

Regional meeting of the north east Local Access Forum

24th February 2013
10:00am Dolphin Centre, Darlington

Minutes

Present: Robin Daniels, (Regional Chair & Tees Valley Chair),
George Astbury (Northumberland National Park & County Vice 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),
John Sugden (Redcar & Cleveland Chair), Rob Brown (Tees Valley Vice
Chair).

Not in attendance: Geoff Hughes (Durham Chair).

1. Welcome by Chair, Robin Daniels

2. Apologies – see above.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting

RD noted that in November 2012, Steve Scoffin had had to resign due to a change in employment, and RD wished to place on record the appreciation from the Regional Forum for the outstanding contribution Steve made to the development of LAFs across the region and to the Regional Forum itself, he will be a great loss to the work of access across the north east.

Amendments to attendance – Item 9 S. Tyneside are re-organising their ROW service and a local MP was invited to the meeting, not the local MP.

4. Dave Turnbull – **November 2012 Workshop Feedback**

DT explained the background to the workshop, which was in order to explore the LAF responsibilities and options. The background to the LAF was discussed, with differing 'responsibility' via each of the transport strategies in the 5 Appointing Authorities. Tyne and Wear wish to work with Natural England to develop a Memorandum of Understanding together with a

Constitution. The issues raised will be debated further at the National Conference due to be held in Sheffield on the 27th February 2013.

The discussion explored the nature of the relationship when a LAF has only one (or two) Appointing Authority, RD highlighted the political deficit when the Guidance restricted the number of Councillors to 3; the links to be made on Planning issues and the suggestion for a Regional Conference to explore shared concerns and expertise from DT. GA thought that other groups should be invited to participate in a regional conference. Tyne and Wear are holding a recruitment drive during one weekend in May, where two members will be in 10 PROW locations across Tyne and Wear inviting members of the public to an open evening to explore membership.

Action: Chairs to gauge interest in Regional Conference, with the potential to include all members and if positive, Themes and Issues. Response to be included in next Regional meeting. RD to write to Defra outlining the comments made about the political deficit at joint LAFs.

RD thanked DT for his update .

5. Chair welcomed **Jim Milner of Natural England** to the meeting

JM opening with information on the present status on Paths for the Community (P4C); £200K has so far been offered to projects, with none in the north east. The panel is due to meet again in March when a larger number of projects will be considered, including one from Hartlepool. So far there have been 31 'expressions of interest' from the north east which are in various stages of development. The difficulty the projects all have is two-fold; finding matched (private) funding and the requirement to establish permanent ROW (not permissive). Natural England need to be able to demonstrate that the P4C project is a success and benefits the rural economy when the discussion with Defra begins to focus on CAP Reform.

Jim circulated a paper from a recent meeting entitled, CAP/RDPE Reform Seminar, held on 5th December 2012 in London. JM shared a number of observations; that the new round of CAP Reform won't be in place before the deadline, that although access had been removed from HLS it should be back in, and that LAFs had not been involved in the discussion. Jim proposed to begin a discussion on huddle. VC hoped that Martin Shaw would be able to introduce it at the National Conference. DT thought that health priorities need to be included. JM said that health performance indicators are being measured in terms of access to green space. GA believes that maintenance rather than creation (of paths) should be the emphasis. JM said that the Scottish Agriculture Environment Scheme does pay (farmers) for the maintenance of ROW and wondered how an assessment could be made for

value for money when all local authorities are cash strapped? DT thought that need for paths change, new paths were needed in new developments, and it was impossible to defend all of them, why only fund new?

Jim circulated his first newsletter. It would serve a number of functions, sharing of valued information, ease time pressure and make effective contact with LAFs. It would be circulated on a quarterly basis with information feeding into LAFs and if LAFs had stories to share these could be included. The Annual Report information would be included and it would be sent within Natural England teams and by LAFs to Appointing Authority CE's. All welcomed the approach.

JM thought it was 90% likely that the funding would be in place for next year to fund the Regional Co-ordinator post. RD asked for it to be a policy commitment as opposed to 'scrabbling about' every year, JM agreed that a 3 year commitment was preferred and was happy to have the Chair's support for this.

JM now has a larger role including P4C, and this may cause limitations on his time available to attend all meetings. He thought it might be more appropriate to sit down at the beginning of each year with colleagues to offer a list of topics that could be made available to LAFs throughout the year in order to structure support to the meetings across the region. Suggestions from LAFs could be fed into the Regional Forum, RD asked would these suggestions be issue based? JM thought each LAF should establish what support it wanted.

Action: RD to write to JM's contact to re-inforce the 3 year commitment request for the Regional Co-ordinator post. Each LAF to pass to the Regional Forum the subject support required from Natural England in order to manage work.

6. Coastal Access Update

Andrew Best of **Natural England** kindly supplied a paper to the Forum on the present status of the local and national picture (papers attached). There are two 'live' stretches in the north east, North Gare to South Bents and Filey Brigg to North Gare.

North Gare to South Bents is furthest advanced with the SoS expected to allow work on the ground to begin this summer. Filey Brigg start point had been changed from Speeton as it was believed to be important that the route had a recognised start point – the southern end of the Cleveland Way. RD explained the support made by the TVLAF to Natural England in establishing the most appropriate route up to and around the Tees estuary. JM explained that although progress appeared slow, the project was ring fenced and well

resourced. VC noted that parts of the Sunderland – Seaham path was washing away, and thought that since the impact of Turning the Tide, the loss of coal was effectively speeding up the process of rollback.

Action: RD asked BB to thank Andrew Best for his update.

7. Regional Roundup

Northumberland

Dukeswood, outside Hexham has been in use for many years as a community area, it appears the Duke of Northumberland wishes to sell, and to avoid the loss of a community facility a presentation was made to the Northumberland JLAF by Jim Lepinwell who hopes to access grant funding to buy the woods and develop an education /craft centre to make a community woodland self sustaining.

The River Aln had lost it's stepping stones in the recent wet weather, and local groups asked the DoN for a ford or bridge to replace the lost stones. The stepping stones would be replaced.

GA had no information about the Local Nature Partnership, but was concerned about the possible duplication of work.

The LAF had assisted College Valley Trust in preparing a paper describing how it's paths could be managed in the future.

Tyne and Wear

DT thought there was an important link to be made with the new Public Health & Wellbeing Boards that were due to assume responsibility on 1st April 2013. Tyne and Wear are writing to all 5 in their area in an effort to promote/defend paths and linking them to healthy exercise.

At the most recent meeting ROW Officers described major paths that had been washed out following the wet weather, some were closed in part, and no funding was available, as the extensive damage was outside the normal maintenance budget. DT thought a national picture should be made available to Defra. RD believed there were contingency funds for highways, and that should extend to paths, GA listed three roads in Northumberland that had been closed due to subsidence, and were not due to reopen for some months. JM thought that the issue should not just be about re-instatement, but that paths should be re-designed and installed to cope with changing weather conditions.

VC described recent housing plans from the Lambton Estates, which include restoring Lambton Castle and access through the grounds. He hopes Durham LAF would have some news on their progress.

Action: All LAFs to let the Regional Co-ordinator know what level of problem exists within their area, as regards the partial/complete loss of paths due to the inclement weather and give examples to BB; DT to draft a regional response for Defra.

Tees Valley

The TVLAF/Access WG/FoG was running the Access Audit, (with the assistance of the Landscape Partnership Bid) of the Teesdale Way, in an effort to improve its profile and its physical condition. The TVLAF Vice Chair Rob Brown, had been invited on to the Management Board of the Local Nature Partnership. Recent communication and success had been made with regard to crossing points on the railways within the area to make sure they are all boarded out.

8. Regional Co-ordinator Roundup

BB circulated a Word copy of the recent Regional Annual Report, which had been compiled without access to all individual annual reports. (paper attached). Despite the operational differences between the urban and rural LAFs there were similarities, in terms of membership and activity.

9. National Conference

DT and colleagues were hosting a national Workshop, further developing the theme of the Tyne and Wear one.

JM thought Anne Louise Orange would be happy to attend the next meeting to outline the status of the LNP in the Tees Valley.

Action: DT agreed to report to the regional Forum their views of the national conference. Regional conference to be on the next agenda. BB to invite Anne Louise Orange to the next meeting.

10. Date and time of AGM

Action: Chair suggested end June/beginning July 2013; Beryl to call the meeting and agreed the same venue.

Meeting closed at 12:00pm