

Submitted by Rachel Connolly for Members consideration.

Planning

Years ago Access was very successfully handled by the Countryside Commission which morphed into the Countryside Agency which in due course was disbanded and absorbed into Natural England (NE) a subsidiary of Defra, but a much-diminished team lacking the strength and width so previously effective.

Natural England is a statutory consultee for development applications which have an SSI or environmental dimension of importance - for instance the service station to be built on the old quarry and ponds at Catterick roundabout. However, NE does not address any access elements in their responses because the two departments work very separately. This results in a loss of access advice from the one body which could make an impact in planning.

The Head of Access at NE is aware of this but says it is 'difficult' to remedy the situation and that their statutory duty is not the same as their statutory remit, but a suggestion was made: Both Defra and NE are sec 94 bodies whom Access Forums have a remit to advise, and our forum could ask the Regional LAF to write to Stephen Reed (Minister for Environment) and also Defra asking that the Access element of major developments and SSI's be included in future NE responses.

Rachel