

Peak District Local Access Forum

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 1 November 2023
at Aldern House, Baslow Road, Bakewell.**

Members Present:

Martin Bennett
Councillor Ian Huddleston
Charlotte Gilbert
Louise Hawson
Paul Richardson

Ben Seal
Richard Entwistle
Clare Griffin
Geoff Nickolds
John Towe

Others Present:

Nick Doran, Local Access Forum
Rich Pett, (PDNPA)

Sue Smith, (PDNPA)
Mike Rhodes, (PDNPA) (Secretary)

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

Apologies from Joe Dalton, Alastair Harvey, Cllr Susan Hobson, Jez Kenyon, Austin Knott, Charlotte Leech and Gill Millward. Cllr Ian Huddleston returns as a Peak District National Park Authority (PDNPA) member representative on the Local Access Forum.

2. MINUTES FROM THE LAST MEETING OF 14TH JUNE 2023

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a correct record subject to the following amendment on Item Number 8, last paragraph, which should have read 'Hopton footpath' rather than 'Middleton footpath'.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM LAST MEETING NOT COVERED BY THE AGENDA.

- (a) Louise Hawson asked whether there was any update on the appointment of a Sustainable Travel Officer, a post which was an outcome of the Transport Symposium convened by the PDNPA earlier this year. Andy Farmer, PDNPA Ranger Team Manager, advised that someone had been appointed to the role and was due to start the following week. Louise suggested that the new person be invited to one of the next LAF meetings.
- (b) Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) and Access to Water. Ben Seal, who needs to leave the meeting at 11:45am, will update Forum members later in the meeting.
- (c) National Park Management Plan (NPMP) - Louise advised that herself and Charlotte Gilbert were hoping to meet with the PDNPA's Chief Executive Officer, Phil Mulligan in the New Year.
- (d) Louise advised on the imminent installation of new Pay and Display machines in National Park Authority run car parks, including at Stanage and Upper Burbage. These were being introduced to some car parks that were previously free to use. An

increase to parking charges would be brought in after this. People parking outside car parks at Stanage would be monitored in respect of parking on roadside verges where damage could be caused.

- (e) The way LAF meetings are supported had not been progressed in regard to better use of information technology with shared platforms and so on. This is something the Forum will need to come back to. Geoff Nickolds and Charlotte Gilbert felt that using email to agree the LAF's response to the Traffic Regulation Order consultation at Moscar Cross seemed to work well. Members will continue to monitor ways to keep in touch as a group
- (f) Points were raised at the last meeting on 14 June 2023 by a member of the public, who spoke to the Forum about Green Lanes. This topic would be discussed later in the meeting, along with an update on Access for All and Derbyshire's Rights of Way Improvement Plan/ Maintenance Programme.
- (g) Richard Pett, PDNPA Access and Rights of Way Engagement Ranger Team Leader, advised that there had been an update from Staffordshire County Council in relation to Swan and Limer Rakes, to say that they are still working on these sites.

4. PRESENTATION BY THE RAMBLERS ON RESEARCH INTO THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF RIGHTS OF WAY USE

Jack Cornish, Head of Paths with The Ramblers, gave a presentation on the organisation's research on the public rights of way network. Jack outlined the need for the research, which would support work to ensure the network is open for everyone, and to set out the value of public rights of way to enable targeting of work. 11% of footpaths in England and Wales are in National Parks. As an area, Derbyshire is doing fairly well on looking after Rights of Way, including the important work of identifying "lost" paths. It is often overlooked that this network is a critical national infrastructure. There is a lot of information looking at people being within 10 minutes of a ROW. Something that has emerged from the research is around the data on house building and access to nature. From the mid 20th century, this access has declined where new houses have been built and the decline has been greater in rural areas.

Clare Griffin commented on the level of detail and data provided by the research that The Ramblers report provided. There is a lack of financial resilience at local authority level and it was good that The Ramblers are looking into this and identifying groups that are affected. Strava - an App for tracking physical, mainly outdoors, exercise could be used in many ways. It allows for lots of analysis and Clare queried if the PDNPA could work in partnership with Strava, and also if the data will be used to advise and direct people. Jack responded that working in partnership is important and for example in the Peak District area, the Strava data can be looked at to see where people are starting and ending their trips, and from that look at which are the most popular places for people that don't live in the area. Sue Smith advised that National Parks were working with Strava and looking at opportunities to share data. This includes using heat maps to identify how people are accessing areas.

Charlotte Gilbert commented that the presentation outlined a fantastic piece of work which could influence a lot of people. There was detail about lost ways from the horse rider's perspective and how work could be done with associated groups. There were issues raised around lack of access to green spaces in new build sites. Buxton for example had no provision for non-motorised access to the town. Sustainable travel should be part of the consideration for every planning application. In the Dolomites footpaths are numbered on maps to make it easier for users to follow routes. Jack responded with the fact that You Gov polling has shown that people struggle to know where footpaths are and where they go – this information is tricky. Are Google Maps useful to guide people round the network, considering that these sorts of solutions can have technical problems? Young people just

tend to follow their phones. Charlotte pointed out that Google Maps don't advise on the status of a route to ensure appropriate use.

Nick Doran thanked Jack for the presentation. He asked if the focus of the research was on walkers and footpaths or are other user groups involved. Jack advised that the focus was on all Public Rights of Way. Strava collects data on walking, running and hiking. With lost paths, volunteers will go on the evidence for the best way to create access.

Paul Richardson asked if The Ramblers are working with other outdoor activity and access groups, for example, cyclists. Jack responded that there was analysis of the cycle network. At various levels, The Ramblers were working with the Open Spaces Society and the British Horse Society, who are looking at lost Rights of Way. The research helps all users of the network and working together gives the groups involved more influence overall.

Ben Seal advised that British Canoeing, the Open Spaces Society, British Mountaineering Council and others are launching an Outdoors for All manifesto. There are a set of asks from the Outdoor Recreation community and it is expected that 15 to 20 organisations will sign up. This sector is not good at communicating in a consistent way and they want to improve. The big message from the Government is around a 15 minutes walk to nature strategy. The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) is currently information gathering - nothing has been implemented yet, but they are looking at green and blue spaces. The Right to Roam is a topic under discussion at the moment around access to nature, and different people have different views on this. There is an interesting video on the Farmers Guardian website on this with four Peak District farmers taking part in a discussion on the Right to Roam. How this is moved forward may depend on legislation brought through by the government as we move past the next general election.

Jack reminded the Forum about linear access to green spaces which is part of the discussion around access to nature. This is a new era for access to the outdoors, with the next stage of access policy and legislation taking shape. Louise stated that Local Access Forums are a result of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act and if there is movement towards some new Access legislation then LAFs are even more important. Jack commented that LAFs hadn't met in some areas for a long time, they are valuable Forums and wondered if they could be given more influence.

5. THE ROLE OF A FOOTPATH SECRETARY

Martin Bennett, member of the Peak District LAF and Footpath Secretary & Access Officer for the Derbyshire Dales Group of The Ramblers, gave a presentation on the role of a Footpath Secretary. Martin stated that the footpath network is a unique national asset that brings many benefits to the population. The Ramblers are a statutory consultee on planning applications. Martin and the Parish Path Wardens cover 73 of the 110 parishes in the Derbyshire Dales area, with the aim of each path being walked at least once a year. The wardens report back on any problems, including signposting, obstructions, bridges, stiles and gates. These are then referred to the relevant authority. Other issues that are looked at are barbed wire adjacent to stiles and gates, and also road safety where the route of a path means crossing a road at points where there is poor visibility of oncoming traffic, especially on the busier, faster roads, where there may be high volumes of heavy goods vehicles.

Paul Richardson thanked Martin for a great presentation. Paul asked how the public can contact the Parish Path Wardens, who walk the footpaths in their parish to flag up problems with way marking, obstructions and maintenance on stiles and so on. Martin advised that people should contact The Ramblers who would pass the details onto the relevant authority. Alternatively, people can report things to the relevant Highway Authority directly. Reporting issues directly to the Highway Authority is not always straightforward. The reporting process for Derbyshire is via an online system, which can sometimes include up to 20 steps and is enough to put people off. Fix my Street is a much easier system. With the DCC Highways

reporting system, the acknowledgement you receive just provides a reference number, without the body of the text of your email detailing the problem, so if you are reporting multiple issues, it is problematic keeping track of things. Paul queried why there couldn't be a national central reporting system. Louise suggested that the difficulties with the reporting process could be raised with DCC Highways at a future discussion.

6. THE NPA APPROACH TO ROW MANAGEMENT FOLLOWING ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

Andy Farmer, Ranger Team Manager, outlined the Landscape and Engagement Team structure and work priorities. The teams within this structure are Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL), Ranger, Land & Nature and Engagement. The Access and Rights of Way work sits within the Ranger Team. Mike Rhodes, Richard Pett and Jess Coatesworth are team leaders in the Ranger team and manage the Area Rangers. Sue Smith is Access & Rights of Way Officer and works on the Authority's statutory responsibilities in regard to Access Land and the making of Public Path Orders, as well as accessibility projects such as Miles without Stiles.

Sue Fletcher, the recently appointed Head of Landscape & Engagement introduced herself to the LAF members. Sue has been with PDNPA for some time and has had several roles within the organisation, starting with the Property Team. Sue's role with the bringing together of the Landscape and Engagement Team was to take things forward strategically in challenging times. She was attending today's meeting to listen and learn and understand the priorities with Access and Rights of Way work and what the statutory role of the team is.

Andy Farmer then went through the Ranger Team priorities and the wide remit of its work, plus the involvement of volunteers and the line management. There are priorities within the Access and ROW work. Andy advised the group that there was a planned lunchtime demo of the Access App, which the Rangers use to log, monitor and evaluate work around Access points within the National Park. Recreation Hubs have been set up to create an area management approach to priority areas of the National Park. The authority no longer deals with general Rights of Way enquiries, so resources can then be focussed on priority routes, such as trails and CRoW Act work. There is work to highlight accessible routes and the Walk Around booklets, as well as on going Green Lane work. This work is incorporated into the management of the Recreation Hubs. This is a challenge as each area is different and it won't be possible to carry out all the work set out in the list of priorities. Green Lanes form part of the work mentioned around priority routes, as set out in the Green Lane Strategy. Work on sites such as Limer and Swan Rakes has to be done in partnership as the PDNPA doesn't have the resources to do this work alone.

Charlotte thanked Sue and Andy for clarifying the new structure and can see a role for the LAF representing major user groups in how work is prioritised. It was good to have the emphasis on putting responsibility back on the relevant authorities for issues which have previously been shouldered by the National Park Authority. Louise hopes the LAF can play a part in that new structure. Andy Farmer responded by saying that he wanted to get across the reality of the Authority's current position. Work needs to be value added. LAF voices should be heard and LAF members views are welcomed to advise the Authority on Access and Rights of Way, especially when making difficult decisions. There have been reduced resources for some time now.

Nick Doran thanked volunteers for their work, especially in the Longdendale Valley around Hadfield and the tunnel, where he feels United Utilities (UU) has been a bit absent lately. He wondered how maintenance works are organised within the Authority. For example, bushes and drainage issues that cause problems on the Longdendale Trail. Andy advised that UU is aware of the problems. Jess Coatesworth, along with the Area Ranger, have looked at the trail there to prioritise and establish?? works. The National Park Authority

ensures that voices are heard and fed back to the relevant organisation, in this case that is UU. Partnership working with the various utility companies is good. The work is organised around team priorities and the Ranger Team leaders steer the rangers with the work. Jess mentioned that UU has had a bit of a reorganisation and there is focus back on the Trans Pennine Trail. They are aware of some horse rider issues and are looking at who will do that work. UU has been directed to FiPL to seek other funding they can tap into. They are also looking to get more user groups involved.

Clare Griffin could see there were difficult choices to be made and that the Authority has to look at how it prioritises work, but she wondered what happens if someone is off sick, for example. She asked if the new structure is now set. Andy stated that the PDNPA Chief Executive, Phil Mulligan, has said the new structure is a 5 year plan. There were more rangers going back in time, but they needed to make the best of the current situation. Team members try and cover where they can if needed. Mike Rhodes felt that the new structure had created a bigger, stronger team overall that can work together more easily.

Martin Bennett mentioned the work of The Ramblers footpath committee, and that there was no Footpath Secretary for the High Peak at the moment. He asked how the PDNPA ensures that the constituent highway authorities are keeping the footpath network up to standard. Andy responded that it doesn't do that checking. Other local authorities have had budget cuts - the National Park Authority will add value to their work and through the use of its user surveys can influence via the recreation hubs to bring partners together. The National Park Authority cannot lead all the recreation hubs, other partners will have to step in. This is what stakeholders signed up to with the National Park Management Plan. Richard Pett added that different authorities had different approaches to manage their work.

Sue Smith also advised that with something like the Miles without Stiles work, landowners, highway authorities and key stakeholders all needed to have input. Louise asked if the Miles without Stiles was just co-ordinated by PDNPA or did authorities such as Derbyshire and Staffordshire also have their own programmes. Sue Smith responded that Miles without Stiles was a National Park brand and initiative across the UK, and that specifications are being rolled out to other areas and locations to develop accessible routes.

John Towe told the Forum that he had volunteered with the National Park for 20 years and seen a lot of change. There is a big pool of volunteers, and the structure of the training and the use of volunteers has changed. There is a wider skills base now and John could take up opportunities to volunteer every day if he wanted – whereas previously the shifts were at weekends only. There are volunteers going out 7 days a week. This change has benefitted the rangers where volunteers are advised of what work needs doing and they can meet that requirement. John feels this is a real help to the Authority. Andy backed this up to say that volunteers are organised over the week so there is more widespread use of this resource, with a wider range of opportunities. There is a different approach to training, which is more modular, so that the volunteers can dip in and out of activities and training in a more flexible way. John added that there was a mix of working and retired people in the pool of volunteers, so this flexible approach is better for everyone.

Geoff Nickolds asked how much resource has been lost. Andy advised Geoff that in 2004 with the introduction of the CRoW Act, there was additional resource put into the National Park from government. At one time there were 22 area rangers, now there are 10. The Engagement team also does education work, as well as the area ranger work. Geoff felt that the new structure is clearer and makes sense. The forming of recreation hubs was moving back to when there were area management plans in place. Andy agreed that the concept is the same as previous area plans, but the delivery will be different. Partners need to work together, as the PDNPA can't do this work on its own. As an example, there is a Draft Recreation Plan for the Hope Valley, where the priority is with sustainable transport. The consideration is what the envelope is for this area and what goes into the mix to form the plan. Mike advised that previous management plans involved working with large landowners and authorities, but the plans being formed now would be much more in

partnership with smaller, local groups such as charities and parish groups.

Geoff mentioned that previously he had been involved in this way of working in the Upper Derwent Valley, where they achieved a lot, and if the proposed areas plans are an update on how things were managed there, that would be a good thing.

Louise wondered if the recreation hubs included input from other PDNPA teams, such as FiPL, Property and Transport. She wondered if there was cross team working. Andy used priority routes in the Hope Valley as an example where it could be questioned whether FiPL or Transport can contribute to that work where some of this is out of the PDNPA's control. The recreation hubs are being set out by 2028. At the Upper Derwent Valley, Severn Trent Water may need to be the lead on that, so different hubs will have different priorities, with different delivery mechanisms.

Sue Fletcher added that after the organisational changes the Authority will have to rethink this work, and it would be a mixed model approach. Louise asked that as more clarity emerges with the forming of area plans, can this be fed back to the LAF group. Andy agreed there was more thinking and more development work to do.

Louise said that DCC has identified some priorities. Green lanes are being looked at from a park wide perspective. Some work is completed, some isn't and new issues are being identified. It is important for individual LAF members to flag up the priorities as they see them and then monitor. Annual meetings with DCC should be maintained, sub-groups should carry out site visits and the priority list for Rights of Way and Access work kept up to date.

Martin asked Jack how the local highway authorities and Peak District LAF compared with those in other areas across England and Wales. Jack advised that it was difficult to measure the performance of highway authorities in relation to rights of way as there was no longer a best value performance indicator on this. There are issues with some highway authorities, but not in this area. The PDLAF is functioning and effective and stands out in comparison. Louise said that it could be useful to look at where the LAF previously carried out a monitoring role on this and how that work could be picked up.

7. DERBYSHIRE CC ROWIP UPDATE

Gill Millward from Derbyshire County Council wasn't present to give this update, so Mike Rhodes went through the report with LAF members.

Work is underway to replace missing roadside signposting, which will help people know where Rights of Way are and make the network easier to navigate. Things are better in Derbyshire in this regard than they were previously. A list of completed, contracted and upcoming works in 2024/25 to improve the surface condition and drainage on Rights of Way are included in the report. The works to improve the bridleway on Jacob's Ladder at Edale are still awaiting a start date.

Geoff Nickolds welcomes the investment and work that is going on, but feels that the completion of the White Peak Loop is moving very slowly, especially relating to the link into Buxton.

Charlotte felt this was an excellent report which ensured that Rights of Way are there for people to use. In relation to the Definitive Map and Statement, she highlighted Project 2026, which aims to define historic, unrecorded routes or "Lost Ways". 381 paths are logged on the database for research records and people can add to that list. 206 Definitive Map Modification Order claims have now been submitted to the County Council and Charlotte wondered how many of those routes would be added in our lifetime. Work should continue to update the list as this will allow for connections and expansions to the rights of way

network. Charlotte wants to check if these will be actioned, as she understands there is a lack of resources. Work is continuing on the Pennine Bridleway National Trail and resurfacing has been completed at Shallcross Incline, Whaley Bridge. Flexipave has been used, which although expensive is a very good, porous material. It will be interesting to see how this stands up over the years and if it proves to be cost effective. It may be a solution to other difficult situations.

Martin Bennett said that the cycling network provision by DCC is not great. The A6 in Matlock is a problem and more money is needed.

Jack Cornish advised on the extent of the backlog for Definitive Map Modification Order applications across England and Wales. There was a backlog of 4,000 applications in 2018, which now stands at 10,000. The local authority with the biggest backlog will take 130 years to process its outstanding applications. The Ramblers and other access organisations are pressing for greater investment. Louise added that it was a very slow process.

Gill's report also updated the LAF on progress with planned route maintenance, focusing on the list of priority routes. Routes 2 and 5 at Hope, and the route at Rushup Edge are to be funded. Louise said that it would be useful to carry out a site visit, and include other user groups in talks about the work. Clare said this is what happened at Chapelgate ten years ago.

Louise further added that they could carry out site visits, or have a group discussion with DCC online, for other sites as part of the planned annual review with Rob Greatorex and Steve Hollingworth in Spring 2024.

8. ACCESS UPDATE

Sue Smith provided Forum members with an update on issues related to access in the Peak District.

Access Land Mapping – Consideration is being given to extending the current 2024/25 deadline for Natural England's Access Land mapping review to 31 December 2030. National Park Rangers and volunteers are using the new App which has been developed by the Authority to monitor and record access points onto Access Land which should improve access and links to these areas. Access at popular locations can cause problems, but landowners are generally receptive to solutions. The mapping can record different types of infrastructure and includes pictures which help to confirm the locations of access points and the signage.

Changing Place – If the planning application which has been submitted is approved, a Changing Place and Tramper storage will be built at Millers Dale Station, which is one of the accessibility hubs within the National Park. This will make a big difference to people planning a visit, enabling them to stay in the area for longer. The funding has come from a variety of organisations.

Access Fund – The Peak District Foundation, which this year has moved across to be a more sustainable, self-financing model, helps support the Access Fund. There are various conservation and access initiatives, with a number of Miles without Stiles projects scheduled for 2024.

Access Improvements – A media update shows that the Miles without Stiles page takes over 10% of the web traffic on the National Park Authority's website. Accessible Castleton is being rolled out this month. The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme has delivered new permissive paths and education projects. Access Fund projects include works by the Countryside Maintenance and Projects Team (CMPT) at Fernilee in the Goyt Valley; works by PPCV volunteers to the barrier on Long Causeway at Stanage; and at Crowdecote, ladder stiles have been replaced with kissing gates. Following the recent

storms, work is being carried out on Miles without Stiles routes at Surprise View and Coombsdale. £5.95 from each Miles without Stiles booklet contributes to the Access Fund.

Geoff Nickolds asked Sue for a ballpark figure on the cost of the works in the Goyt Valley. Sue's response was about £9,000.

Martin Bennett said that the FiPL programme has funded some work at Great Longstone, where livestock feeders and troughs are located next to stiles. There should be discussions with landowners as it is best not to have these next to stiles and access points. Sue Smith said it was good practice, as backed up by the Country Land and Business Association (CLA) and National Farmers' Union, not to have feeders at access points or on Rights of Way. As with other issues on the RoW network, this would be something to raise with the relevant Highway Authority.

Charlotte wondered if the work on concessionary RoW will continue after the FiPL funding has stopped. Sue responded that the funding is for a set period and introduced landowners to the idea of working this way. Hopefully in future there could be an access element to stewardship schemes. Reports have been shared with Defra's access team.

9. GREEN LANES UPDATE

No report submitted

10. MEMBERS' REPORTS

None presented

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

An item for the next LAF meeting is proposed where the view of landowners on the Right to Roam can be discussed.

12. DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING - WEDNESDAY 21ST FEBRUARY 2024

The next Local Access Forum meeting to be held at 10 am in the Board Room at Aldern House, Bakewell on Wednesday 21st February 2024.

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