

Regional Local Access Forum - North East Chairs & Vice Chairs Meeting

20th November 2014

2:00 – 4:00pm

Natural England Offices, Newcastle on Tyne

Present: Rob Aubrook (Natural England Area Manager Northumberland), Liz Bray (Vice Chair Tyne and Wear), Roger Cornwell (Vice Chair Durham), Victor Cadaxa (Vice Chair Tyne and Wear), Robin Daniels (Chair Regional group and Tees Valley), Gill Featonby (Chair Northumberland), Ted Liddle (Vice Chair Northumberland), Jim Milner (Natural England Lead Advisor), Martin Shaw (Natural England Senior Advisor), Beryl Bird (Regional Co-ordinator).

Apologies: Rob Brown (Vice Chair Tees Valley), Geoff Hughes (Chair Durham), John Sugden (Chair Redcar & Cleveland), Alisdair Buchan (Chair Tyne and Wear).

1. Welcome

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

2. Previous minutes

2.1 MENE – Jim Milner (JM) had just had a meeting with Robin Trounson of Durham LAF and agreed to forward any relevant information when available.

2.2 Environment Agency – JM agreed to establish contact with the local area advisor within the Environment Agency in order that the Regional Forum could invite them to a future meeting to discuss their access policy.

2.3 Administrators meeting – Beryl Bird (BB) outlined the latest position; in October for the first time in 2014 each Forum had a secretary/administrator. Agenda items had been requested with only one response so far, JM and BB to establish progress.

2.4 Section 3 Higher Rights at the Coast

Tyne and Wear requested the reference to Sunderland RoW team be removed from the Minutes as inaccurate.

3. Natural England Update

Rob Aubrook (RA) outlined the revised structure of Natural England nationally; with 5 patch-based team's replicating the structures of the LNPs. The responsibilities remained the same, with statutory responsibilities to the government and to the local community. Their regulatory role includes supplying planning advice for protected sites and wildlife, the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, the Water Framework Directive, Biodiversity 20:20 and the England Coastal Path.

Rob described his interest in developing a series of projects, delivering benefits on the ground and highlighted the LNP work supporting Land of Oak and Iron and River Tees Re-discovered. However, funding was a major issue despite the political pledge to complete the

England Coastal Path within the next five years. He envisages that there will be a need to charge for their services in addition to raising funding from elsewhere.

4. Regional Action Plan and Funding

RA described 2014 as a transitional year for Natural England, planning has begun for 2015; in March the local Delivery Plan will be in place, it will need to integrate with the national Corporate Plan and he may introduce partners into this discussion.

He wishes to align Natural England's work with the LNPs, working with partners, influencing strategies thereby adding a level of credibility and weight. The access agenda is 'difficult for us', there is no money to support it and the level of statutory work is quite small, so 'how do we demonstrate it's value?'

Martin Shaw (MS) described the forthcoming LAF Annual Report, which will be sent to Defra by the end of November, and the circulation list included health professionals and LNPs. Ted Liddle (TL) described no meaningful link with the Regional Growth Fund, in response RA thought LEP's may have access.

RD described a number of positive outcomes with the community and health. He described the Lottery approach as location specific rather than route, can access routes not be funded in their own right, can we make this case nationally to the Lottery?

JM thought funding access 'for access sake' would not be a position that the Lottery would be interested in funding. RD thought that we must alter the focus, building in access from the beginning.

RA described an example in south east Northumberland – interest from housing developers, challenges in subsidence, nature improvement areas - suggesting an access strategy is required. RD suggested the LAF work with Natural England on an Action Plan. Liz Bray (LB) thought RoWIPs were the strategy. Roger Cornwell (RC) described Durham's view of the Regional Transport Plan, the Access Prioritisation Projects in Durham funded by 106 agreements, improving paths in the vicinity of new developments and establishing links with the health bodies.

TL described a series of commissioned reports gathering dust, and cited a report produced by John Turner; LB agreed, we could sift through work originally commissioned to attract funding. All agreed the need for a regional strategy, an action plan.

The information in a regional access strategy would demonstrate an economic value to the LNPs, with LAFs taking the lead.

After some discussion TL agreed to sketch out a scoping report to request funding for a (successfully tendered) consultant to take 3 months establishing the region's access priorities. MS thought the regional transport plan could offer a financial solution to preparing such a report; with LAFs offering RoW advice to the RTP if the RTP paid for the study. RA thought other funding bodies could also be considered. RA thought Natural England might be able to assist, with TL keen to see such a strategy demonstrating best practice.

Action: TD to scope out a short report detailing the need for an Access Strategy and the issues that would be addressed. Views to be included the goal, the key objectives, the balance between urban and rural demands and their individual value, how to move people into the area to visit, the economic benefit; health, wellbeing and social outcomes, the need to communicate with the right people,

acceptable standards of access, links to LNP's and LEPs, funding and cost implications. TL agreed to produce and circulate the Scoping Report by the 12.12.14.

Action: It was agreed to have an extra ordinary meeting on the 15th January 2015 at 10:30am at Natural England offices in Newcastle to develop the Regional Access Strategy brief.

5. Recruitment to LAFs

MS described the LAF National Newsletter and National Annual Report being sent to section 94 bodies and other influential parties. All Regional Co-ordinators forward these publications on to Appointing Authorities Chief Executives and other partner organisations.

RD asked if the status of Regional Co-ordinators could be firmed up, MS believes it is a budget issue and RA thought it could form part of an access strategy.

The timetable for next year's Annual Report is the same as this year, MS and Rob Leek need at least one quarter to compile the results and forward the report on to Defra.

MS believes the next National Conference is likely to be in February 2015 in London. Gill Featonby (GF) requested video conferencing as it was unlikely that northern Forums would attend, MS agreed to consider this whilst suggesting that such an approach may not work well in the workshops.

6. Regional Roundup

6.1 Northumberland

GF outlined the work of one Working Group who are approaching Parish Councils offering to assist with their RoW. One meeting a year has taken place with a major landowner, most recently with the National Trust, this has resulted in a greater understanding on both sides. The Forum is offering RoW training on the afternoon of the 22nd January 2015 to which all are invited.

6.2 Tyne and Wear

Victor Cadaxa (VC) outlined the major developments taking place at Nissan/Testo's roundabout and at the Airport. Some positive news has come from Gateshead Council addressing the problem of missing bridleway links.

6.3 Durham

Network Rail have boarded out a crossing on the boundary of the Coastal Path, the major opencast site at Marley Hill affects the Heritage Trail and The Land of Oak & Iron Project. (Durham refused consent whilst Gateshead approved). The path from Maiden Castle to Durham has suffered a major landslip, obliterating the path and will require a great deal of money to re-instate.

6.4 Tees Valley

The Development Officer has been re-appointed, and a recruitment drive for new members has begun. River Tees Re-discovered has lottery funding with Teesdale Way as the key running throughout the project.

7. AOB

7.1 Forestry Commission

GF informed the group that the Northumberland LAF has had to address 3 applications from the Forestry Commission for woodland planting on open access land. This land ceases to be open access when planted up, it is clear that negotiations must take place with the landowner to allow access to continue if possible and that an access provision must be built in to the planning.

Action: RA asked if MS would raise this, and he agreed.

Meeting closed at 4:00pm