

Tees Valley Local Access Forum

Minutes

5th December 2016, 10:00am

Darlington Borough Council Offices, Allington Way, Darlington

Attending: Rob Brown (Vice Chair), Paul Harman, Graham Clingan, Christine Corbett, Mike Roff (Vice Chair), David Reed, Yvonne Ramage (Chair).

Officers Attending: Stewart Williams, Rob Morrow, Chris Scaife, Malcolm Thompson, Beryl Bird.

Apologies: Councillor Carson, Councillor Rooney, Deborah Jefferson, Robin Daniels, Fiona Campbell, Judith Underwood.

1. Introduction and Welcome

Yvonne Ramage welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked Malcolm Thompson for hosting.

2. Apologies

As above.

3. Minutes of Meeting 29th September 2016

MR indicated the date of this meeting had changed; BB explained the need for change. RB proposed to accept the Minutes were a true record and DR seconded.

4. Matters Arising

4.1 Letter to Hartlepool Mail

YR described the background for the letter to the Hartlepool Mail objecting to the volume of dog waste, necessitating collection by Hartlepool Countryside Volunteers and Brownies at Seaton Dunes, a SSSI. RB believes the letter has been published.

Action: BB to establish whether the letter was published and see what response there has been.

4.2 PSPOs

This led to a wider discussion about PSPOs (which were the subject of the ten minute training at the last meeting) – MR wondered if they could be described as ‘draconian’ as described in the national media. SW believes the issue is that of unclear guidance, a number of orders had been replaced by PSPOs and the guidance needed to be more specific. CS observed that any draft order had to be published, this was part of the consultation process and the problem was lack of communication.

YR described her view when she read the plans at Sunderland Council; an enormous geographical area, inadequately worded and shallow questions. CS described the national need to build case law and precedent and that the high court can overturn an inadequate PSPO.

PH described a more open approach taken by Innsbruck, where the town has a positive open approach to welcoming skateboarders. Perhaps the LAF role could recommend positive liaison with these groups? YR thought that public spaces shouldn't be barren and all the Officers agreed that skateboarders have had facilities provided for them over the course of the last few years although perhaps not in the areas where they would prefer. GC described the positive engagement with skateboarding groups; building facilities when funding was available and agreed not one size fitted all.

5. Teesdale Way website development

YR described a positive meeting on the 16.11.16 with Paul Sherwood from North Yorkshire LAF and David Maughan from Durham LAF. Both LAFs endorsed the notion of a Teesdale Way website, built and managed by RTR, with direct input from the LAFs, and with a long term future built in.

Redcar and Cleveland LAF had not attended, but had been copied into the Minutes of the meeting.

CC believes the Durham University students who would work on the project were second year students, and their assessment would be at the end of February 2017. All agreed the skeleton of a site would be a good beginning. YR and MR hoped to be able to join a meeting with RTR and the students from Durham University early in the New Year.

Action: BB to liaise with Tom Watson to request LAF attendance at the meeting, if possible

A very positive discussion ensued;

SW agreed the LAs couldn't manage or fund such a site, that a process needs to be in place to inform the public of path closures or diversions, that guidelines need to be available for updating entries, a certificate could be provided to walkers who had completed the path and there should be a management sub-committee committed to the website.

CS thought that sponsorship and other funding opportunities should be tracked from day one to build in longevity, that there needed to be an administrator and the South West coast path was a good example for the students to study.

GC thought there should be a framework provided for businesses to update their own information, which would also provide a sense of ownership.

CC thought the students would set the style and branding.

PH thought the students should be encouraged to look overseas at successful path sites, to see how it's done in Tenerife for example.

MR thought that Ted Liddle's example of the Sandstone Way was a very positive one to follow, and hoped the whole of the Teesdale Way would be included and in order to assist promotion he suggested a coast to coast T shirt.

Action: All comments to be passed on by YR/BB to the RTR/Durham University website design group.

6. ECP – North Tees Trail

CS described a stage in the ECP shared with Stockton on Tees Borough Council, from Hartlepool along the Tees Road into Stockton. Whilst it had been approved by the SoS (DEFRA), the next task was to manage the funding gap between

Natural England and the partner Authorities and at the same time start the 'installation' of the path.

The area in Hartlepool requiring funding was a section over marshy land alongside the Tees Road of approx 300meters that required board walking. A bid to the Veolia Environmental Trust was being applied for by Hartlepool Borough Council with assistance from Stockton on Tees Borough Council. Other funding streams were being explored; Andrew Best from Natural England had approached the new Combined Authority for support, CC described a bid submitted to the HLF for this North Tees Trail, GC described LEADER funding where economic regeneration would be the lead driver. The outcomes of the joint bids submitted for the whole of the North Tees Trail would be known in the spring of 2017.

The only difficulty appears to be the estimation of numbers using the path; submissions had to rely on figures generated in Seaham and latterly figures provided by Niall Benson at Crimdon.

RM described the difficulty balancing the original intention of future proofing the path to allow for cyclists at some point, whilst managing to establish the path in the first instance. In an attempt to narrow the funding gap, the 3m path could be reduced to 2m; treated timber was cheaper than recycled plastic.

Action: CS/RM to update the next meeting with any progress.

7. Standing Items

7.1 Co-ordinate LAF Activity

BB described updating the website; improving the quality of information on the Nature Reserves entries and attempting to make the site more useful.

Action: Any suggestions for improving the site would be welcome.

7.2 Coastal Access

SW described the increasing incidence of fly tipping around the Newport Bridge on the ECP. Network Rail's land in the area had been sold and the site was now open allowing unrestricted access. SW is considering gating the access to manage the problem.

7.3 River Tees Re-Discovered

CC described the increasing benefit to the RoW from the RTR Heritage Lottery project across the Tees Valley, with Access Officers improving stiles, paths, gates and tracks. Christine is planning the launch of Heritage Trails, and is considering a mini walking festival in 2017. YR thought the programme of walks for 2017 'looked inspiring'.

GC wondered if the LAF could add anything to the proposals for the Heritage Trails and asked if these could be available for the next meeting.

Action: CC agreed to submit the drafts of the Heritage Trails to the LAF members to see if anything could be added; including the type of heritage to promote and more particularly the about-to-be launched Shildon to Darlington bikeway.

7.4 Traffic Lights for Dogs

CS has met with the Hartlepool Police and in a separate meeting with RB and BB all agreed the detail, making some final amendments. The funding for the signage is being met by the Council and Hartlepool Police who have also offered to print short leaflets and small cards promoting the project around the Hartlepool area. All agreed that it could be rolled out across the Hartlepool

Borough and used a model of how to approach the problem of dogs attacking sheep. It is envisaged that the HBC PR department will report on the project once the signage is in place; hopefully by the close of the year.

Action: CS/RB to update the members at the next meeting.

8. Issues to be raised by members or Officers

8.1 CTC Survey

YR outlined the background to this item; CTC had produced a report on a survey conducted amongst cycling members concerning our 'archaic' RoW network. It was felt that the editorial was leading the mountain biking fraternity, which appeared to YR and MR to be irresponsible.

A general discussion ensued; SW thought the government were hoping to increase cycling using the largest network – the RoW, which for Middlesbrough would mean increased maintenance and further complicated by funding only available to improve economic well being and not health.

CS described some local issues that were managed by HBC, but largely believed that as LA's were 'cash strapped' that this could not be considered a priority and that the legal processes were being ignored.

DR described mountain bikers in towns and on footpaths in Hamsterley Forest as both bad-mannered and dangerous, moving very quickly on the path network with no bells and no alerting other users that they were coming through.

SW agreed that LA's were 'strapped for cash' and believes that segregated cycle routes would shortly disappear, as there was a difference in cost between red and black tarmac.

YR thought that this was a 'hot topic for the future' and we should avoid being drawn into it if possible.

8.2 Ramblers Big Pathwatch

The Ramblers Big Pathwatch has been re-launched at the same time as a report into the first years progress was released.

SW described the report as disappointing and the project hadn't really worked, the quality of information provided was poor and no maps were provided.

RM described continual confusion between different authorities. PH described the walks promoted in the Darlington and Stockton Times (D&S), could the D&S invite comments on the walks they published with users encouraged to mark issues on the map?

SW described the confused reporting system; LA normally get problems reported in their web site, the Big Pathwatch now had issues reported to Ramblers who then reported them to the LAs – where was the benefit?

DR read out a section from the Ramblers magazine, *Walking*, describing the Big Pathwatch as a four year campaign to build public support for ROW and 'to encourage Local Authorities to think creatively' about RoW maintenance.

MT applauded the aims of the Big Pathwatch but that the reporting mechanism needs improving as the quality of the information provided is poor.

9. AOB

9.1 Malcolm Thompson retiring

YR asked MT what plans Darlington Borough Council had for his post once he retires in April 2016. MT described the LA plans to replace him and in time for a suitable handover period to be managed.

9.2 Work Programme

BB described the annual Work Programme, and its need for revision. Once YR had an opportunity to study the present plan, it would be circulated for comment and updating.

9.3 Highways Asset Management Team

SW is now a member of the new team, Highways Asset Management in Middlesbrough Council. Apart from now having to provide scaffold and skip licences he was also responsible for updating the Local Street Gazetteer (LSG). CS at Hartlepool Borough Council and MT at Darlington Borough Council have already added their RoW to the National Street Gazetteer and the list of Streets and LSG.

9.4 Stockton on Tees Local Plan

GC had a number of points to make; he drew the member's attention to the Local Plan which is out for consultation (members already have a link to the site). He also described the recent opening of the South Stockton Greenway from Preston Park to Hartburn, in effect a traffic free path from Ingelby Barwick to Sedgefield, a major strategic route and some considerable time in the planning. YR described the opening of the path for cyclists as 'wonderful'.

9.5 Middlesbrough RoWIP

SW will be consulting with the TVLAF about the revisions being planned to Middlesbrough Council's RoWIP, the funding available will curtail the action Plan and a new one is being developed.

9.6 Meeting timings

All agreed the revised meeting time was appropriate.

9.7 Meeting Dates 2017

Provisional dates are:

AGM March 2nd 2017 in Middlesbrough,

June 1st 2017 in Stockton on Tees,

September 7th 2017 in Hartlepool and

December 7th 2017 in Darlington.

Meeting closed at 12:00.