

North York Moors National Park

c/o Local Access Forum Secretary,
North York Moors National Park
The Old Vicarage, Bondgate, Helmsley, YORK
YO62 5BP

Public Minutes of the meeting held at The Old Vicarage, Helmsley on Tuesday 3 March 2009.

PRESENT:

Mr J Bateman, Mr P Cody, Mrs C Cook, Mrs C Cussons, Mr D Hanson,
Mr P Hay, Mrs J King, Lady E Kirk, Mr M Knaggs, Dr D Leyshon,
Mrs M Mitchell, Mrs N Taylor, Mr G Winn Darley

Apologies:

Mr B Briggs, Mr J Cavana, Mr G Dawson.

Copies of All Documents Considered are in the Minute Book

01/09 Election of Chairman

Resolved:

That Derek Hanson be elected Chair of the Local Access Forum, to take office until the next Annual General Meeting of the Local Access Forum.

02/09 Election of Deputy Chairman

Resolved:

That Catriona Cook be elected Deputy Chair of the Local Access Forum, to take office until the next Annual General Meeting of the Local Access Forum.

03/09 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the public minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2008, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

- a) That under minutes 30/08, 31/08 and 42/08 attendees be amended to attenders.
- b) That under minute 68/08 the fourth bullet point be amended to two separate points:
 - New cycle routes in the park should be suitable for multi-users.
 - That written assurances should be given that promotional material would make cyclists using the Coast to Coast route aware of their obligation to give way to horses and riders. Signage should remind users that the route was available to a variety of users, not just cycles.

04/09 Matters Arising

a) There were no matters arising directly from the minutes.

b) Jonathan Bateman was introduced to the Forum as the new Member under the category of 'Members representing users of rights of way and access land'.

b) The National Trails (NT) Officer gave a presentation on the review of National Trails. A copy of the presentation appears in the minute book.

In response to a question from a Forum Member the Officer explained that the % of National Trails using volunteers was a calculation based on the number of routes using volunteers rather than the total number of volunteers in relation to the length of National Trails. He added that the term 'product' referred to grading and quality improvements rather than general maintenance costs.

Members raised the following points in discussion:

- Regional routes were subject to less use due to the amount of roads involved which could deter some users. Appropriate links avoiding main roads were important if routes were to be promoted and used by the public.
- The survey results concentrated on walkers rather than horse riders and issues such as using public transport to access routes were not applicable to horse riders.
- The high level of staffing costs on routes other than the Cleveland Way was highlighted and it was suggested that the promotion of best practice by officers working on the Cleveland way could be helpful.
- The marketing of National Trails needed to be appropriate and consistent.

Hillary Scott from Natural England (NE) was introduced to the Forum as the Regional NE contact officer. She explained that this was the first time these national figures had been collated and made available and it was hoped concerns could now be addressed and work on National Trails could be progressed.

In response to a question from a Forum Member regarding the provision of information via the web and the expectation that an increasing number of members of the public would be able to access the information in this way the NT officer explained that what was required was one website with a consistent source of information. Currently there were no other firm proposals for provision of information. Members considered that some form of document or leaflet would be required to prevent exclusion of those without access to the website.

c) Recreation & Access (R&A) Strategy – in response to a question from a Member regarding the identification of rock climbing sites within the Park which were contained in the R&A Strategy, the Director of Recreation & Park Management (R&PM) explained that the document was not being promoted as a source of information for visitors and users but rather it was a document for the Authority and staff to use to guide the strategic direction of the organisation with regard to recreation and access issues.

05/09 Rights of Way Action Plan and Performance Indicator Results.

Considered:

The report of the Access Officer.

The Director of R&PM gave a presentation a copy of which appears in the minute book.

In response to a question from Forum Member the Director of R&PM explained that there had been approx. 30 definitive map modification orders (DMMOs) in the last year and work was ongoing to ensure outstanding issues were resolved.

Members raised the issue of replacement and provision of bridges to ensure that rights of way met the criteria of the BVPI methodology. The Recreation & Access (R&A) officer explained that in some cases routes were fine during the summer months but following prolonged periods of wet weather or during the winter there were sometimes occasions when a route could become impassable due to water levels. The Authority then had to decide what was the most reasonable use of the limited resources i.e. diversion of the path to the nearest bridge or erection of a new bridge that may only be required for a limited number of days per year. Officers also relied on comments received from members of the public to highlight particular problem areas.

Members raised the following points in discussion:

- Educating farmers and landowners about unrecorded routes which existed on their land would be beneficial in getting routes recognised in the future.
- The adoption of a 'mediation panel' drawn from LAF members to help landowners and the Authority come to an agreement regarding unrecorded routes.
- Landowners could be contacted to ask if any signposts on their land were missing in order to improve performance against this target. The Director of R&PM agreed to try to promote this through the Moors Messenger.
- A Member reported that problems regarding the quality of bridleways in the Sinnington area had been raised by the Parish Council. The R&A officer advised the Forum that there had been an increase in the number of horses in the area and a subsequent increase in the use of bridleways. The Authority needed time and resources to respond to this increase in use.
- A Member advised the Forum that routes in Troutdale, Langdale and the Blue Man Walk were impassable due to bad weather and a lack of maintenance. The Director of R&PM advised that bad weather last year had affected many of the routes in the Park and work was ongoing to try to remedy these problem areas.
- A Member asked if there had been problems securing agreements with NE to carry out works, such as drainage, to improve rights of way in SSSIs. The R&A officer explained that NE regional officers had consented to works which had been required in the Park and no problems had been experienced.

In relation to the fluctuation in the 'easy to use by the public' figure the Director of R&PM explained that this information had related to a very small sample and had only been recorded for 3 years and therefore should not be relied upon to show overall trend data. He recommended that Members consider this information in more detail when results were available in future years.

In response to a question from a Member about methodology the R&A officer explained that bridleways were judged on whether the route could be accessed by a horse rider and the methodology would not include cyclists, and a footpath would be judged from a walkers perspective.

A Member proposed that the Forum should urge the Authority to focus on paths used by the public and the Authority's Business Plan should be amended to reflect that work to improve targets and performance in the area of rights of way should be a priority. Forum Members were supportive of improvements but agreed that targets needed to be realistic and achievable given the resource constraints, the number of users and the problems caused by extreme weather conditions. Forum Members noted that the target had been increased since last year despite not being achieved, and considered this was ambitious.

Resolved:

That Members noted the contents of the report and priority be given to work to improve the result of the easy to use performance indicator.

06/09 Recreation Events

Considered:

The report of the Recreation & Access officer.

The R&A officer advised the Forum that recreation events taking place in the Park were monitored particularly to ensure there was no damage to SSSIs. On many occasions organisers contacted the Authority to advise them of events even if there was no obligation for them to do so. Officers and Rangers were involved in work to change routes, signage and timings of events in order to ensure the impact on the area was kept to a minimum. However, there was no financial contribution to these events from the Authority.

Members recommended that landowners and user groups should be encouraged to work with the Authority to manage events and maintain a balance between activities and the rights of users.

Resolved:

That Members noted the contents of the report.

07/09 Delivering the Rights of Way Improvement Plans for North Yorkshire and Redcar & Cleveland

Mr Knaggs declared a personal interest as a Member of the North Yorkshire LAF.

Considered:

The report of the Recreation & Access officer.

The R&A officer advised Members that the Authority had received £50,000 from NYCC for Rights of Way improvement works. The NYCC ROWIP had prompted a number of actions and priorities and it was hoped that this report outlining actions would be repeated in future years to help target activity.

Members were keen to ensure that work started as part of the Heritage Connections project was maintained to ensure continued promotion of the National Park to young people, disadvantaged groups and BEM groups. The R&A officer conceded there were problems trying to ensure all groups, particularly informal ones, were aware of the provision in the National Park.

Resolved:

That Members noted the contents of the report.

08/09 Update on Discovering Lost Ways

The R&A officer advised Members that resources had been used to employ staff to put together case files on unrecorded routes and the Authority was now working to employ contractors to move these cases forward.

As discussed under a previous item Forum Members agreed that a small panel should be set up to assist and mediate in cases of difficulty in order to ensure good relations between the Authority and the landowner and to help gain an outcome in the best interest of the public.

A group of 5 Members was appointed: Mr George Winn-Darley, Dr David Leyshon, Mrs Catriona Cook, Lady Elizabeth Kirk and Mr Paul Cody and it was agreed that up to 2 members of this group would be nominated to deal with each route should the need arise. Where meetings were required these would be treated as approved duties for the purposes of payment of Members Allowances.

Members agreed that in future discussions 'Lost Ways' would be referred to as 'Unrecorded Ways'.

Resolved:

That Members noted the contents of the report.

09/09 Verbal Update on Coastal Access

The R&A officer advised Members that NE had published a revised scheme and the Bill was being deliberated in this parliamentary session. The Government was committed to ensuring the Bill would go through before the next summer recess. The English National Park Authorities Association (ENPAA) had raised concerns regarding 'relevant authorities' and it was now expected that although this would not be changed it was anticipated that Natural England would delegate responsibility to the appropriate National Park Authority.

There would be no change in rights of way legislation as part of the Bill and in designated areas the Open Access land would roll in should it become necessary due to erosion. Issues surrounding the coastal bridleway were still to be resolved. Details on management schemes were still awaited particularly as there would be differences on what could be done on Open Access land in comparison to PROW. A Forum Member expressed concern that this was a particular issue when cattle and cows with calves were grazing. In relation to dogs NE have suggested 'under close control = within sight and can be recalled'. This has been highlighted and NE are considering further.

Members expressed concern that differences between Open Access Land and PROW could be confusing for the public. The R&A officer conceded this could cause problems and explained that signing would have to precisely define which was a PROW and which was Open Access land. He added that a peg was available which could help to define land use without interfering with the management.

A Member advised the Forum that this area had been targeted to look at equine access along the coast. The local British Horse Society were checking routes and would be inviting representatives from NE to visit farmers in the area to discuss this.

10/09 Induction Training for New Local Access Forum Members

Considered:

The report of the Member Services Officer/Secretary to the Local Access Forum.

Members were supportive of the proposals and suggested the following documents could be added to the induction pack:

- Glossary of Terms
- List of local partnerships
- Responsibilities of other LAF Members
- Codes of practice for recreation events, dogs, moorland access and others as appropriate.

Members agreed the activities proposed should be optional and existing Members welcomed the opportunity to participate in some of the activities in the future.

Members also suggested the Authority should put together a database of legislation and computerised documents held which could be used as a resource by Forum members for research. Copies of documents should also be made available for Forum members to borrow.

Resolved:

That Forum members expressed support for the proposed areas of induction training with the proviso that activities should be optional and that the additional documents listed should be added to the 'Induction Pack'.

11/09 Consultation on a Strategy for the North Yorkshire Countryside.

Considered:

The consultation document issued by North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC).

Members raised the following points in discussion:

- The consultation needed to be aimed more specifically at the remit and area of the LAF.
- Consultation documents of this type need to be circulated to Members earlier so that there is more time to consider a response.
- A covering report to the document would be helpful in order to direct Forum Members attention.
- Forum Members should have been advised that an extension to the response time had been secured so that they could respond fully.

A Forum Member raised the issue of footpaths and rights of way which provide access from towns to the countryside and the Park, and the how developments outside of the Park boundary could affect these rights of way and impact on the nature and access to the Park. Some Members of the Forum supported these comments particularly where developments could affect the use of the PROW network into the Park. Other Members considered that discussion of developments and building outside of the Park boundary and the potential impacts was the not within the remit of this Forum.

The following additions were proposed to the text and agreed by the Forum and would be forwarded to NYCC as the comments from this LAF:

Page 18, second paragraph " undulating wooded hills and flat farmland *all threaded by little old lanes and roads which are an expression of the history of the countryside,* and scattered.....

Page 36 The Resource – additional bullet point: *Roman, medieval and historic hedged lanes, pack horse bridges and stone trods.*

Resolved:

That the proposed additions would be forwarded to NYCC as the comments from this LAF.

12/09 Verbal Update on Activity to Tackle Illegal/Damaging Vehicular Activity

The Recreation & Access (R&A) Officer updated the Forum on activity. Langdale Quest had ceased operating although the website had continued to be active for a time afterwards. There was still some illegal vehicular activity taking place but it was hoped that an increased Ranger presence and the support of the Police would help to reduce this. Joint action days had been held with the Police and there had been a number of articles in the press both locally and regionally.

A Forum Member reported that gamekeepers had offered to help the Ranger service identify areas where activity was taking place and to report vehicles that were sighted. They were disappointed that this offer had not been taken up. The R&A officer advised that the majority of activity was taking place in the south west of the park where there was less keeper presence, however, the "spotter" role of keepers was helpful and they were encouraged to contact the Rangers to report sightings.

Members were keen to see that with the demise of Langdale Quest a positive message could be promoted which educated vehicular users on their rights and the appropriate areas and routes which could be used.

13/09 Verbal Update on Newtondale Forest Drive from the Forestry Commission

The Forestry Commission Officer updated the Forum on proposed changes to the Newtondale Forest Drive. The Forest Drive was to be closed as a vehicular right as maintenance of the route had become too difficult. Other users' rights and residents' access rights would not be affected. A small car park would be made available near Levisham Station so that walkers could park their cars and use the route on foot. Although the Newtondale picnic area would not be accessible by car it was proposed that alternative facilities would be provided. The officer advised that the consultation was ongoing and once complete use of the route would be monitored and gates would be closed if necessary.

A Forum Member expressed concern that if a rider using the route had a fall it could be difficult for emergency services to gain access. The officer explained that emergency services would be issued with an access key for any gates which were closed.

Members understood the reasons for closure of the route and received the report with regret.

14/09 Joint North Yorkshire Local Access Forum Meeting

The Forum was advised that the Chairman and R&A Officer had attended a briefing for the meeting. Copies of the agenda and other papers had been forwarded to Members who were attending the meeting.

15/09 Appointment of Representatives on Other Bodies

Nominations were requested for LAF representation on outside bodies. The following Members were elected:

- Unsurfaced, Unclassified Roads Liaison Group – Mrs Catriona Cook and Lady Elizabeth Kirk with one person to attend the meeting.
- Yorkshire and Humber Regional Access Forum – Mrs Catriona Cook and Mrs Muriel Mitchell
- Natural England meetings/workshops as they arose – Mrs Norma Taylor

16/09 Report back from the National Park Authority

The Authority had allocated £60k to be spent on work on Unrecorded Ways and work was underway.

17/09 Items for Future Meetings

Members suggested the following items for future meetings:

- A presentation from the Education Officers on recent work.
- A site visit to be held as part of the June 2009 meeting.

18/09 Date of Next Meeting:

Tuesday 2 June 2009