

North east region Local Access Forum

Chairs and Vice Chairs AGM

9th June 2014

Natural England Offices, Newcastle on Tyne

Present: Robin Daniels (Chair Regional group & Tees Valley LAF, Geoff Hughes (Regional Vice Chair & Chair Durham LAF), Alistair Buchan (Chair Tyne and Wear), Ted Liddle (Vice Chair Northumberland), Roger Cornwell (Vice Chair Durham), Victor Cadaxa (Vice Chair Tyne and Wear), Lisa Shearer Development Manager, Land of Oak and Iron, Jim Milner (Natural England), Paul Scott (Gateshead Council), Beryl Bird Regional Co-ordinator.

Apologies: John Sugden (Chair Redcar & Cleveland LAF), Rob Brown (Vice Chair Tees Valley), Gill Featonby (Chair Northumberland), Liz Bray (Vice Chair Tyne and Wear).

1. Welcome

Robin Daniels (RD) welcomed everyone to the meeting and all introduced themselves.

2. Previous Minutes

2.1 Political Deficit – the second letter to Defra was circulated, BB agreed to raise with other Regional Co-ordinators.

2.2 Regional Co-ordination – RD agreed to write to Martin Shaw to establish 3 year rolling commitment.

2.3 Flood damage – JM had established with LEADER that there was little opportunity for assistance, and will re-visit the issue with colleagues as to a strategic approach which may include LNP and LEPs.

2.4 MENE – the project had not moved forward as Durham LAF member, Chris Wiltshire had sadly passed away. JM outlined a £12K project by South Pennine LNP which was described as a model to adopt. GH described the Three Rivers LNP which are attempting to draw funds from the LEP; the importance of the environment to tourism has not been developed, it is hoped the appointment of an LNP Officer would address this.

2.5 RC believes the news that the Local Transport Plan was going regional must be pursued, and agreed to provide contact details.

2.6 Regional Action Plan – JM outlined the change in structure at Natural England which meant that little attention was being given to it at the moment.

2.7 Environment Agency – JM has begun contacts with Wendy Thompson on access, and will make enquiries as to who to invite to a future meeting.

2.8 TD described the work of the Rivers Trust, who share similar aims. It was agreed that individual LAFs should pursue any shared interests.

2.9 Defra Workshop – TL described the event at Hexham which would shape the next LEADER funding, it was hoped it would be more flexible as the process for funding was tortuous!

2.10 Rob Aubrook – the new person in charge at Natural England in the north east, had addressed the National Conference in Durham.

2.11 National Conference – a ‘good event’ and Durham CC were pleased to receive a letter of thanks for their hospitality.

3. Chair and Vice Chair Election

As there was no further nominations from the individual LAFs, RD and GH both allowed their names to go forward for the roles of Chair and Vice Chair.

GH nominated RD as Chair, seconded by TL, whilst RD nominated GH for Vice Chair and TL seconded. Both were re-elected unanimously.

Meeting Closed.

1. Lisa Shearer Development Manager, Land of Oak and Iron

LS works for Groundwork in partnership with Gateshead Council and Paul Scott as Programme Co-ordinator and described the status of the project so far. The first round has been passed, with July 2015 the final funding deadline, and 2016 when the delivery of the project begins.

The area covers 177 sq Km (104,000 people) and includes 3 LA areas, Durham, Gateshead and Northumberland. Using the river catchment areas, the area covered includes the Derwent Reservoir to the Tyne. The Programme Development Group includes three sub-groups, Cultural, Built and Natural Heritage. The economic outcomes are important for the LAs as they need to secure matched funding, e.g. LEADER. Tracing the history of the area will include ancient woodlands, Roman history, lead mining and river influences. For example, Shotley Bridge is famous for making swords, there was a massive gentrification of the area with private ownership of mines and waggonways. In total, there are 16 projects under 11 themes which all include river, woodland and wetland, interpretation, and key to the project are access to footpaths and bridleways.

Gateshead Council are concluding the first mapping stage of all waggonways/railways, the prioritising of each hasn't been agreed yet. GH offered to share Durham CC methodology for prioritising routes. LS described the need for matched funding, on-going maintenance for the long term, booklets, green exercise, working with local bus companies, joint use of paths. Community consultation is continuing, attending the Blaydon Festival most recently.

Requested £2.2M for 2016-2020, requesting £1.2m match funding, the budget for

the waggonways project alone is £350K. The funding is to ensure management and maintenance costs for up to 5 years after the project finishes.

Paul Scott described a number of feasibility studies underway, particularly into the 22 waggonways already suggested. GH described the difference between the evidence of use and its potential, describing, 'a network for the future rather than a legacy from the past'. PS described the desktop exercise beginning with survey work commissioned. RC asked if the intention was to include any new routes on the Definitive Map, PS believes any new routes or links would be added. LS hoped the regional group would be able to share information and Durham, Tyne and Wear and Northumberland all offered to send a representative to a task and finish group.

RD thanked Lisa and Paul for their contribution.

2. Natural England Update

JM outlined his understanding of the changes presently taking place in Natural England; of the 14 area teams, there are 5 sub-teams which are cross functional, agricultural, environmental, planning and so on. A sixth team is business overview. There are decreasing numbers of access advisors and the mapping isn't yet complete. Rob Aubrook as the new lead is also Chair of the Northumberland and Coast LNP and is keen to see outcomes. JM thought using RoWIPs as a base for a prioritisation strategy for the area, using the work undertaken by the Oak and Iron Project would be a way forward.

GH described a number of strategic partnerships that need to be brought together to add value, joining up RoWIPs, multi users need a coherent approach. VC thought the Action Plans within RoWIPs could be used with neighbouring LAs, linking routes. RD thought the LAF key role was to get the LAs talking to each other, and key routes joined up across the area would follow.

RD thought a problem that does require some attention was the position of the Lottery funding, neither the two Lottery providers at the National Conference would fund access, unless it was 'dressed up as something else', some pressure needs to be applied to enhance the level of routes.

GH hoped that Rob Aubrook is talking to the Health/Tourism/LA/Transport bodies for some joined up thinking across the region. A meeting with Rob Aubrook was requested, and this was agreed.

RC asked if BB would circulate the constitution of the LA7, the Regional Transport Plan. GH thought an audit should take place of the individual RoWIPs, RD thought the each RoW Officer should be invited to establish links with their neighbouring LA.

3. Higher Rights at the Coast

GH outlined the background to the regional position that the north east LAF agreed it was a priority to encourage Higher Rights where appropriate at the coast. Summing up the historic position he said the higher rights are being exercised now, clearly demand is there and should be managed.

TL described the 'perceived impact' of horses and cyclists, when the reverse was true.

Tyne and Wear described the position of the Sunderland RoW team, as being unable to take anything new on.

RD thought that this should be included within a Regional Action Plan, and the Landscape Action Plans, and should be included in the discussion with Rob Aubrook.

TL thought it should also be included in the Health Action Plans, Access to Nature, Green Exercise and NICE Policy Statements.

4. LAF Secretaries

It has been suggested to the LAF Co-ordinator that the individual LAF Secretaries join the regional Chairs and Vice Chairs meeting. After some discussion it was suggested that JM and BB organise a separate meeting of Secretaries, to take place before the next regional meeting. The Regional Chairs & Vice Chairs meeting would continue as a focused policy forum with Officers attending when needed.

5. Regional roundup

5.1 Durham

GH described the slow progress of persuading the Durham CC to dedicate land for access. RC outlined discussions with Network Rail looking at safety issues on the Middlesbrough to Newcastle line. RD thought that the discussion with Network Rail about level crossings in Tees Valley over the past few years had made some positive changes.

5.2 Tyne and Wear

The new LAF was now underway, with only partial success in the recruitment of new members. VC described some large projects; Newcastle Airport, A19/A184 Testo's roundabout improvement plans, A19 cut-offs, revised Wear Bridge and tracking the Newcastle and Gateshead Strategy.

5.3 Northumberland

TL described a recent visit to Lord Joicey's estate at Ford and Etal and it's positive example. The Forum is working with the Coastal AONB on Quiet Lanes, the Access & Rec. Working Group are working on cross border anomalies. The Definitive Map has been upgraded and is an excellent site. The Sandstone Way, a 100 mile route for off road cyclists from Berwick, and supported by Defra will be opened in July and launched in the spring of 2015.

Two problems continue; powered two wheelers and flood damaged bridges.

5.4 Tees Valley

RD outlined the River Tees Re-discovered funding outcome which would be known by the end of the week. The RoW Officers group had assessed the Teesdale way for inclusion in the project. The Forum is struggling with no Co-ordinator and membership is down, the RoW Officer group is addressing these two issues.

6. AOB

JM to invite Rob Aubrook to a meeting of the Regional Forum as soon as convenient.

Meeting closed 12:30