

NORTH YORKSHIRE
NORTH YORKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

19TH MAY 2011

RESTRUCTURING THE NORTH YORKSHIRE ACCESS CONSULTATIVE
GROUPS

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This paper seeks views over a proposal to re-structure and rationalise access consultation groups in North Yorkshire, which is intended to aid communication, avoid duplication of functions and achieve maximum efficiency for all involved

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At their August 2010 meeting, members of the Local Access Forum asked officers to explore the options for merging the operation of the Forum and the central Rights of Way Liaison Group. LAF members expressed their preference to continue with both groups but recognised the continuing pressure to review working practices and find efficiencies in all areas of public life. They were open to changing their position.
- 2.2 At their meeting on 8th November 2010, in considering the potential savings that the Council needs to make over the coming years, members of the Rights of Way Liaison Group questioned whether there was a continuing imperative for the group to continue.
- 2.3 In addition to a range of informal communication mechanisms in North Yorkshire outside the 2 National Parks, five different committees seeking to facilitate communication about access issues operate
- 2.4 The Local Access Forum, North Yorkshire Rights of Way Liaison Group and three local liaison groups all function at different levels, but there is both overlap in the subject matter under discussion and in the membership of the groups
- 2.5 There is modest overlap between the membership of the Local Access Forum and central Rights of Way Liaison Group and there is significant overlap between membership of the central and the local liaison groups. Matters under discussion at all of the groups are frequently duplicated

- 2.6 There is a need to review working practices and find efficiencies in all areas of public life, which is all the more evident in the current financial climate.

3.0 LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

- 3.1 The Local Access Forum (LAF) was established in 2003 as a requirement of the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000. Their statutory function is to "advise as to the improvement of public access to land in the area for the purposes of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area, and as to such other matters as may be prescribed."
- 3.2 The LAF includes members drawn from a range of different interests (users, owners/occupiers and other). The LAF regulations make it a requirement that membership is balanced between various interests. Broad range of participation is aimed at creating a consensus on the development of access issues at a strategic level. Agendas and papers can be seen on the North Yorkshire Council website at <http://www.northyorks.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=10509>
- 3.3 Whilst there is nothing to prevent forums giving advice on local issues, Defra guidance steers the LAF to prioritise and focus on the key issues for the area, considering matters at a "strategic" level and avoiding site or route specific discussions. By and large this has been the case with the North Yorkshire LAF. The LAF has a statutory function to provide advice to a range of organisations (section 94 bodies, including North Yorkshire County Council, the appointing body) who are required "have regard ... to any relevant advice given to them"
- 3.4 The North Yorkshire LAF meets 4 times per year. In addition a sub-group also meets a further 4 times per year to consider matters at greater depth and provide more detailed suggestions for the main Forum discussion

4.0 NORTH YORKSHIRE RIGHTS OF WAY LIAISON GROUP

- 4.1 The North Yorkshire Public Rights of Way Liaison Group (ROWLG) was established in 2000 to aid communication between North Yorkshire County Council and a range of access and rights of way user groups. The central ROWLG preceded the Local Access Forum and was established to perform a similar function before the LAF became a statutory requirement
- 4.2 Membership of the group is drawn from various interest groups, including The Ramblers, the British Horse Society, the National Farmers Union and the CLA

- 4.3 Whilst the ROWLG was created to have a county-wide function a good deal of the business has focussed upon operational issues relating to individual routes or sites. This has included receiving and discussing minutes of local liaison groups (section 5 in this report). The central ROWLG meets twice a year

5.0 LOCAL LIAISON GROUPS

- 5.1 Four local liaison groups were established in 2003 to help communication between North Yorkshire County Council and a range of access and rights of way user groups relating to specific on-the-ground issues. This was subsequently changed to 3 meetings in 2007 to coincide with operational areas of the newly formed 3 rights of way ranger teams.
- 5.2 Membership of the groups is drawn from the same interest groups that contribute to the central liaison group, including The Ramblers, BHS and CLA.
- 5.3 Each local liaison group considers and seeks views in rights of way issues within their areas and they meet twice a year.

6.0 ISSUES

- 6.1 Including sub-group meetings, there are currently 16 consultative meetings per year relating to access/rights of way issues. This figure does not include other ad hoc meetings and discussions that take place with user groups or their representatives.
- 6.2 There is significant overlap and duplication between the business and membership of central and local liaison group business.
- 6.3 Much of the original purpose of the central liaison group is being performed by the Local Access Forum, for which there is a statutory requirement.
- 6.4 It is not technically possible to merge the central Rights of Way Liaison Group with the Local Access Forum. However, whilst membership of the LAF is prescribed by Defra, within the requirement to maintain balance between different interests there may be scope to stretch the existing current membership to allow increased user group involvement.
- 6.5 Local liaison groups have provided a useful mechanism for communication on a range of on-the-ground matters

6.6 Continuing the current arrangements is not sustainable. We will need to find a way to make efficiencies in this area, reducing the frequency of the range of meetings whilst at the same time sustaining communication

7.0 PROPOSAL

7.1 This paper proposes a rationalised structure for access consultative groups. The suggested structure sustains an appropriate level of communication whilst at the same time reduces the number of meetings that all parties are involved with and as far as is possible eliminates duplication between meetings

7.2 The elements of a new formatted structure would include;

- Local Access Forum delivering strategic/North Yorkshire-wide advice and discussion. Builds upon its statutory function. Need to explore the potential for stretching the membership to its maximum extent.
- Local Rights of Way Liaison Groups – Considers and consults upon operational delivery on-the-ground. They have the local knowledge, capability and sensitivity to continue to make a difference.
- The central rights of way liaison group ceases to function in its current form.
- Continued ad hoc meetings with user groups and representatives as necessary

8.0 RECOMMENDATION

8.1 Members are asked to;

- Consider which mechanisms they feel are most efficient in providing county-wide advice and consultation and local level input in on-the-ground delivery
- Comment upon the proposed rationalisation of consultation groups and suggest other factors that need to be taken on board in implementing that rationalisation

CONTACT OFFICER

Richard Walker

Head of Countryside Service

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richard.walker@northyorks.gov.uk