

Lancashire Local Access Forum

Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday, 15th January, 2019 at 10.30 am in Committee Room 'C' (The Duke of Lancaster Room) - County Hall, Preston

Present:

Chair

J R Toon, Independent

Committee Members

County Councillor Ian Brown
County Councillor Cosima Towneley
Arthur Baldwin, Access Rossendale
Ralph Henderson, Cross Category
David Kelly, Ramblers Association
Chris Kynch, Lancashire Association of Local Councils
Mike Prescott, Cycling UK

Officers

Steve Williams
Lorraine Mellodey, Blackburn with Darwen (Capita)
Paul Withington, Blackburn with Darwen (Capita)

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Steve Kirby, Paul McKeown and David Goode, Public Rights of Way Manager.

The Lancashire Local Access Forum was informed that Ralph Henderson had decided to resign from the forum and thanked him for all his service to the forum.

The Chair also welcomed Chris Kynch to the meeting as an observer and explained that some formalities had to be sorted out before she could become a member of the forum.

2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 October 2018

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2018 were agreed as a correct record.

3. Matters Arising

Regarding coastal access there were still concerns raised about the route at Whitehaven. The forum was informed that Natural England was still trying to keep to the timescale.

The dwindling numbers of LLA members was also raised. The forum was lacking in landowners and dominated by user groups. It was noted that it was the responsibility of the three Highways Authorities and the appointment process must be looked at.

In terms of the Local Transport Plan 4, it noted by members that they not been contacted as stakeholders and stated they wanted to be actively involved.

4. Birds of Prey in Lancashire's Upland Areas

The Chair welcomed Stephen Murphy from Natural England to the meeting who gave an excellent presentation on birds of prey in Lancashire's upland areas.

Hen Harriers were emblematic of the Lancashire uplands, especially in the Forest of Bowland. A bird of prey which was emblematic could benefit from the area being given special status. Stephen explained that the numbers of hen harriers had declined nationally and in Bowland the numbers had significantly declined since the mid 2000s. Hen Harriers were an extremely rare species and the remnant population was almost extinct. He stated that Bowland should be designated as a wintering Special Protection Area (SPA). This would increase protection for the hen harrier. Bowland was already designated as a SPA during the breeding season over spring and early summer. Some felt that it was important that SPAs did not affect access to an area which made a livelihood for some people. Hen harriers valued areas which were not subject to intensive management. A winter SPA would not result in a massive influx of people.

Hen Harriers breded mainly in upland habitats and nested on the ground. They were communal. Lancashire's uplands had amazing wildlife. Merlins were a success story. Although declining in numbers nationally, their numbers were stable in Lancashire. Sharp Eared Owls were declining nationally including in Lancashire. Peregrines were increasing nationally but had declined in Bowland and other upland areas. The number of ospreys was on the up.

Regarding hen harriers, between 2002 and 2010 Natural England had raised awareness and recorded breeding distribution and performance. It had also an improved radio and tracking system which gave a more accurate picture of the winter activity of hen harriers.

Hen Harriers were natural predators and grouse was their main prey. Intensive grouse shooting was a problem and the forum was informed that there was an online petition to ban driven grouse shooting.

It was noted that Defra had set up a six point action plan to increase the hen harrier population. The six points were:

1. Monitoring of populations in England and the UK.
2. Diversionary feeding – share best practice with land managers and gamekeepers.
3. Work closely with the Raptor Persecution Priority Delivery Group (RPPDG) to analyse monitoring information and build an intelligence picture.
4. Nest and winter roost protection.
5. Reintroduce hen harriers to suitable upland and lowland habitat in Southern England.

6. Trial brood management scheme.

Forum members enquired if there was anything they could do for a sustainable population of hen harriers. Local Nature Partnerships could possibly help. They felt that it was appropriate to revisit wintering Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designation. In particular to give some protection to the birds in the winter parts of the year. They wanted designation to maintain conservation. They would make a representation to Defra and Natural England.

5. North West Regional LAF Chairs Meeting

The Chair, Richard Toon, informed the forum he had attended the North West Regional LAF Chairs meeting on 27th November 2018.

One topic that came up at the meeting was Local Street Gazetteer (LSG). LSG was a database of all street information. Information about the street would include many items such as its name, location, type and length.

From the information within the LSG, local authorities were able to plan street works and run the maintenance of roads to much greater efficiency than was previously possible.

The forum felt that LSG should give access to Lost Ways and it could allow United Utilities to block future works on the network. Its primary purpose was to inform the public where United Utilities were working.

6. Level Crossings on the Rail Network

The Memorandum of Understanding was an agreement nationally and had been developed by representatives of Network Rail, the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport – Rights of Way Manager's Group (ADEPT) and the Institute of Public Rights of Way and Access Management (IPRoW). The aim was to improve working practices between Network Rail and Local Highways Authorities where Public Rights of Way used level crossings on the rail network in England and Wales.

The document was not intended to be legally binding. It was aimed at encouraging clearer communication and building collaborative relationships between Network Rail and Local Highway Authorities. This would encourage the most effective dialogue when changes were proposed to a level crossing which affects a Public Right of Way. It was an important step towards working together to ensure that users remained safe when using the PROW network.

Concerns were raised by the forum that Network Rail would not follow procedures properly when making changes. The LLAF and user groups were not being consulted with. Changes were being made that were a disadvantage to the disabled. It was agreed that the Chair write a letter to Network Rail representing all LAFs regarding this.

7. Collaboration Between LAFs

It was felt that lack of collaboration and communication between Local Access forums was a weakness. It was noted that there used to be an annual meeting between forums but Defra had pulled the funding on this. The forum felt it was a shame that Defra did not see the value in an annual meeting.

8. Access Land in Lancashire - Officer Responsibilities

This item was accidentally missed at the meeting.

9. Warcop, Hilton and Murton Lose Commonland Status

For information the forum was informed that after an inquiry at Cumbria County Council, the Ministry of Defence's (MoD) application to deregister Warcop, Hilton and Murton Commons as common land had been accepted despite opposition.

The outcome of the inquiry and the decision were hugely important because of the precedent this set for all of our common land. The inquiry had been complex but the consequences of deregistration were simple enough. The decision to deregister these commons put their cultural heritage at risk and gave the MoD discretion to deny local use. It could lead to vulnerabilities in common land around the country. The land would lose protection against encroachment and development since work on common land required the consent of the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in addition to any planning permission. Regarding Heritage it would bring to an end hundreds of years of tradition of upland communing. The farming community would now be denied any opportunity in future to graze their stock there.

10. £50,000 Award to Test Cycle and Walkway Along Arnside Viaduct | Morecambe Bay Partnership

It was noted that an award of £50,000 to Morecambe Bay Partnership would cost and explore the opportunities of a walking and cycling route alongside Arnside viaduct.

The idea of the project had been around for years. After the tradition of walking across the viaduct on Christmas Day was stopped ten years ago for safety reasons the idea to build a new footpath / cyclepath alongside the viaduct was born.

The connection would create a vital link in the English Coastal Path and offer a new route for the Bay Cycle way creating a new circular route starting from Grange or Arnside stations.

Evidence from other long distance cycling and walking routes suggested that more walkers and cyclists could bring a very significant boost to the local economy.

The award would mean that studies could be done to find out if the bridge and route should go ahead, to find out how much it would cost, what benefits and challenges it would bring and how it should be designed to help manage visitors positively.

Network Rail had supported initial feasibility and would work with Morecambe Bay Partnership and other partners to evaluate and test the route, economic impact and costs.

11. Any Other Business

The Chair, Richard Toon, informed the forum he would be attending a public inquiry in Carnforth about decisions made in 1995.

12. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Forum would be held on Tuesday 9 April 2019 at 10:30am in in Conference Room 1, First Floor, Old Town Hall, Blackburn.

L Sales
Director of Corporate Services

County Hall
Preston