

North Yorkshire Local Access Forum

Minutes of the meeting held in The Council Chamber, County Hall, Northallerton on 5 June 2013, commencing at 10.00 am.

Present:-

John Taylor in the Chair.

Les Atkinson, George Bateman, David Barraclough, Rachel Connolly, David Gibson, Tom Halstead, County Councillor Robert Heseltine, Tony Martin and Pat Whelan.

Officers:- Aidan Rayner and Penny Noake (NYCC Waste & Countryside Services) and Jane Wilkinson (Legal and Democratic Services).

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor John Fort, Leo Crone, John Gibson and Roma Haigh.

2. Minutes

Resolved –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2013, be agreed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

3. Matters Arising.

There were none

4. Public Questions or Statements

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

5. North Yorkshire National Parks Local Access Forums

The Minutes of meetings of the North York Moors National Park Local Access Forum and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Local Access Forum held on 4 December 2012 and 26 February 2013 respectively were received by the Forum for information.

Aidan Rayner agreed to produce a copy of the County Council's annual programme of 'strimmed' routes for discussion at forthcoming meetings of the local liaison groups.

Resolved –

That the Minutes of meetings of the North York Moors National Park Local Access Forum held on 4 December 2012 and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Local Access Forum held on 26 February 2013 be noted.

6. Record of Actions

Considered –

The report of the Chairman listing actions completed by him on behalf of the Forum during the period since the previous meeting.

Leeming to Barton A1 Upgrade

The Chairman reported that following his attendance at the public exhibition in February he along with other members of the Forum had met with the Highway Agency on several occasions. The discussions had been constructive and he was optimistic that modifications suggested by the sub-group in a letter would result in improvements being made to the original proposals. The formal response of the Highways Agency was still awaited. A further public exhibition was due to take place later that week at which the Highways Agency was expected to announce its final proposals. The Chairman had received an invite to attend a pre-exhibition meeting the following day where he hoped to learn if the Forum's comments had been taken on board.

Rachel Connolly reported that it was her understanding that the Project Manager for the scheme had already circulated a letter setting out what the Highways Agency was proposing. She agreed to obtain a copy of the letter and circulate it to Members.

Members agreed it would be useful to know what stance the County Council was adopting in respect of the proposals as this would help to inform the Forum's response. Aidan Rayner confirmed that following attendance at the pre-exhibition meeting by a member of his team and perusal of the documentation he hoped to confirm the County Council's position by the end of the week. He confirmed that he was happy to share with the Forum the County Council's reaction to the proposals.

Following attendance at the pre-exhibition meeting by the Chairman and upon his receipt of the County Council's stance the Chairman agreed to co-ordinate the drafting of the Forum's formal response via the use of email with Members.

A1 Upgrade to Motorway Dishforth to Leeming

The Chairman reported that the response of the County Council was still awaited to concerns raised by the Forum in respect of provision for non-motorised users. He did not anticipate receiving a response until the results of the final safety audit were known. Rachel Connolly said that whilst some works had been completed not all complied with the recommendations made by the Public Inquiry. She acknowledged that the works were still incomplete but was concerned that it would be difficult to rectify at a later date any that were sub-standard. Members debated whether there was any merit in seeking an assurance from the County Council about the standard of the works it was prepared to adopt. The consensus of the majority of Members was that until the results of the safety audit were published no meaningful progress could be achieved. In the interim Members were reassured that a member of staff from the public rights of way team was monitoring the situation and liaising with Highway Agency regarding the provision for non-motorised users.

NOTED

7. North Yorkshire Local Access Forum Principles

Considered –

The report of the Chairman inviting Members to review the written Principles of the Forum, a copy of which were attached to the report.

The Chairman said that arising from comments made at previous meetings and given the passage of time since they were originally drafted it seemed an appropriate time to reconsider their content.

Members debated the purpose of the Principles during the course of which several alternative forms of wording were put forward in respect of Principle number one. Members concluded that the purpose of the Principles was to reflect the Forum's aspirations/ideals and that subject to a couple of very minor changes the overall wording could not be improved upon. Instead the issue appeared to be more about the difficulties Members encountered when seeking to strictly interpret the Principals as opposed to their meaning being ambiguous. Members concluded that inevitably from time to time there would be conflicts between different user groups which would give rise to debate about what for example was deemed to be appropriate or reasonable.

It was pointed out that as the Best Value Performance Indicator for rights of way (BVPI178) had been discontinued the wording of Principal 9 needed to be amended to reflect this. The following revised wording was agreed for 1 and 9:-

1. "All rights of way should be maintained to the legal standard and where appropriate upgraded physically and legally to a higher status.
9. The Forum supports the continuation of indicators for rights of way to measure the ease of use of rights of way in the county"

Members agreed that apart from the revisions described above no other changes be made to the wording the Principals.

Resolved –

That the revised wording as set out in the preamble to this minute is approved and that a copy of the amended Principles be circulated to all Members of the Forum.

8. High Speed 2

Considered –

The report of the Public Rights of Way Team Leader describing the likely impact of the High Speed 2 (HS2) rail project on rights of way and access in North Yorkshire.

Members noted the overall impact was likely to be very small and that it would be many years before the project came to fruition. Members agreed that the Forum should keep a 'watching brief' on the project with a view to scrutinising its impact on rights of way if and when specific proposals were announced. Based on the content of the report it appeared that there would be a greater impact on UUR (U866/2/70)A than on rights of way. For clarification purposes Aidan Rayner agreed to supply Members with a copy of a map of the area which overlaid the North Yorkshire stretch of the preferred route of HS2 onto the definitive map.

County Councillor Hesletine confirmed that the County Council fully supported the project as it recognised the economic benefits a high speed rail link would bring to the region.

Whilst the project was still in the early stages of development Members agreed that it was nevertheless important that the Forum establish and campaign from the out-set for the retention of affected rights of way.

Resolved –

That the content of the report be noted.

That on behalf of the Forum the Chairman write a letter to the HS2 Project Team and all North Yorkshire MPs seeking their support for the retention and connectivity of all rights of way affected by the HS2 project in North Yorkshire.

9. Public Rights of Way Maintenance Team Update

Considered –

The report of the Public Rights of Way Team Leader describing maintenance work undertaken during 2012/13. Photographs taken before and after maintenance work had been completed were shown at the meeting

Overall productivity was down and the size of the backlog of reported issues had increased. The drop in performance was attributed to a combination of adverse weather, a staff restructure and the long term absence of staff. Despite these difficulties a number of significant improvements had been made to the network. Aidan Rayner predicted that 2013/14 would see the backlog decrease as the new staff structure bedded in. He described a new initiative whereby contractors took photographs of completed works which they were then able to produce upon demand. This meant that volunteers/rangers no longer had to carry out surveys thereby saving time and resource.

A request was made for future reports to contain a breakdown of:-

- numbers of high and low priority issues reported,
- totals for each of the different types of issues reported
- the age profile of the backlog

Provision of this information could then be used to demonstrate the efficiency of the system. It was pointed out that both National Parks in North Yorkshire continued to measure the ease of use of rights of way by conducting surveys the same as had been carried out for BVPI 178 even though this was no longer a legal requirement. This provided a valuable source of information enabling performance to be measured. Members asked how the County Council measured performance in this regard in the absence of this data.

Aidan Rayner replied that he was happy to provide in future reports the breakdown of issues as requested. With regard to being able to demonstrate ease of use of rights of way he said that the County Council had over the course of recent months adopted a new practice of conducting 'real time condition network surveys'. Whilst not surveys of the entire network they did cover the all most important aspects for example bridges and ploughing and cropping activities. These survey results enabled Officers to build up an on-going picture of the condition of the network rather than one that was based on a fixed specific point in time. Members were supportive of his suggestion that a report on this new practice be referred to the August meeting.

Resolved –

That the content of the report be noted.

That a report on 'Real Time Condition Network Surveys' be referred to the next meeting.

10. Forward Plan

Considered –

A report setting out possible future agenda items.

The item on Unsurfaced, Unclassified Roads/Deadmans Hill was erroneously shown as being listed for consideration at the August meeting instead of the November meeting as had been previously agreed.

The following items were added to the agenda of future meetings:-

21 August 2013

Real Time Condition Network Surveys

Philip Robinson (Natural England) to be invited to present/explain changes to the Environmental Stewardship Scheme and explore the interface between LAFS, Natural England and DEFRA.

Arising from her comments at the last meeting Rachel Connolly sought the support of Members for the Forum to adopt a proactive approach to the provision of advice to Section 94(4) bodies. She reported that the Chief Planning Officer at Hambleton District Council had extended an invitation to Forum Members to meet with him to discuss access provision on a large development scheme that included a mix of residential and industrial premises in Northallerton. David Barraclough volunteered to accompany Rachel Connolly to meet with the Chief Planning Officer at Hambleton District Council. They agreed to report the outcome of their visit to the next meeting. Forum Members were sceptical of their ability to routinely monitor the activities of all Section 94(4) bodies with a view to identifying developments on which they wished to provide advice.

In view of the duration of the meeting Members agreed that a report on this topic be referred to the next meeting.

Resolved –

That the content of the Forward Plan be noted and approved and the suggestions made during the meeting and recorded in the Minutes be incorporated.

The meeting concluded at 1.00 pm.

JW/ALJ