

NORTH YORKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held in The Grand Meeting Room, County Hall, Northallerton on 17 February 2011.

PRESENT:-

John Taylor in the Chair.

Rachel Connolly, Leo Crone, Edward Dennison, Janet Dowling, David Gibson, Tom Halstead, County Council Robert Hesletine, Tony Martin, Hugh Spencer, Catherine Wardroper, Pat Whelan and Martin Wiles.

Officers:- Penny Noake, Aidan Rayner and Richard Walker (Countryside Service), Jane Wilkinson (Legal and Democratic Services).

In attendance County Councillor John Batt.

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors John Fort and David Jeffels.

COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED ARE IN THE MINUTE BOOK

84. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2010, be agreed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman subject to Tony Martin being added to the list of those present at the meeting.

85. MATTERS ARISING

None

86. PUBLIC QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS

There were no statements or questions from members of the public.

87. NORTH YORK MOORS NATIONAL PARK LAF

Draft copies of minutes of a meeting held on 7 December 2010 were circulated for information.

RESOLVED –

That the draft Minutes of the North York Moors National Park LAF held on 7 December 2010 be noted.

88. RECORD OF ACTIONS

The report of the Chairman listing actions completed since the previous meeting.

With regard to the draft Unsurfaced Unclassified Roads Policy the Forum was advised that the public consultation was still underway. It was agreed that

Doug Huzzard be invited to attend the meeting of the Forum in May to present the results of the consultation and the final draft policy. Members requested sight of the draft policy in advance of the agenda papers being circulated so that they had time to properly consider its content.

Members referred to the Minutes of the previous meeting (Minute No 80) when it had been agreed that the Chairman would write two letters concerning access to open access land and proposing conditions to be attached to Higher Level Stewardship Agreements. Concerns about the effectiveness of lobbying both the Regional Access Forum and the English Access Forum were expressed. As both matters were of national concern it was agreed that the Chairman should send further letters to DEFRA.

The Chairman to write to DEFRA inviting the Government to amend legislation to allow access to open access land.

The Chairman to write to DEFRA requesting that it be a condition of all Higher Level Stewardship Agreements that access to open access land is granted.

That a copy of the draft policy on Unsurfaced Unclassified Roads be circulated to Forum Members in advance of agenda papers being distributed for the May meeting.

That Doug Huzzard be invited to attend the meeting of the Forum in May to present the results of public consultation and the draft policy on Unsurfaced Unclassified Roads.

89. REVENUE BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Forum received an oral report from Richard Walker Head of Countryside Services. In summarising the County Council's budget he highlighted the reduction in Government grants and the front loading of required savings. The overall financial position was worse than had been originally anticipated and there remained a shortfall despite a wide range of savings being identified. Consequently the County Council had agreed an interim budget with the shortfall being funded from reserves. Work to identify the required additional savings was ongoing and the County Council was due to agree its final budget in May 2011. The uncertainty surrounding the final position meant that it was impossible to give a definitive answer on what the impact would be on rights of way budget other than to say there would be an overall reduction.

Every effort was being made to limit the impact of the cuts and assurances were given that if savings proposals would result in there being a significant impact on service delivery the Forum would be consulted.

Forum Members recognised the seriousness of the situation and were keen to contribute to the County Council's savings plans and made the following suggestions:-

- Catering – the provision of lunch be withdrawn from Forum meetings.
- Sponsorship – The County Council explore options for specific routes including harnessing support through the parish council initiative and through offering a range of products in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan
- Complaints – The County Council consider the introduction of charging members of the public who lodge vexatious and/or serial unsubstantiated complaints on rights of way matters

- Volunteers – take steps to ensure capacity is maximised – expand the role of elected members to promote to parish councils the volunteer resource available

Richard Walker thanked Members for their suggestions and agreed to explore sponsorship opportunities when reviewing the Service Plan.

A report on sponsorship opportunities is added to the Work Programme.

A copy of the newsletter detailing the activities of the County Council's rights of way volunteers is circulated to Forum Members.

90. PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY MAINTENANCE BUDGET

The report of the Public Rights of Way Team Leader providing details of current budget provision and expenditure on PROW maintenance in North Yorkshire outside the National Parks.

Members noted the content of the report.

91. THE FUTURE OF THE PUBLIC FOREST ESTATE IN ENGLAND

It was reported that following publication of the agenda papers the Government had abandoned the consultation about the future ownership and management of the public forest estate in England.

There was general consensus that the Government was rethinking the terms of the disposal and that the likelihood was that a new consultation would be launched shortly.

The Chairman said that the consultation had highlighted the weakness of current access arrangements to the public forest in North Yorkshire. The majority of the access was permissive only. It was suggested that the sub-group research the position and catalogue forest access in North Yorkshire.

Forum Members agreed it was imperative that permanent access to the public forest was guaranteed and that the public be consulted on any future proposal to dispose of the public forest estate in England. The Forum agreed to lobby the Prime minister and DEFRA Minister Caroline Spelman MP.

That the Chairman on behalf of the North Yorkshire Local Access Forum write to all Members of Parliament in North Yorkshire stressing the importance of permanent access to the public forest estate and insisting that the public be consulted on any future disposal plans.

92. PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY DEFINITIVE MAP MODIFICATION ORDER AND PUBLIC PATH ORDER APPLICATIONS

The report of the Definitive Map Team Leader on progress achieved since August 2010 processing Definitive Map Modification Order and Public Path Order applications.

Members noted that since the report had been written a further two new applications had been submitted to the County Council.

Members noted the report content.

93. COUNTRYSIDE CODE

The Forum considered a report on the consultation by Natural England on revision of the Countryside Code. The closing date for responses was 28 February 2011.

Members' attention was drawn to additions in respect of coastal access and dog owners.

Members were asked to forward their comments on the consultation to the Chairman who would respond on behalf of the Forum.

Martin Wiles requested that the response include reference for the need for a budget to be made available to facilitate a publicity campaign aimed at educating the public about the requirements of the new Code.

That the Chairman on behalf of the North Yorkshire Local Access Form submit a formal response that incorporates the comments of Forum Members to Natural England on proposed changes to the Countryside Code.

94. PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY RT ROAD RECORDING PROJECT

The report of the Definitive Map Team Leader updating Members on progress investigating the status of the Priority 1 RT routes in North Yorkshire.

Copies of coloured plans showing each of the 16 prioritised routes were circulated at the meeting. Members noted that RT routes within National Park boundaries would not be prioritised.

It was reported that four volunteers had been selected to take part in the project. A meeting date of 7 March 2011 had been agreed with the Volunteers.

Members requested a list of the prioritised routes.

That the content of the report be noted.

95. FORWARD PLAN

A paper setting out possible future agenda items.

It was reported that Barrie Mason had given his apologies for the meeting that day. It was confirmed that Barrie Mason would now attend the November meeting and had agreed to meet with the Chairman in the interim period.

Rachel Connolly reported that Richmondshire District Council was seeking a response from the Forum on its Local Development Framework document. Members agreed that the general Principles agreed by the LAF be sent to Richmondshire District Council.

RESOLVED –

That the content of the Forward Plan including suggestions made at the meeting be approved and noted.

Members to forward to the Chairman notice of the questions/topics to be discussed with Barrie Mason/Doug Huzzard.

That Rachel Connolly write to Richmondshire District Council emphasising the core values that had been agreed previously for guidance in Local Development Frameworks.

96. NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED -

That the next meeting take place on Thursday, 19 May 2011 commencing at 10.00 am at County Hall, Northallerton.

JW/ALJ