

Peak District Local Access Forum

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 14 June 2023
at Aldern House, Baslow Road, Bakewell.**

Members Present:

Charlotte Leech
Martin Bennett
Ben Seal
Charlotte Gilbert
Louise Hawson
Geoff Nickolds
John Towe

Craig Best
Austin Knott
Richard Entwistle
Clare Griffin
Jez Kenyon
Paul Richardson

Others Present:

Mike Rhodes, (PDNPA) (Secretary)
Dave Savage, Local Access Forum

Gill Millward, (DCC)
Sue Smith, (PDNPA)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Susan Hobson, Alastair Harvey and Councillor Andrew McCloy.

10. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Nick Doran, Cllr Susan Hobson, Alastair Harvey and Cllr Andrew McCloy. Mike Rhodes advised that today's meeting would have been Andrew McCloy's final LAF meeting, as he has now stepped down as Chair of the Peak District National Park Authority, and will no longer be an Authority member. The group thanked Andrew McCloy for his services to the Peak District LAF. Jo Holliday is no longer a member of the Forum.

11. MINUTES OF THE MEETING 15 MARCH 2023

The minutes of the last meeting held on the 15th March 2023 were approved as a correct record.

12. MATTERS ARISING FROM LAST MEETING NOT COVERED BY AGENDA

PDNPA TRANSPORT SYMPOSIUM

It was agreed at this event that a new post of a Sustainable Transport Officer would be created. The person appointed would be invited to the next LAF meeting.

ENVIRONMENT LAND MANAGEMENT SCHEMES (ELMS) UPDATE

Charlotte Gilbert gave an update to Members to the effect that the government had reviewed the payments to upland farmers, which had previously been proposed to be set at a lower rate to lowland farmers. Upland and lowland farmers will now receive payments at the same rate.

ACCESS TO WATER

Ben Seal to update the Forum later in the meeting.

NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN (NPMP)

Chief Executive, Phil Mulligan, has sent a confirmation letter that the NPMP is now into the delivery stage. Charlotte Gilbert has sat on the NPMP review board for a while, but would now aim to pass that work on, and asked for any LAF member that might be interested in picking this up to come forward.

CAR PARKING CHARGES

After Authority Members agreed the increase to car parking charges on 3 February 2023, the scheme is now with Derbyshire County Council. The increased rates and introduction of new Pay and Display machines is set for the end of summer 2023.

LANDSCAPE RECOVERY ROUND 2

Louise thought it would be useful to be kept up to date with any Landscape Recovery funded schemes that Forum members were involved in. Craig Best advised that a plan would be submitted imminently for the whole of the High Peak National Trust estate.

Martin Bennett referred to the NPMP Aim 2 regarding nature depletion, with the recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report stating that there is a likelihood of 1.5 °C increase in global temperatures.

13. PROPOSED CHANGES TO LAF MEETINGS (INCLUDING UPDATE ON PDNPA ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

Mike Rhodes advised the Forum that there had already been some adjustments to the running of LAF meetings in that there had been a reduction to 3 meetings a year, with the next meeting scheduled on Wednesday 1 November. The proposed organisational changes would mean that PDNPA support for the LAF would be reduced, including less support from Democratic Services who currently provide much of the administrative work. It was important to keep the momentum of the LAF work going. Communication between meetings would be ongoing.

There followed a discussion between LAF members as to the best way to do this as a group who don't have access to a shared network, with input on how this is done with other groups and organisations.

Jez Kenyon wanted to ensure that the purpose of the LAF was clearly set out in order to underline its importance as a statutory advisor. WhatsApp allows for easy group discussion and enables sharing of documents, either by referring to the current published documents on the website or as email attachments. As all key information is published, WhatsApp's main function would be to continue group discussion, with reference to relevant documents. There would be no need to set up a separate platform for LAF members to access discussion details and documents, and therefore no requirement to set everybody up with logins and passwords.

Charlotte Gilbert emphasised the importance of the LAF working as a group. It has facilitated useful discussion amongst Forum members, which needs to continue with full agendas and presentation of information. More sub groups and different structures for topic discussion could be considered, along with ad hoc follow up meetings and site visits.

Louise Hawson flagged an issue with having longer intervals between meetings around consultation deadlines being missed by full group meetings. Any solutions to keeping the Forum in discussion between full meetings should be kept simple.

Further discussion was had around different platforms that could be used by the group, including some input from PDNPA Web Manager, David Higley, attending in a personal role

with his involvement outside work in digital marketing, and also as part of an access community group in his local area. He advised that a dedicated domain on the PDNPA website could be set up with members accessing through a login and password.

There was some debate on using a group discussion platform versus continuing to use email to circulate documents and information, plus what would be confidential at discussion stage as opposed to public information.

Sue Smith advised that Natural England is looking at how it can support Local Access Forums.

It was agreed to look into solutions for keeping LAF discussions moving between full meetings.

14. THEMED TOPIC - ACCESS FOR ALL

An update was given on DEFRA Access for all funding by Sue Smith, PDNPA Access and Rights of Way Officer.

In November 2022, the Peak District National Park Authority received £131k of capital funding for infrastructure improvements to make Protected Landscapes more accessible for people of all ages and abilities and from all socio-economic backgrounds, to make them what Glover called, 'places for everyone.' No funding is available in Year 2 (this current year) of the programme. Further funding will be received in Year 3, anticipated to be £158k.

The Year 1 funding was required to be spent by the end of March 2023. This was met by developing facilities at key locations, improving online information, creating and enhancing Miles without Stiles routes, and increasing the number of people participating to meet the Authority's ambition. The Programme and Resources Committee Report of 28 April 2023 sets out the details of that delivery.

Sue advised the Forum on how to make a destination an accessible place. In the Peak District, Accessible Castleton has been developed as a template for accessibility. This builds on the provision of accessible routes by working with businesses to compile a catalogue of information, producing a visitor guide for the visitor centre, providing a sensory story and itineraries, and, in conjunction with Visit Peak District & Derbyshire, providing accessibility training for businesses.

There followed a video by Gillian Scotsford, Director of AccessibleUK. Gillian set out how and why AccessibleUK was set up, and their aim to make it as easy as possible for any person or group with disabilities to get out and about. Availability of information about destinations is very important, even if the advice is that there are access limitations to that site. Awareness and training of people providing services at these locations is also important.

John Towe expanded on this by giving a presentation based on an individual case study of someone with acquired disability which means they have mobility problems as well as underlying health conditions. The presentation highlighted that people of all abilities want to be as independent as possible, and there can often be quite simple solutions to make access for all easier. John pointed out that many people with any sort of disability or additional needs don't get past the planning stage for their visit. Detailed, accurate information about the destination is vital, along with how they are going to make their journey, with good customer service along the way. The person represented in the presentation was a hillwalker, canoeist, skier and guider before they became a wheelchair user, and with the right information, facilities and support, there is no reason that this person shouldn't be able to keep participating in these activities.

The Forum warmly welcomed John's detailed presentation.

Louise Hawson picked up on how important it is for organisations to provide all relevant information so that people can plan properly.

David Higley advised of his involvement with Accessible Belper, and how some of the momentum on accessibility was lost during Covid. Some areas are better than others on this issue, now is the time to try and get the momentum back at scale by raising awareness with businesses and the hospitality sector.

Sue Smith outlined that some of the Year 1 DEFRA Access funding had been used to identify what information is useful for visitors, and how and where to make that information available. This will help support local businesses to think about what they can do to improve access.

Clare Griffin pointed out that anyone could acquire a disability at any stage in their lives and added that it was recognised in the health service that access to nature delivered better outcomes for patients. She raised a question about what the Year 3 DEFRA money was to be spent on. Sue Smith stated that plans were being drawn up to build on the Year 1 work, including working with partners. Some of the plans could be costly, and match funding may be required. The LAF is key in looking at accessibility.

Geoff Nickolds raised a point about the possible closure of visitor centres in places such as Castleton. This was part of efficiencies being proposed by the PDNPA. Geoff wanted to clarify whether this was purely based on money saving, or were other factors being considered when looking at the value of visitor centres, such as the role they play in providing information about accessibility in the Peak District. Sarah Wilks, PDNPA Head of Engagement, was present for this part of the discussion. She updated the Forum that there had been a PDNPA press release on 6 June 2023 stating that an external donor support of funding for up to 3 years had been offered. The proposals for the closure of the Visitor Centres was on hold for a period of time while the funding was secured, and plans drawn up.

Louise mentioned the improvements that had been made at the bottom of the Long Causeway at Stanage. Hopefully the work would continue to the top of the track, but already it had improved access to Stanage Pole. Louise went on to mention access to North Lees estate more generally, commenting that making sites accessible needed to be balanced with retaining the element of wilderness. Sue Smith advised about the accessible camping pods and facilities at North Lees. More widely, the PDNPA Rights of Way Team is working with DCC to look at connectivity and to identify routes that can be linked.

Jez Kenyon raised a point about the digital side of planning for a trip or journey, in that people will have a wide range of ability. Technology may be an important feature of access for all, but maybe some market research is needed to find out what the best way is of making information available.

Martin Bennett pointed out how important it is to install and maintain infrastructure to assist people to access all facilities and areas as fully as possible, including outside of normal business hours.

There was a concluding comment from John Towe, who stated in his experience individuals will adapt to their surroundings. They just want to be out and about. Information is shared amongst the disabled community, to help others make progress.

15. ACCESS UPDATE

Silence Mine Direction

Following the consultation, Sue Smith confirmed the extension of the restriction of open access at this site through to April 2025. She thanked the LAF for its response to the consultation, and confirmed that there would be continued monitoring of the instability of the land in and around the mine, as well as consideration of the impacts of the restriction on the adjacent highway and the Restricted Byway/ public footpath that run across the site. The PDNPA will continue to liaise with DCC on this matter.

Speaker – Sue Woods – Green Lane Alliance

The National Park Management Plan (2023-28) sets out aims and objectives for natural beauty, assisting nature recovery, tranquillity and reducing carbon emissions, and any actions on Green Lanes needs to be consistent with these objectives. Enjoyment, protection and access have to be balanced against each other. There is no Green Lane Action Plan for the year ahead. Neither is there a report on last year's plan, so the public can't assess the effectiveness of how well the PDNPA is doing to look after Green Lanes. Will the work on Green Lanes be discontinued and will the LAF be happy with that? Sue Woods stated that if the work is to stop, then the LAF should ask for a detailed Rights of Way programme for the coming year, which states where Green Lane work sits within that plan.

Louise Hawson thanked Sue Woods for her contribution, and said the points raised would be picked up in Item 6 - Access Update.

Green Lanes

Over the last year there has been a comprehensive scheme of maintenance of routes, including a number of Green Lanes. There will be further details about this under agenda item 7, but Staffordshire County Council has also been involved in a programme of repairs. This has improved accessibility generally and the 2022-2023 Action Plans are in place until the end of 2023. The work on Green Lanes has been incorporated into the Recreation Hub work with an update being provided to the next LAF meeting. Sue reported on the results of the latest ease of use survey on rights of way within the National Park, with a score of 82% of routes being found to be easy to use. An update was given about the Access Fund, which is used to improve access and accessibility in the National Park. Money comes in from donations via the PDNP Foundation and from sales of the Miles Without Stiles Guidebook. Yorkshire Water's sponsorship has enabled a reprint of the Miles Without Stiles Guidebook.

Charlotte Gilbert queried progress on Swan Rake and Limers Rake at Hollinsclough, as she is involved in putting together a Heritage Lottery bid which will be used to make bridleway improvements at Washgate. Works have been done on the Derbyshire side and they want to replicate that on the Staffordshire side. It would be good to know when Swan and Limers Rakes are going to re-open, as they link into the network around that area. Charlotte wanted to know what measures would be in place to ensure further damage doesn't occur on the Rakes, for example, is Staffordshire CC likely to confirm the route as a bridleway.

Sue Smith stated that she didn't have a specific update for Swan and Limers Rakes, but emphasised that the maintenance scheme was comprehensive and that work was ongoing, and at significant cost. Louise asked if the Forum could raise the issue with Staffordshire CC. John Towe mentioned that bridle gates aren't good for wheelchair users, to which Charlotte advised that the design of the gates was being looked at.

Austin Knott updated the group that the works on Swan and Limers Rakes had been paused, but had started again recently, with the aim of completing in the autumn.

Jez Kenyon, on the subject of Miles without Stiles, said quite a lot of stiles aren't very user friendly. Sue Smith added that, as an example, Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) was only providing funding for gates rather than stiles.

It was agreed that the LAF would write to Staffordshire CC to ask for an update on

repairs to Swan and Limer Rakes, and the overall Green Lanes maintenance programme.

16. DERBYSHIRE CC ROWIP UPDATE

Gill Millward presented a report on the progress towards the delivery of Derbyshire's Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Gill reported that DCC had been successful in securing just over £3 million from Active Travel England (Tranche 4), and this was going to Cabinet the following day for approval to accept the grant. £2.73 million was awarded to fund the construction of a multi-user Greenway between the National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 54 Millennium Cycleway at Duffield Road in Little Eaton and Rawson Green in Kilburn as part of a longer route eventually connecting Ripley into Derby City. The remaining amount of £275k will fund further development and feasibility work to help progress connecting the White Peak Loop from the end of the Monsal Trail at Topley Pike into and across Buxton Town Centre to Harpur Hill.

Other work is on-going in relation to the Via Gellia (A5012) safer road scheme, and Gill thanked Martin Bennett for providing comments on that scheme. The work should improve not just road safety, but also the safety of footpath users on routes that come into that area.

Charlotte Gilbert reported on the work on Unrecorded Ways which will now extend for a further 5 years until 1 January 2031. This would add to the bottleneck of Definitive Map Modification Orders, but was still the best way to bring about bridleway network improvements. DCC is dealing with these Orders on a first come, first served basis. There are over 300 waiting to be reviewed and maybe there needs to be a way of prioritising how the updating work is done. Work is continuing on the Pennine Bridleway.

Charlotte asked for an update on the experimental Traffic Regulation Order consultation at Bamford Clough. Rob Greatorex advised that he had a draft paper to look at in order for it to go to the Cabinet Member to make a decision, which would be made this year.

Charlotte asked for an update on Pindale. Rob confirmed that remedial works were required, but would need to check with colleagues exactly where things were up to currently.

Martin referred back to the discussion on Via Gellia as he was there over at the weekend and advised that one way is lethal on the Middleton footpath. He also stated that the involvement of Active Travel was good, but cycling needs pushing at scale and pace.

17. DERBYSHIRE RIGHTS OF WAY MAINTENANCE PROGRAMME

Rob Greatorex, Team Leader of the Public Rights of Way (PRoW) team at Derbyshire County Council, made a presentation to the LAF.

Rob outlined the organisational structure of the Highways Directorate and the make up of the PRoW team that sits within the Highways Maintenance section of Network Planning. DCC's PRoW team manages and maintains the Public Rights of Way network throughout Derbyshire, ensuring the successful delivery of the Council's duties, responsibilities and priorities as Highway Authority. It was currently a responsive service to enquiries raised by members of the public, landowners, stakeholders etc

The team looked after 4,497 km of Public Footpaths; 612 km of Public Bridleways; 69.8km of Restricted Byways and 59 km of Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATS). Rob presented some figures to demonstrate the volume of work that the team deals with. Out of the 5,371 enquiries received in 2022/23, 4,670 (87%) are closed, leaving 701 (13%) outstanding.

During 2023/24, surface vegetation clearance will be undertaken on 662 selected paths across the county. Rob also referred to the role of Town and Parish Councils in carrying out maintenance on any footpath or bridleway within the parish or community. Of the 204 Derbyshire parish/town councils, 156 are signed up to the Minor Maintenance scheme and in 2022/23, 61 parish/town councils participated in the scheme.

In 2022/23, the PRoW team improved the surface of 8.1 miles of public rights of way, renewed or installed 1,043 roadside fingerposts, waymarked 202 routes and completed 240 minor rights of way schemes, as well as more major projects funded from the Highways Capital Programme.

The Highways Service is moving towards a mixed economy operational model and all service areas, including PRoW will be looked at. The new working model to be implemented by March 2024.

Clare Griffin congratulated Rob and DCC's PRoW team on the volume of work they undertook given that they are a small team. Martin Bennett added that the 5,238 km of rights of way that DCC is responsible for are pretty well looked after. Charlotte Gilbert gave an example of reporting a footpath problem to DCC's PRoW team through the public reporting system, where the path was closed within 3 hours of it being reported, and that the report was fully followed up. Austin Knott commented that the experience with Staffordshire Highways was not so good compared to DCC, who are very responsive.

Louise wondered if there were ways to try and involve groups, such as recreational users and parish councils, to build up support for RoW work.

Rob Greatorex advised that a volunteer officer had previously played a role in PRoW work at DCC, but that post had been lost due to cuts. Also the PRoW team had now been moved into the Highways Division from the Countryside Service. Volunteers don't tend to be an operational part of Highways, but volunteer involvement with maintenance work on rights of way should be looked at as it can help stop routes deteriorating. DCC's Countryside Service want to set up a volunteer co-ordinator role, and the PRoW team could use volunteers through a Service Level Agreement. Rob directs people who make enquiries about volunteering to contact town and parish councils.

Mike Rhodes advised the Forum that the PDNPA has volunteers who carry out conservation work, including path maintenance. Jez wondered if the PRoW team could secure time with Countryside Rangers in order to involve volunteers with maintenance work. Martin Bennett acknowledged that volunteer involvement is good, but that it takes resources to manage and co-ordinate.

Charlotte advised on the Peak District LAF Sub-Group which met with DCC Rights of Way on 18 May 2023. The Sub-Group went through the schemes of work completed by DCC and Louise thanked them for that work. There was good representation on the sub-group of different users – including cyclists, horse riders and walkers, and the meeting was very useful. Louise said that one of the issues that did come up in that meeting was about vegetation control. Rob Greatorex advised that clearance work was kept to a minimum and was done for safety reasons and to keep access points clear. Louise asked about drainage work around rights of way and if farmers assisted with this work. Rob responded that his team works with the Flood Risk team at DCC and that landowners and farmers could be encouraged to do more. Jez suggested that farmers used paths as drainage in some cases, and this can alter and widen routes. Rob referred to legislation regarding managing flood risk in relation to rights of way. Louise wondered if routes have been identified to prioritise issues re flooding and drainage.

Rob will report back later in 2023/early 2024 on the Highways Service review.

Louise mentioned that the Ease of Use survey will be discussed at a future meeting with Andy Farmer (PDNPA).

18. MEMBERS' REPORTS

Ben picked up an earlier agenda item relating to Access to Water and the Right to Roam. There has been a recent Access to Nature debate in the Commons. The shadow Environment Minister has advised that Labour will introduce a new Right to Roam Bill looking at wild camping in National Parks and extending access to woodlands and waterways. The current default is to exclude people. The shift with this Bill will be to a default of giving access. The Conservatives won't bring a further Access Bill before Parliament, although Therese Coffey, Secretary of State for the Environment, has announced an access to Green Space initiative, whereby everyone should be able to access green space within 15 minutes' walk from home. There is no detail about this as yet. If there was a shift to open up access to the public then it is worth thinking what that guidance would look like, and what input stakeholders, including the National Park, would like to have. Under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, there was a mention of amending Local Authority's duty to provide health and wellbeing opportunities for their residents, but Ben wasn't sure if this was being actioned by government.

Louise commented that if the assumption was to open up access, LAFs will become more important. Ben added that opening up access further can be a benefit for wildlife as it means that channelling everyone into small areas is less likely.

Dave Savage told the Forum about developing a running and walking challenge, the Wild Peak Rounds, starting and finishing in Bakewell and will be organised through the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust and would hopefully generate donations. The plan is for 3 routes – 15km, 50km and 115 km – that will link Wildlife Trust sites. There will be no set routes or times, and all will take place on Public Rights of Way. Participants will be given proof of completion, and routes will be signposted by discs on way markers. Clare thought not having time limits was a good idea and commented that we don't need more merchandising. Paul Richardson also thought this was a good idea and should generate a lot of interest.

19. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The group discussed the extension plans at Upper Derwent which are expected to be submitted by Severn Trent Water in July. Louise advised that PDNPA has a holding objection to the proposal. STW has offered to attend the LAF meeting after the submission is made.

The Kinder and High Peak Access Advisory Committee is having a meeting on 30 July to discuss the proposals and invites will be sent out to stakeholders. The Council for the Protection of Rural England and Friends of the Peak District are co-ordinating a coalition of concerns.

Austin Knott pointed out that the STW proposals will impact across the whole of the Peak District, not just the Upper Derwent Valley, including the pipeline network that will be required to connect reservoirs.

Paul Richardson praised Staffordshire CC on the consultation work they are doing at Hollinsclough, where there are large mounds of aggregate at the start of some of the trails, but there are no updates on the website. He asked if anyone at the Forum knew about this. Austin said this had been discussed previously relating to Swan and Limers Rakes.

Martin Bennett referred to Authority Members training on subjects such as RoW, Access Land and the Definitive map, and wondered if LAF members could attend sessions. Being

supplied with a list of Policy documents to be aware of would also be useful.

Louise said maybe some of these ideas could be circulated on email and wondered if LAF members could gain access to the Volunteer System to sign up for training.

Geoff Nickolds, on the Severn Trent Upper Derwent proposals, referred back to when Carsington Reservoir was built. Seven sites were proposed originally, and he wondered why they opted for the site that now forms Carsington, and rejected the other sites.

20. DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

The date for the next meeting of the LAF will be on Wednesday 1 November 2023 at Aldern House, Bakewell.

Meeting ended - Time Not Specified

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