

Meeting of the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Local Access Forum
Held on Monday 13 September 2010
Wakefield Town Hall

Present:

Terry Howard (TH)	Sheffield Local Access Forum
Richard Holmes (RH)	Wakefield Local Access Forum
Arthur Hodgson (AH)	East Riding of Yorkshire and Kingston upon Hull Local Access Forum
Hazel Armstrong (HA)	East Riding of Yorkshire and Kingston upon Hull Local Access Forum
Catriona Cook (CC)	North York Moors Local Access Forum
John Siddall (JS)	Doncaster Local Access Forum
Jerry Pearlman (JP)	Yorkshire Dales Access Forum
Mike Willison (MW)	Leeds Local Access Forum
John Harker (JH)	Rotherham Local Access Forum
Terry Norris (TN)	West Yorkshire Local Access Forum
John Taylor (JT)	North Yorkshire Local Access Forum
Hillary Scott (HS)	Natural England
Rachel Briggs (RB)	Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority

1. Welcome and Introductions

RH welcomed everyone to Wakefield and members were asked to introduce themselves. RB was welcomed as the new Regional LAF Coordinator and HS was welcomed from Natural England (NE).

RH asked HS to provide an update on NE issues as she would be leaving the meeting early.

Coastal Access

The government are still keen to push ahead with the commencement of coastal access though NE are unsure about the funding until the comprehensive spending review in October. The first stretch at Weymouth is still planned for 2012 and after that a further four pilot areas will be commenced. HA informed the meeting that the pilot area in East Riding had been withdrawn as elected members had decided this was not feasible considering the current economic climate. HA stressed that PROW officers from the council are still keen to see the pilot go ahead. HS added that the stretch at East Riding would be opened eventually and that it was preferable to have council backing on it. RH asked members of the regional LAF to offer their support to NE in the opening of the section in the East Riding. All Agreed.

Members of the Regional LAF offered their support to NE in the opening of the section of coastal access path in the East Riding of Yorkshire.
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2. Lost Ways

HS informed the meeting that the decision with regards to unrecorded routes was now with DEFRA and that after the spending review this might become clearer.

JT said that the North Yorkshire LAF had taken the decision not to look at lost ways as there are other, more important issues for the LAF to consider. There was some concern about this and CC said that it was an incredibly important project for higher rights users.

JP suggested that a good starting point would be to look at the claims made in the National Park and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 but that never went forward. JT wondered who would be doing all this work? JP thought that visiting record offices would be a specialised job but that looking at the routes on the ground could be carried out by volunteers.

HA suggested that the regional LAF write to NE and DEFRA saying that members would like ten years adding to the 2026 cut off date. This was agreed by members and it was agreed that, together, RB and JP would write the letter.

RB and JP to write to NE and DEFRA with regards to the cut off date for lost ways.

3. South Pennines Moorwatch

HS told members that Steve Westwood, Natural England National Trails Officer, had been unable to attend the meeting but that he would be willing to attend at a later date to discuss Moorwatch.

HA thought that this would be a good idea and asked if he could bring along a selection of the signs he uses on PROW.

JP said he would welcome Steve Westwood coming along and added that an officer from the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority could be invited as well to update members on the Traffic Regulation Orders used in the Yorkshire Dales.

RB to invite Steve Westwood from NE and an officer from the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority to a future meeting to discuss the improper use of PROW.

4. Minutes of the last meeting

Landlocked access land

TH asked what was meant by 'reasonable access' with regards to timescales for the establishment of access points. JP said that in legal terms it meant that it was a 'matter of fact and degree'.

The minutes of the last meeting were approved as a true record of the meeting.

5. The role of the regional LAF coordinator

RB was introduced to members. She explained what her role would entail and stressed that the contract was until the end of March 2011 for three days a month. RH hoped that with a regional coordinator in post, that the link between LAFs, the regional LAF and the England Access Forum (and hence ministers) would be improved.

6. Training for the regional LAF

RH informed members that, as part of RB's role, a training event for the regional LAF was to be organised. RH, HA and RB had a meeting previous to the regional LAF meeting and had looked at some suggestions for training events but it was hoped that members could add to this. The following list of suggestions was put together by members:

- Outreach
- Marketing your LAF
- Repairing PROW
- Running your LAF
- Dealing with the improper use of PROW
- Types of PROW
- Quangos and abbreviations
- Review of open access
- Gating orders
- Cross boundary consultations
- Dealing with consultations
- Section 94(4) notices

RB said she would send the list to all LAFs and ask which topics their LAF would like to see discussed. Once this information is received, RB will circulate a date and venue.

7. The Local Transport Plan (LTP3)

HA informed members that some local authorities are saying there is no funding for their Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) yet some have begun to revise their RoWIP. She urged members to go back to their LAF and ask what amendments are going on.

All members to ask their LAF what is happening with regards to their RoWIP.

RH told members that there was a meeting on 4 October in West Yorkshire to look at the LTP3. He added that he would not be able to attend and asked for a representative to attend for the region. MW said he would attend.

MW to attend the LTP3 workshop in West Yorkshire and feedback to the regional LAF at the next meeting.

8. Review of the England Access Forum

HA reminded members that a letter had been sent to all LAFs asking for their opinion of the England Access Forum (EAF). The deadline for the response is the end of September. HA added that the EAF was an important link for ensuring LAF advice is channelled to the right place.

JP informed members that he used to be a member of the National Countryside Access Forum which was the precursor to the EAF. He said it was a great success as relevant organisations and agencies were also present.

JT said that there was very little communication from the EAF to the North Yorkshire LAF. He agreed that the EAF should continue to exist but he thought they should communicate far more effectively.

All members to remind their LAF to respond to the EAF letter by the end of September.
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9. Last minutes of the England Access Forum

HA went through the minutes of the last meeting of the EAF and picked out the salient points.

Dual status routes

CC thought that this issue was of national importance and that it should be stressed to ministers that other users are losing their rights. CC asked members to urge their local authorities to look after them.

Forestry

HA informed members that Natural England are currently looking at this issue.

Gating orders

HA is currently asking Natural England for the number of gating orders made. JH added that LAFs should know about all the gating orders in their area and that they could the figures from their secretary.

The next meeting of the EAF is due to be in October.

10. Rights of way review committee

JP informed members that this committee is a group of all sorts of people who all have an interest in PROW and that, traditionally, the group has been chaired by a member of parliament. The rumour is that the government will no longer be servicing this very useful group. JP asked members for their support for the group to continue. HA suggested that the issue be picked up at the next meeting of the EAF.

11. News from the Local Access Forums

CC drew members attention to the government white paper on the natural environment. She said that access was not mentioned within the document and that access was vital when trying to conserve the natural features of the PROW network. CC agreed to circulate her response to the members of the regional LAF for RB to send as the response from the regional LAF.

CC to send her response to the government white paper on the natural environment to RB to circulate (see Annex 1).

TH asked if the ten year review of open access was still going ahead. RH said he would find out from the EAF.

RH to speak to members of the EAF about the ten year review of open access.

JT asked what had happened to the DEFRA consultation 'The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and structures (gate, gaps and stiles) on rights of way'. RB said she would find out.

RB to find out what happened to the DEFRA consultation 'The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and structures (gate, gaps and stiles) on rights of way'.

11. Date and venue of the next meeting

The next meeting will be in April and will be held in a central location e.g. York.

Annex 1

Yorkshire and Humber Regional Access Forum Response to the Government White Paper on the Natural Environment

The Yorkshire and Humber Regional Access Forum are concerned that the public will only cherish and want to preserve the natural environment if they have access to it to enable them to enjoy and understand it. This means that there needs to be a comprehensive rights of way network, both locally and nationally, for all. Multi user routes deliver Best Value, benefiting more people when using public resources.

- Many historic landscape features exist on under and unrecorded routes, and if they remain un-recorded they have no protection. These linear routes (old unsurfaced roads, sunken holloways, packhorse bridges etc) provide corridors for wildlife, and if they are properly recorded as public rights of way, they are then protected from being destroyed by private landowners.
- It is impossible to access the natural environment using the rights of way without using the road network too. The volume of motor traffic often means that the road links between rights of way are unusable. Behind the hedge safe links need to be created, not just as footpaths but for all non-motorised people. They also act as wildlife corridors, and can co-exist with public access successfully.
- The future shaping of Natural England needs to address the access issue to the natural environment for everybody; that is walkers, the less able, riders of horses and cycles and drivers of horses. The government needs to support local and voluntary groups and Local Access Fora, (the Big Society), who are already trying to provide a comprehensive multi user network of routes for everybody to access the natural environment.
- The value of the rights of way network both financially to the local economy and tourism, and for people's emotional and physical health must be emphasized by Defra and NE at all levels.
- The effects of any future legislation must be thought through and not be deleterious to one group of people. For example equestrians have had ridden and driven access to the foreshore since time immemorial, but since the Marine and Coastal Access Act, the foreshore is now Open Access Land from the CROW Act which has a restriction on horses on Open Access land. The Act does say that all existing rights will be honoured but since equestrian access is not written down under any legislation, in effect and certainly for future generations, equestrian access has been lost.
- All government departments and agencies need to work together, rather than having opposing priorities as at present. Defra, the Departments of Transport and Culture and Heritage, Highway Authorities, and Health Authorities need to work together over access to the natural environment. Despite the government wishing to take things to a local level rather than dictating from a national level; as regards access to the countryside, there needs to be national standards and priorities.

Catrina Cook, North York Moors Local Access Forum