

Lancashire Local Access Forum

Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday, 26th January, 2021 at 10.30 am in Zoom Virtual Meeting - Zoom

Present:

Chair

Richard Toon, Independent

Committee Members

County Councillor Ian Brown
Peter Edge, Lancashire Association of Local Councils
David Kelly, Ramblers Association
Chris Kynch, Lancashire Association of Local Councils
Mike Prescott, Cycling UK
Paul Withington, Blackburn with Darwen Council

Officers

Garth Harbison, Lancashire County Council

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from County Councillor Cosima Towneley, Lorraine Mellodey, Arthur Baldwin, Steve Kirby and David Goode.

2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 4 February 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

3. Matters Arising

Regarding the Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4), it was noted that in terms of congestion in Manchester there had been noticeable, significant changes in terms of cyclist provision and noting had really been done to improve cycling provision in Lancashire. It was pointed out that cycling provision in Lancaster was excellent.

Regarding carbon emissions, the subject of electric charging points for vehicles was raised. There was concern because people did not know where these charging points were. Local authorities must make the public more aware as to where these points were located.

4. Notes of the Special Meeting held on 24 November 2020

The Chair, Richard Toon, had submitted a formal response about the Coastal Path on behalf of the Lancashire Local Access Forum to Natural England.

Regarding Preston Go-Kart Track to Wallend Road, Riversway, Preston, the forum would like to see the path follow the north bank of the River Ribble. The owners of the site were looking to create a large recreational development. The Chair, Richard Toon, would make a representation to Preston City Council about this area.

5. Coastal Access Update

The forum was informed that three of the six sections of the North West England Coastal Path had gained approval.

In the Natural England report for each of the sections, there was itemised costings for the work to be done. The forum enquired if the work on the ground was going to start quickly on these sections which had been approved.

It was stated that Section 5 of the North West England Coastal Path had not been approved as there had been a lot of objections to it. The forum was informed that this section was still with the Planning Inspectorate.

6. Countryside Code

The new draft Countryside Code had already been circulated to forum members prior to the meeting. The new draft Countryside Code had been put out for consultation by Natural England. It was felt to be a significant improvement on the previous Countryside Code. It was agreed to look at the complete Countryside Code at the next meeting of the forum.

It was stated that during the Covid pandemic, farmers and landowners had seen a lot more visitors. Farmers and landowners had experienced problems with littering, dog fouling, dog attacks, the lack of provision of toilets and parking. There were also issues around trespassing. There was a request for the possibility of LCC, the LLAF or the NFU to get messages out to the public before the holiday season explaining to them what the rules were about visiting the countryside. It was hoped that the three highway authorities would provide to the public good quality information, imploring them to follow the Countryside Code and respect the countryside.

It was pointed out to the forum that all the local authorities had been working with the 'Let's Do It For Lancashire' campaign. It would be useful to use this campaign to focus on the countryside reminding people how to explore the countryside safely and considerately.

7. Rights of Way in Lancashire

The forum was interested to know if there was any hard data of Rights of Way in Lancashire. It was noted that the Ramblers Association used to do a conditions survey of footpaths the association was hoping to do something similar again. There was no legal obligation for Lancashire County Council to do surveys. It was more about responding to issues and complaints rather than having a forward plan.

The forum was informed that Blackburn with Darwen Council received regular updates from ramblers both on paths and failed paths. Pre Covid the council had done random 10% surveys of the network to see whether the paths were fit and available for use.

Because it was a random 10% survey the only issue was that you would not get the full coverage.

Over the last ten years there had been representations a few times about a survey that Natural England had done across the country. It was a very detailed survey and involved in-house interviews with a random selection of people to do with Rights of Way and access to the countryside. These MENE surveys were done between 2009 and 2019. The survey had continued and was now called the People and Nature Survey.

Three reports were presented to the forum. The first one was on 'The People and Nature Survey for England 2020: Monthly Interim Indicators for November 2020 (Experimental Statistics)'. This report was published on 13 January 2021 and was extremely up to date. There had been increases in people accessing the countryside during the pandemic.

The second report was 'The People and Nature Survey for England 2020: Children's Survey (Experimental Statistics)'. Natural England commissioned research to understand the perspective of children and young people relating to nature during the pandemic. Asking children about their experiences directly was important to provide young people with a greater stake in and voice about the natural environment.

The report asked whether young people had been able to get outside or not. It was noted that young people had more limited access to the outdoors due to social backgrounds. There were questions about why go outside and what were the reasons for going outside. The report stated that 60% of children had spent less time outdoors since the start of coronavirus. This was more than double the proportion that had spent more time outside.

Some primary schools in Lancashire had introduced 'Forest School' into their curriculum. This was where children went outside of the classroom to learn about nature. There had been positive feedback on this.

It was felt that the report was very informative and it was important to encourage Natural England to continue with this work. It was very important for public health and wellbeing.

The forum enquired as to what extent families were being deterred from going out and was anything being done regarding safety especially walking on roads and crossing fields with livestock.

The Chair, with the agreement of the forum, wished to refer this report to the three education authorities to draw their attention to it and to show there had been significant research into young people not accessing the outdoors.

The third report was 'Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment – the National Survey on People and the Natural Environment'. This the result of one of the final ten year MENE reports prior to Covid. It gave details of how many people did access the countryside and for what reasons. Over the ten year period there had been an upward trend in terms of visits to the countryside. It was possible to extract the data for Lancashire from this report.

The forum was informed that around 15 years ago there had been a Quiet Lanes initiative. The Quiet Lanes Initiative had been set up by Central Government with pilot authorities

doing the work. Lancashire had been a pilot authority for Quiet Lanes. Work had been done but the evaluation of how effective it had been was never completed. It was noted that Government had published advice for the provision of non-motorist users.

It as agreed to draw this third report, 'Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment – the National Survey on People and the Natural Environment', to the attention of the three Highways Authorities.

8. Any Other Business

There was no Any Other Business.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meetings would be:

Tuesday 20th July at 10:30am

Tuesday 18th January at 10:30am

L Sales
Director of Corporate Services

County Hall
Preston