

North Yorkshire Local Access Forum

Minutes of the meeting held in The Brierley Room, County Hall, Northallerton on 4 February 2016, commencing at 10 am

Present

David Barraclough, Michael Bartholomew, George Bateman, Doug Cartwright, Rachel Connolly, Edward Dennison, David Gibson, Roma Haigh, Tom Halstead, County Councillor Robert Heseltine, County Councillor David Jeffels, Barrie Mouny, Sue Raper, Paul Sherwood and Richard Smith

Officers: Ian Kelly and Michael Douglas (Business and Environmental Services) and Kate Arscott (Legal and Democratic Services, Secretary to the Local Access Forum)

2 members of the public attended the meeting

110 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from John Ainsworth and County Councillor John Fort BEM.

The Secretary informed members of the resignation of John Taylor.

Resolved - That the Secretary write to John Taylor on the Forum's behalf to thank him for his service

111 Minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2015

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2015 be agreed as a correct record and be signed by the Chair.

112 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

113 Public Questions or Statements

2 members of the public in attendance wished to speak in relation to the Countryside Access Service Review. The Chair agreed to allow them to speak under the relevant agenda item.

114 Rail Crossings

The Forum considered a report of the Chair seeking views on whether to carry out any work in relation to safety concerns on rail crossings. The Chair reported that she had spoken to the relevant officer at Network Rail and had been assured that the Forum would be consulted on any relevant proposals for change related to local crossings.

Members agreed that the most effective approach in the current climate would be to respond to any specific proposals as they come forward.

Resolved – That the Forum does not wish to undertake any general work in relation to railway crossings at this point, but will respond to any specific proposals for change as they come forward.

115 Hambleton District Council Local Plan Issues and Options Consultation

The Forum considered a report of the Secretary advising Members of the current consultation on the Hambleton District Council Local Plan Issues and Options stage, and inviting the Forum to consider whether it wished to respond to the consultation.

The Chair, as the District liaison representative for the Hambleton area, circulated an initial draft response to the questions set out in the consultation document for comment. The main issues raised in discussion were:

- That the consultation document was generally welcomed
- The potential impact of wind turbines and fracking on public rights of way and enjoyment of the countryside
- Members welcomed the reference to the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and also identified this as a potential future agenda item for this Forum
- Members would like to see a stronger emphasis placed on outdoor recreation and walking, and particularly the contribution of these activities to tourism in the District
- That the environment of the countryside is a key asset as well as that of towns

Resolved – (a) That the Secretary and Chair revise the draft response to reflect comments made at the meeting, and circulate it by email for Forum members' comments, prior to submission by the Secretary on behalf of the Forum to meet the deadline of 19 February 2016.

(b) That the Health and Wellbeing Strategy be considered as a potential future agenda item for the Forum.

116 Schools and Education Project

Members considered a report of the Secretary regarding progress with a Forum project to promote outdoor access for school children.

The Chair reported on the worksheet for primary schools that she had developed to promote walking out of school. She envisaged providing a simple laminated sheet and a map to schools, and had sought the support of the Council with funding of £3k to produce and distribute packs, but this had not been forthcoming to date due to the lack of a supporting business plan. The Local Access Forum (LAF) was not in a position to seek direct sponsorship itself for the project. This would require the establishment of a separate trust and this was not felt to be feasible at present.

The Chair suggested that it may be appropriate to ask a representative from Children and Young People's Services to attend the next meeting of the LAF to discuss what the directorate is doing to encourage access. She also referred to the potential for exploring links with pilot health and wellbeing work in Selby to address obesity.

County Councillor David Jeffels offered to take up the project proposal on behalf of the Forum with the Director of Children and Young People's Services.

Sue Raper also agreed to ask the Howardian Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) team for information about their work to promote outdoor access for school children.

Resolved – That the Forum receives a further update at its next meeting.

117 Countryside Access Service Review

The Forum considered a report of the Assistant Director – Waste and Countryside Services inviting them to comment and advise on a draft proposed policy statement; proposals relating to route prioritisation and the proposed approach to issue prioritisation.

The report produced by a LAF sub group and agreed by the LAF in February 2015 entitled “Report of Sub Group on Achievement of Minimum Statutory Standard” was appended to the report for information.

Ian Kelly, Countryside Access Manager, and Michael Douglas, Performance & Improvement Officer, attended the meeting to present the report and respond to members’ questions.

Ian Kelly explained the rationale for the review, highlighting the following points:

- The perception of management that the current system was not operating effectively
- The recent major restructure of the service
- The substantial reduction in staffing and resources
- That prioritisation is seen as key to future operation
- That about 40% of the network is not currently prioritised, and that assessment criteria are not always consistently applied
- The current prioritisation model tends towards identifying too high a proportion of issues as high priority
- The need to deliver on statutory obligations
- A desire to provide greater clarity for staff and customers

At this point in the meeting, the Chair invited the two members of the public to make their contributions. Mr Forbes told the Forum that he was a regular walker as part of a group. His perception was that the proposed prioritisation would result in an ‘urbanisation’ of priorities. The routes that his group used were likely to be considered low priority. He felt that all footpaths are important, but recognised that the authority needs to take a practical approach.

He also raised a query about the processing of low priority Definitive Map Modification Orders (DMMOs), and the link to the List of Streets. Mr Forbes was advised to contact the Countryside Access Manager separately about this query outside of the meeting.

Mr Barr supported the points raised by the previous speaker and raised his concern that there was a danger of longstanding Rights of Way being eroded due to lack of resources.

Members of the Forum then considered and debated the matters raised in the report, focusing particularly on the questions raised in paragraphs 4.3, 5.9, 5.18 and 6.5.

The following key points were raised in the discussion:

- Members generally welcomed the consultation and the opportunity to contribute
- There was a range of views amongst Forum members as to whether the current prioritisation system did or did not work well
- Members supported the concern expressed by Mr Forbes regarding the potential for ‘urbanisation’, although they also acknowledged that it could be the case that this reflected the reality of levels of path usage. Officers acknowledged the concern and clarified that this had not been intentional, but was a concern that they would take into consideration in further work on the model.
- The positive role of the 3 Local Liaison Groups was highlighted
- Whilst members recognised the need for a clear prioritisation framework, they welcomed confirmation that the proposals would be applied with a degree of

flexibility by officers exercising their professional judgement in the light of individual circumstances.

- Some members encouraged the Forum to focus its advice at a strategic level, and avoid becoming too involved in the detail which was more properly left to management
- Members asked about the definition of a 'link' as the unit for assessing each section of path. Members were concerned about the potential for different 'links' within the same path to be assigned different levels of priority
- Concern about the work required to actually develop and implement the new model, rather than focusing on resolving issues, and whether the staff input required would be justified by the results. This concern was acknowledged, but officers also restated their view that effort put into prioritising the network now would bring a range of benefits, for example greater clarity for all and easier work programming.
- Clarification was provided at a general level over the implications for maintenance work once priorities have been assigned
- A general agreement that members of the LAF had confidence in the exercise of professional judgement by officers in assessing the priority of routes.
- Confirmation that officers would also be expected to make pragmatic decisions when commissioning work to be undertaken, to include appropriate lower priority work in the vicinity.
- Ian Kelly confirmed that it was intended to review the system after about 12-18 months of operation.

- With specific reference to the proposed draft policy statement, the following comments were made:

- A suggestion that reference should be made to the importance of public awareness of the opportunities available and the obligation to use the network responsibly
- The suggested addition of a commitment from the service to respond to issues raised
- A request to replace the word "cattle" in vi with "livestock"
- A request to add specific reference to landowners/land managers in x
- A request for an alternative wording to "a timely way" in point xi, particularly in light of the 2026 deadline

Officers confirmed that the various points in the draft policy statement were not in any order of priority

- With specific reference to the Route characteristic element, the following comments were made:

- A suggestion that proximity to facilities such as stables and livery yards should be included in the proposed path characteristic scores
- A suggestion that connectivity between centres of population should be recognised as a criteria
- A request to ensure that long distance walks are recognised
- A proposal that the Path characteristic "Other routes" listed in Table 3 should be defined as "all routes that don't have any of the above characteristics"

- With specific reference to the proposals in relation to the Community Value element, the following comments were made:

- Some members were concerned that many Parish Councils may not be either willing or able to contribute to the proposed modelling of community value. There was therefore some reservation about the proposal in paragraph 5.12 of the report. Equally other members highly valued the role of Parish Councils and expressed confidence in their role in representing their local community.
- That some routes may be little used or valued by local people, but have a high importance to users who came from further afield. For example a long distance trail might pass through a Parish which did not participate in the

community value exercise. Officers acknowledged this and also reminded the Forum that, even if implemented, the community value element would comprise a maximum of 5 points, compared with 10 points associated with route characteristics.

- It was also confirmed by officers that about 60% of feedback on the condition of routes currently came from individual members of the public rather than groups, and any model would need to take account of this.

With specific reference to the proposals on issue prioritisation, the following comments were made:

- That it was important to test the scores for unintended consequences – for example to ensure that a problem causing significant inconvenience but that was not classified as a high risk on a high profile route would still be addressed. Officers confirmed that some modelling had already taken place and that this would continue as the proposals are developed further.
- Some members felt that there may be an over emphasis on risk compared to obstruction in the balance of the three elements of the issue prioritisation model

It was agreed that the Secretary would produce a summary of the Forum's response to the proposals in the report, based on the discussion at the meeting. This would be circulated by email for confirmation and submitted to the Service.

During the discussion Members also asked about progress on a number of other aspects of the service which had been referred to in the sub group report of February 2015. It was agreed that the Secretary should liaise with the Countryside Access Manager to develop a timetable of reports to the Forum to cover the various workstreams. It was also noted that the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) was due for review in 2017.

Resolved – (a) That the Secretary circulate a draft of the Forum's comments in response to the questions raised in the report, based on the discussion at the meeting, for members' confirmation prior to submission to the Service.

(b) That the Secretary liaise with the Countryside Access Manager to obtain an outline timetable of the various workstreams for the Countryside Access Service, in order to schedule reports into the LAF's forward plan at appropriate points.

118 Secretary's Update Report

The Secretary presented an update since the last meeting of the Forum, covering the following issues:

- Consultation responses
- Access to County Council planning register
- Open Access restrictions
- National LAF conference
- Regional LAF meeting
- LAF newsletter and Huddle access – the Secretary agreed to facilitate access to Huddle for those members that would like to join

Members thanked the Secretary for the support received since the last meeting.

Members discussed the potential role of sub groups. It was agreed to ask Highways Officers to meet with a sub group of the Forum in advance of the next full meeting in July, to discuss design and surfacing issues. The following LAF members agreed to take part in the sub group: Rachel Connolly, Mike Bartholomew, Barrie Mounty and Paul Sherwood.

Members also discussed the nomination of representatives for each District Council area, who would be willing to act as a first point of liaison in relation to planning and other relevant matters. The following representatives were confirmed:

District Council area

Craven	Mike Bartholomew
Hambleton	Rachel Connolly
Harrogate	Richard Smith
Richmond	David Barraclough
Ryedale	David Gibson/Sue Raper to consider this role
Scarborough	Roma Haigh
Selby	Barrie Mouny with support from Tom Halstead

Resolved – (a) That the report be noted.

(b) That Highways Officers be asked to meet with the sub group before the next meeting of the LAF.

(c) That the LAF members listed above will be the first point of liaison in relation to District Council areas, on planning and other relevant matters.

119 Forward Plan

The Forum considered a report of the Secretary inviting members to identify items of business for future meetings.

The following items were identified for the next meeting

- Annual Report of the LAF (Chair and Secretary to prepare a draft)
- Harrogate draft Local Plan Consultation
- PLAN Selby – draft preferred options consultation
- Ensuring all Rights of Way are included on the Definitive Map (or appropriate list) by the 2026 deadline
- Increasing the use of volunteers
- Position statement on Unsurfaced Unclassified Roads (UURs)

The Forum also requested an outline timetable of the various workstreams for the Countryside Access Service, in order to schedule reports into the forward plan at appropriate points.

Resolved – That the issues identified during the meeting and recorded in the minutes be incorporated into the Forum's Forward Plan.

120 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Local Access Forum will be held on Wednesday 6 July 2016 at 10 am.

The meeting concluded at 12.35pm.

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