

NORTH YORKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held at County Hall, Northallerton on 20 August 2009.

PRESENT:-

North Yorkshire County Council:- County Councillors John Fort BEM, Robert Heseltine and Mike Knaggs.

Other Members:- Rachel Connolly, Leo Crone, Edward Dennison, Janet Dowling, David Gibson, Tony Martin, Hugh Spencer, John Taylor, Martin Wiles and Terry Williams.

Officers:-Paul Whittaker (Economic & Rural Services) Joanne Coote and Penny Noake (Countryside Services) and Jane Wilkinson (Secretary).

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Ian Jakulis, Tom Halstead and Stephen Ramsden.

One member of the public.

COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED ARE IN THE MINUTE BOOK

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

The Forum was informed that Stephen Ramsden who was currently away on holiday had before the meeting indicated his willingness to stand as Chairman.

RESOLVED –

- (i) That County Councillor John Fort BEM is elected Chairman of the North Yorkshire Local Access Forum to hold office for one meeting.
- (ii) That Stephen Ramsden is thereafter elected Chairman of the North Yorkshire Local Access Forum until the first meeting of the Forum after 1 April 2010.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED -

That John Taylor is elected as Vice Chair of the North Yorkshire Local Access Forum to hold office until the first meeting of the Forum after 1 April 2010.

3. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION OF NEW MEMBER

The Chairman welcomed Martin Wiles to his first meeting.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 May 2009, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and confirmed and be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

5. MATTERS ARISING

None

6. 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.

7. COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE RESTRUCTURE

Paul Whittaker reported that the revised management structure for Economic and Rural Service had now been agreed and was in the process of being implemented. A copy of the new management structure chart was tabled at the meeting. Forum Members noted the appointment of Richard Walker as the new Head of Countryside Services. Paul Whittaker reported that a further structure review of Countryside Services below the level of the four Team Leaders was currently in progress.

The objective of the new management structure was to reduce the number of posts and to reinvest those savings in front-line services. This would increase the capacity of the four Team Leaders to deal with front-line issues. Further progress would be reported to the November meeting when it was anticipated that the review would be complete.

In recognition of the commitment and dedication of the Forum it was reported that the Corporate Director – Business and Environmental Service had agreed to provide the Forum with a small budget and dedicated administrative support. Final details would be agreed with the Chairman on his return from holiday.

In response to questions from Members the Forum was advised that the re-structure would not impact adversely on current operational matters. Once finalised the re-structure would increase capacity that would allow the substantial outstanding backlog of reported incidents to be tackled. This was evidenced by the recent appointment of four people to the Definitive Map Team on a temporary basis. It was hoped that the re-structure would result in permanent career graded posts being created. It was emphasised that the County Council was fully aware of the situation surrounding the backlog which was why the re-structure had been devised.

Members supported in principal the objectives of the re-structure but remained sceptical. They expressed concern that previously the lack of a 'figurehead' for the Forum had resulted in communication difficulties. Some consultation documents had in the past failed to reach Forum Members and the Secretary's details on the County Council's web-site were incorrect. Members said they were keen to raise the profile of the Forum and to work proactively with Section 94(4) bodies however this was proving to be very challenging. It was agreed that Section 94(4) bodies should be sent a prepared letter enclosing the principles underpinning the Forum and reminding them of their duty to consult.

Paul Whittaker acknowledged Members concerns and was fully supportive of the Forum's objectives. He said that in future administrative support to the Forum would be provided by Kate Gray within the Business and Environmental Services central support team. Her contact details would be circulated following the meeting. He confirmed that she would type correspondence and reports, book meeting rooms and act as a contact point for members. Members said that it was important that the arrangements were formalised as soon as possible to avoid further difficulties.

RESOLVED

That the revised management structure for Economic and Rural Services be noted.

8. ORAL REPORTS FROM FORUM SUB-GROUPS

It was reported that the sub-groups had not met since the previous meeting of the Forum on account of the state of flux due to the re-structure of economic and rural services and changes in Forum membership. Arrangements were in hand for the sub-groups to meet before the November meeting of the Forum. An open invitation to attend sub-group meetings was extended to all new members.

Penny Noake referred to the training paper on improving disabled access in the countryside attached to the agenda and reported that a survey on service centres had been modified to take account of views expressed by David Shaftoe. The survey was now more inclusive. She acknowledged that at present there were approximately only 20 routes in North Yorkshire outside of the National Parks that were suitable for use by the disabled.

Copies of documents provided to new members at a recently held training session were available from Rachel Connolly.

NOTED

9. RESPONSE TO LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN 3 INITIAL CONSULTATION

CONSIDERED

Paul Whittaker drew Members attention to the consultation document for the Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP3) attached to the agenda. The closing date for responses to the initial consultation was 30 September 2009. He invited the Forum to respond formally to the survey questions and to take part in the next stage of the consultation when during 2010 the views of stakeholders and communities on what they see as being priorities for improvements to the local transport system after 2011 would be sought. He said that the Local Transport Team would welcome an opportunity to meet with the Forum early in 2010.

Members agreed that it was important that the Forum participate in the consultation as it was recognised that the Local Transport Plan was a source of funding improvements identified in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWiP).

Members considered the questions attached to the survey document and agreed to respond in writing making general observations as opposed to responding to each of the posed questions. The response would emphasise in particular the need for greater integration between the LTP and the ROWiP (promotion of health benefits) and for the needs of vulnerable non-road users to be specifically recognised.

It was agreed that authority be delegated to the temporary Chair to draft the wording of the final response.

Forum Members voiced their support to meet with the Local Transport Team and requested that an event be organised early in 2010.

A member requested specific details of how and where the monies allocated in LTP2 to implement the ROWiP had been spent. Paul Whittaker agreed to provide a written response following the meeting.

RESOLVED –

- (i) That the Chair (County Councillor John Fort) submit a formal response on behalf of the Local Access Forum to the initial consultation on the Local Transport Plan 3.

- (ii) That a consultation meeting with the Local Transport Plan team be added to the Work Programme and be organised in early 2010.

10. YORKSHIRE AND HUMBER REGIONAL LAF

Paul Whittaker said he had nothing new to report. The Regional LAF had not met since the previous meeting of the Forum and did not appear to be functioning properly.

Members agreed that communications with the Regional LAF had proved particularly problematic and that notes of the meeting attended by John Taylor were still awaited. Despite the problems Members all agreed that the role of the Regional LAF was important and it was vital that the North Yorkshire LAF continued to feed into both the Regional and National LAF.

Paul Whittaker agreed with Members that the Regional LAF had an important role to play and agreed to make a further attempt at contact.

The Forum debated the merit of nominating representatives to attend future Regional LAF meetings on behalf of North Yorkshire. Following a lengthy debate, the consensus was that it would better not to appoint named representatives on the grounds of increased flexibility. Members agreed that as and when details of the next Regional LAF meeting were known all members of the North Yorkshire LAF be given the opportunity to attend.

In the absence of the Chairman elect the Vice Chair agreed in the interim to oversee work on the Regional LAF.

Tony Martin reported on his attendance at a meeting of the Tees Valley Local Access Forum. The Tees Valley Forum was a joint Forum comprised of four different local authority's that each paid a contribution towards the appointment of part-time lead officer. This structure appeared to work very efficiently with the lead-officer acting as a figure-head who also applied for external funding to fund projects identified in the ROWiP. Members said they were keen to learn best practice from other Forums and noted that the Forums that were most successful were those with a strong partnership between the appointing authority and the Forum. Paul Whittaker noted the comments of Members and agreed to report them back to the Corporate Director – Business & Environmental Services.

RESOLVED –

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

11. DRAFT MINUTES - NORTH YORK MOORS NATIONAL PARK LAF

The Forum received the draft Minutes of the meeting of the North York Moors Local Access Forum held on 19 May 2009.

RESOLVED –

That the draft Minutes of the meeting of the North York Moors LAF held on 19 May 2009 be noted.

12. FORWARD PLAN

CONSIDERED –

Report of the Rights of Way Team Leader outlining the Forum's future work programme.

Paul Whittaker reported that draft Annual Report would be referred to the November meeting.

Members referred to previous comments about proactive working and suggested items they would like added to the Work Programme. Paul Whittaker agreed to Members requests for the following items to be added to the Work Programme:-

November Meeting

- Annual Report 2009 (NYCC Aidan Rayner)
- Ministry of Defence (Richard Brookes) Access to ROW on MOD Land at Catterick

February Meeting

- Minerals & Waste Development Framework (NYCC – Rob Smith)
- Highway Matters within NYCC and report on Unsurfaced, Unclassified Roads, (NYCC - David Bowe)

Rachel Connolly referred to the on-going consultation by the Highways Agency on the A1 Upgrade and suggested that the Forum submit a formal response. Members supported her suggestion and agreed to write to the Highways Agency expressing interest and asking to be part of the formal consultation.

At the request of Members dates and times for sub-group meetings were agreed.

Settle Riverside was suggested as a possible venue for the May 2010 site visit. Members supported this suggestion on the proviso that some follow-up work be undertaken by the Forum and included on the agenda following the site visit. Penny Noake agreed to draft some proposals in this regard for the Forum to consider.

In response to a request it was agreed that all Members of the Forum should be regularly supplied with a copy of the Countryside Service News and a copy of the latest Guidance issued by DEFRA on Local Access Forums in England.

RESOLVED –

- (i) That the next meeting of the sub-groups be held as follows:-
 - Wider Access 22 October 2009 @ 9.45am at County Hall
 - Improving ROW 22 October 2009 @ 11.15 am at County Hall
- (ii) That the information in the Forward Plan is approved and the suggestions made at the meeting incorporated.

13. FUTURE MEETING DATES

RESOLVED –

- (i) That the next meeting of the Forum be held on Thursday 19 November 2009 @ 10.00 am at County Hall, Northallerton.
- (ii) That the Chairman agree meeting dates for February, May and August 2010 and to circulate details to Members.

URGENT BUSINESS

The Chairman agreed that the following item be dealt with as an item of special urgency in order to agree future measures in the interests of public safety.

14. INCIDENTS INVOLVING DOGS AND CATTLE

A Member referred to a number of accidents reported in the press involving dog-owners walking on rights of way in fields of cattle. He called upon the County Council to work with the two national parks to educate the public so as to avoid further accidents.

It was acknowledged that many of the people who used the rights of way network were visitors who lived outside North Yorkshire who would be difficult to contact. Members suggested that during the summer months the North York Times should include a standard article warning the public of the dangers. It was also suggested that veterinary surgeries could be asked to display a standard warning notice in their waiting rooms. Other suggestions included the use of bye-laws to forbid dogs on rights of way and the use of orders to temporarily close rights of way or re-route them around the edge of fields although the cost of this was thought to be prohibitive. Finally it was suggested that the Volunteers be utilised to survey/maintain way mark posts in large fields in order to assist users from veering off route.

RESOLVED -

- (i) That North Yorkshire County Council issue a press release warning the public of the dangers when using rights of way that cross fields of cattle.
- (ii) That authority be delegated to the vice chair to agree the wording of a warning notice to be displayed in the waiting rooms of veterinary practices.
- (iii) That an article warning the public of the dangers when using rights of way that cross fields of cattle be published in the North Yorkshire Times.
- (iv) That Officers investigate the options for prohibiting dogs at certain times from rights of way that cross fields of cattle.

JW/JD/ALJ