

# Regional AGM of the north east Local Access Forum

15<sup>th</sup> July 2013  
10:00am County Hall, Durham

## Minutes

**Present:** Robin Daniels, (Regional Chair & Tees Valley Chair), Ted Liddle (Northumberland National Park & County Vice Chair), Geoff Hughes (Durham Chair), Dave Turnbull (Tyne and Wear Chair), Victor Cadaxa (Tyne & Wear Vice Chair), Beryl Bird, Jim Milner (People & Partnerships, Natural England).

**Apologies:** Gill Featonby (Northumberland National Park & County Chair), Rob Brown (Tees Valley Vice Chair).

**Not in attendance:** John Sugden (Redcar & Cleveland Chair)

**1. Welcome** by Chair, Robin Daniels

**2. Apologies** – see above.

**3. Minutes of the previous meeting**

3.1 Political deficit in Joint LAFs

RD noted that Defra had not replied to a letter examining the political deficit in Joint LAFs in the north east. All agreed to contact Defra again, giving two weeks in which to respond, or the matter would be elevated to the Minister.

3.2 Regional Co-ordinator post

It was agreed that the Chair should write to NE emphasizing the important role of the Regional Co-ordinator and the need for the continued support of these posts to be a matter of policy and priority rather than whether there is some money available as appears to be the case at the moment.

3.3 PDF/Word Documents

DT outlined dismay at recently received PDF documents which he is unable to access, GH requested printed papers.

Meeting Closed. BB managed election as follows.

#### **4. Election of Chair and Vice Chair**

GH proposed Robin Daniels as Chair, seconded by Dave Turnbull.  
VC proposed Geoff Hughes as Vice Chair, seconded by Robin Daniels.

Both RD and GH were content to accept responsibility.  
GH did suggest that the Chair of the meeting should be who is present, however DT thought that the present system was more suitable as it meant that the current Chair had access to all the relevant papers.

AGM closed.

#### **1. Jim Milner – Natural England Update**

##### **1.1 Tri-annual Review**

Defra had decided against merging the Environment Agency and Natural England as the costs would be prohibitive, but the cuts facing Natural England were at least 10%, flood prevention had been ring fenced at the Environment Agency and Defra had requested they 'continue to develop closer partnership working'. A discussion ensued as to the potential nature of closer working with the Environment Agency, JM agreed to keep the meeting up-to-date and RD requested of JM that the Environment Agency be invited to next springs Regional LAF meeting when working relationships are more likely to have been established.

*Action: JM/BB to invite north east leisure/access Environment Agency contact to the spring meeting.*

DT asked if Martin Shaw had developed the Engagement Plan any further. Would it be a Memorandum of Understanding which could be used to clarify roles with their Appointing Authorities? JM briefly outlined the spring publication of Natural England's Access & Engagement Strategy.

*Action: JM agreed to pass any further information back into the Forum via BB and to circulate a copy of Natural England's Access and Engagement Strategy.*

##### **1.2 CAP Update**

JM believes the greening measures will reflect the shrinking budgets and described the dates by which LAFs should comment on the consultation

which closes in early January 2014. The flood damage/climate change letter should be available to Defra by no later than November 2013.

TL outlined the current North/land position, which is reflected across areas of the north east. TL asked could river bank paths be moved with the changing direction of a river, when paths are washed away, there is no legal duty to replace them, but there is a precedent with the England coastal path of roll back.

*Action: Regional Co-ordinator (BB) to establish the national picture of last years flood damage via the other regional co-ordinators. All agreed with the recent BMC Access Stakeholder Group paper and agreed a letter is required replying to the consultation to be available to agree at the November meeting.*

### 1.3 MENE

JM suggested a joint Workshop with ADEPT (LA ROW Officers) who were also keen to be able to interpret the data, however there was no Natural England training budget. The on-line tool was not available yet. DT thought Health Boards should be added to the training, GH thought Planners should also be included, and all agreed to extend it across the north east region.

*Action: JM to track speakers, GH to Chair, ROW Officers to identify Health/Planning professionals, BB to find venue. Funding remains an issue.*

### 1.4 Regional Action Plan

Priorities emerged as follows; TVLAF requested assistance with sources of funding to assist Appointing Authorities, Tyne and Wear require assistance with a Memorandum of Understanding to establish a working relationship with Appointing Authorities, Northumberland endorsed both requests and were addressing additional items which would be passed on to JM when agreed.

*Action: JM agreed to incorporate these requests into a Regional Action Plan.*

A discussion ensued regarding the Annual Review, referring to it as an exercise in cutting and pasting and not an examination of local community engagement. RD believes the LAF Action Plans should be part of it, the Reg-Coordinator thought the report was not carved in stone, and that it was an attempt to pass to Defra the activities of LAFs nationally. If changes were requested in the type and level of information to be assessed, then future Reviews could be altered to reflect that.

*Action: BB agreed to pass on these recommendations on the national Annual Review to the National Co-ordinator.*

### 1.5 Coastal Access

JM believes the England Coastal Path is likely to be affected by the cuts, each scheme length is likely to be reduced from 10 to 5 stages and the progress of each is likely to be slower. At the moment it looks as though south of Hartlepool will still go-ahead, but Northumberland will not.

### 1.6 Regional Conference

A poll found Tyne and Wear keen for a regional all-inclusive Conference, North/land described a recent meeting where neighbouring LAFs were invited and how positive it was and requesting relevant topics, Durham requested an evening event, Tyne and Wear thought a Saturday morning would ensure a good turnout.

JM described finding a free venue, and tracking speakers, but stressed it must be member led. Tyne and Wear offered to host.

*Action: All agreed to establish what topics their LAFs were interested in learning more about, and to bring their potential conference agenda to the November meeting.*

### 1.7 Newsletter

JM requested a couple of paragraphs from LAFs on news to be included in the national newsletter. This could include Tyne and Wear's recent recruitment initiative.

## 2. Engaging with LNPs

GH described the invitation to the Board of the Three Rivers LNP, and had sent papers to Tyne and Wear LAF to ensure all were up-to-date. GH described a request for a briefing guide from Natural England as regards LAF input so he was 'singing from the same hymn sheet'. VC thought we should have a 'common line' as all LAFs were experiencing the same issues. JM described the LNPs as group partners; the Natural England role was one of support. RD thought they were the main players for access funding via the Lottery as they represented everyone in the area. TL described engaging with the Northumberland LNP making sure access was on the agenda.

*Action: JM asked if Adrian Vass could be invited to the November meeting alongside Ivor Crowther of the Heritage Lottery Fund. RD agreed.*

### **3. Regional Roundup**

#### Tyne and Wear

A recent recruitment drive found Tyne and Wear members handing out a recently produced promotional leaflet over a busy weekend at popular, well used paths across Tyne and Wear. They found a very positive response, the invitation to an open evening resulted in a somewhat disappointing turnout, but more positively they now have two new members. The exercise has revealed a 'shambolic' recruitment system between the appointing authorities. VC described a recent survey of bridleway missing links, having contacted each of their appointing authorities; they are now working with one in particular. The recent privatisation of highway responsibilities in North Tyneside to Capita Symons has made for a clearer defined working relationship, with improved communication.

#### Northumberland

Recent recruitment has been very successful, with membership now standing at 22. However, the Administrator is now reduced to 4 hours per month. They have an active nucleus, for example a recent member is now working with local community groups identifying anomalies/misclassifications/cut offs. The recent De-Regulation Bill is of particular interest.

#### Durham

The County Council have recently dedicated land for public access and GH hopes there will be more to come, recent council activity on land disposal means that the access profile can be raised and they have recently been consulted by local Parish Councils. The other area of recent work includes the protection of higher rights on the coast, again in consultation with the County Council. GH can see potential future LNP work with regard to Lambton estates, which would include joint work with Tyne and Wear LAF.

A recent meeting included a presentation from the Durham Public Health & Physical Activity Lead Officer Dawn Phillips; closer ties are being explored. MO described the fortuitous arrival of two influential cabinet members who both have an interest in access.

#### Tees Valley

RD described recent work with the River Tees Re-Discovered LNP, including the development of 7 circular trails off the Teesdale Way. Many of these walks are in existence; new links will be made and re-launched. Other work includes the support made to Elwick Parish Council for a successful P4C bid, and NYM DfT Cycling Bid linking Teesside to the NYM via old railway lines.

#### **4. Regional Co-ordinator**

BB reminded the meeting of recent papers circulated; the LAF Chairs/Secretaries Survey, the National Annual Report and the Engagement Plan. Tyne and Wear and TVLAF had forwarded the Annual Report and Engagement Plan to their Chief Executives.

P4C was discussed; £1M had now been pledged and was due to close in 2014. RD asked JM whether Natural England were considering a national scheme of funding with the Lottery. MO thought Defra were committed to reviewing P4C, including reviewing those that didn't get through the funding process. One of the main issues for community groups was that of payment in arrears.

The Co-ordinator had recently attended a meeting in London, a one off event for all the Co-ordinators where common issues were discussed.

Huddle uptake is being measured quarterly and BB has agreed to be the lead on a Whiteboard on Urban LAFs.

#### **5. Date and time of next meeting**

*Action: Ivor Crowther has been invited to the next meeting on November 7<sup>th</sup> 2013 at 10:00am at Dolphin Centre Darlington. JM to invite Adrian Vass.*

Meeting closed at 12:25pm