North Yorkshire who were in receipt of grant monies. The database would be used by Officers to identify landowners on whose land obstructions had been reported.

It was reported that the spring inspections had just been completed and the initial indications were that there had been an improvement on the figures for the previous year.

One benefit of the economic downturn was that the County Council had received some very competitive tenders for works and materials, which had resulted in greater numbers of improvement works being completed than had been originally anticipated. This was especially the case in respect of bridge repair works.

Forum Members commended the Ranger Teams for all their hard work and asked that future reports contain a definition for each of the categories referred to in the report.

RESOLVED –

That the content of the report and presentation be noted.

184. FORWARD PLAN

CONSIDERED –

Report of the Access and Public Rights of Way Manager outlining the Forum's future work programme.

Members said it would be helpful if future reports contained the exact date of future meetings.

Members agreed to discuss in the next round of sub-group meetings the names of those Officers they would like to invite to attend future Forum meetings together with a list questions they would like answered.

Members requested an update on the re-structure of countryside services and a progress report on the design of the new web-site at the next meeting.

RESOLVED –

That the information in the Forward Plan is approved and the comments made at the meeting taken on board.

FUTURE MEETING DATES

RESOLVED –

(1) That the following future meeting dates are agreed:-

- Thursday 20 August 2009 @ 1.00pm at County Hall, Northallerton.
- Thursday 19 November 2009 @ 1.00pm at County Hall, Northallerton.

JW/JD