

Peak District Local Access Forum

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 21 February 2024
at Aldern House, Baslow Road, Bakewell.**

Members Present:

Charlotte Leech
Joe Dalton
Ben Seal
Richard Entwistle
Clare Griffin
Louise Hawson
Geoff Nickolds

Craig Best
Martin Bennett
Ian Huddleston
Charlotte Gilbert
Alastair Harvey
Jez Kenyon
John Towe

Others Present:

Nick Doran, Local Access Forum
Gill Millward, (DCC)
Rich Pett, (PDNPA)

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

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Susan Hobson and Austin Knott.

13. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Apologies received from Dave Savage, Austin Knott and Cllr Susan Hobson. PDNPA Chief Executive Phil Mulligan observing meeting. Also due to observe was PDNPA member, Simon Thompson, who has sent apologies.

14. MINUTES FROM THE LAST MEETING, 1ST NOVEMBER 2023

The minutes of the last meeting held on the 1st November 2023 were approved as a correct record.

15. MATTERS ARISING FROM LAST MEETING NOT COVERED BY AGENDA

The Rambler's presentation has been published on the website, so that it can be viewed there rather than circulating round the LAF members.
Martin was thanked for his presentation as Footpaths Secretary at the November meeting, and Andy Famer's presentation on the Authority's approach to Rights of Way, and the contribution from Suzanne Fletcher, was appreciated.
The LAF group need to be kept up to date on the progress with the forming of Recreation Hubs.

16. THEME - LANDOWNERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF PUBLIC ACCESS

Three members of the PD Local Access Forum presented their landowner perspectives on public access.

Charlotte Leech, Deputy Estates Manager for Chatsworth Settlement Trustees, is primarily

involved in the management of the property portfolio of the estate, gave a presentation on the challenges of public access.

The core estate is made up of Chatsworth House, the gardens and estate villages. Further to that there are sites such as Thor's cave, parts of the Manifold Valley, Park Hill and Monsal Dale, plus the Scarcliffe and Staveley estates to the East. This also includes 42 miles of Rights of Way and concessionary routes, including moorland, woodland and river banks. There are approximately a million visitors to Chatsworth a year, with a long history of public access. For the last 2 years the team have been developing a whole core estate plan for the next 20 years. This will measure environmental, economical and cultural impacts, and how the estate plan will contribute to the special qualities of the National Park.

Managing the Estate is complex – including developing projects, removing barriers to access, route improvement, as well as maintaining relationships with remote managers, tenants and partners. There are conflicting interests of user groups, and sensitive areas to protect from visitors. Maintenance costs are high, and there has been a huge increase in visitor numbers with associated problems of parking, littering and conflict during, and continuing after, Covid. Health and safety considerations are a big part of managing the estate.

Improving and maintaining access is seen as an opportunity to support the hospitality and retail industry and welcome a range of visitors. New partnerships have been formed to support the management of sites and visitors, such as with the National Park, National Trust, Emergency services and local communities. They are also looking at Citizen sites where the public can report back on species and any issues, as well as providing more and better facilities to a wider audience.

Ben Seal pointed out that although there is a lot to be applauded from the work outlined in Charlotte's presentation for cyclists, horse riders and walkers regarding access to the countryside, water isn't generally accessible, and is preserved for those wanting to fish, which then puts barriers in place for those who want to swim, paddle and canoe. What are the challenges to Chatsworth in enabling this access?

Charlotte stated that in relation to Chatsworth, where a river runs through the estate, this is complex to resolve, and needs to be explored with landowners along the full stretch of the river.

Nick Doran asked if concessionary routes for walkers and cyclists are publicised. Charlotte responded that these weren't yet advertised as they are still being developed in line with some of the other work on the estate, such as in forestry areas.

Martin wanted to check whether there will be cycle storage at Chatsworth as part of the plan to extend the cycle route from Rowsley into Chatsworth, and whether the route will carry onto Baslow. Were there any plans to look at cycle hire in Rowsley. Charlotte advised that they hadn't progressed that far with the planned cycle route.

Charlotte Gilbert continued the theme of benefits and challenges of public access from the perspective of a farmer and land manager.

Charlotte explained the set up of her farm, where there are lots of public access opportunities. Farming is a business producing food, but farms need to diversify into farm stays, B & B's, livery services and campsites as well, in order to be viable. Charlotte is generally positive about all the opportunities to engage with the public – it's a chance to educate, be socially interactive, to share a passion, to help the business and to facilitate health and physical benefits.

There are challenges such as anti-social behaviour, livestock on public access areas, wild camping, dogs not being kept under control, impact on wildlife, litter and maintaining

signage. There are measures that can help reduce some of the problems, such as ensuring that paths are well sign posted, and that stiles and gates are easy to use, as well as being non confrontational when approaching members of the public who may have gone off the pathway or blocked a gate with their vehicle.

Charlotte detailed some of her own experience and pointed out that where people want to visit and enjoy rural areas, they will want to park their cars, walk their dogs, camp overnight and have BBQs.

Charlotte emphasised that most people want to do the right thing, it's just a few that cause problems. Those problems are significant, and dog worrying and dog attacks are not uncommon. Better publicity of the Countryside Code would be useful, and having the right signage in the right place is helpful.

Jez Kenyon felt that the wider population has a lack of knowledge of the Countryside Code. People won't follow rules if they don't know why they are there, so there needs to be a better public understanding of the issues.

Nick said there was a particular problem with dog owners and people accessing the countryside in a responsible way, and queried how that situation could be improved.

Charlotte Gilbert, as a long standing dog owner herself, said that there should be a good reason for dogs to be off lead. Her dogs are working dogs, but are on the lead at all other times.

Charlotte Leech mentioned that designated walking areas can be established for people to exercise their dogs.

Louise said that there is a big issue with contract dog owners that she's heard from elsewhere.

There were general comments and observations from LAF members about signage that is left in place longer than is necessary, and queried who puts up way markers. People were possibly more respectful and had a better understanding of the countryside previously, and what is the role of volunteers in educating people on access to the countryside.

Ben welcomed the discussion and felt it was good not to be adversarial. The CLA wanted to reduce the liability of landowners for incidents on their land, and wondered if the cost was preventing promotion of access.

Charlotte Leech said that for a large organisation it's absorbed as a management cost, but might have more impact on smaller scale landowners.

Charlotte Gilbert advised that it depends on the type of Right of Way accessed on your land, but much of the liability lies with the local authority. As a farmer the insurance liability costs were fairly low.

Joe Dalton said there was a conflict with people and nature, and the 24 hour a day nature of people accessing the countryside meant that nature doesn't get time away from that pressure. Which includes straying livestock causing a bio security risk, to damage to moorland from wild fires, along with camping and litter.

Louise added that although nature protection prevails in the National Park, it still wanted to encourage people to visit, which is a challenge.

Alastair Harvey, in his role with Yorkshire Water, mentioned that they have an obligation to enable access to their sites, and inappropriate behaviour was particularly bad during Covid, but things had slightly improved recently. More onus has been put on landowners to resolve these issues that were previously enforced by the relevant authorities, who are themselves

now limited because of resourcing issues. Off-roading by motorbikes was an increasing problem. Most people have a good, enjoyable visit and left no trace of their activity. He agreed with an earlier point about contract dog walkers causing problems. Better understanding by the general public was important, and educating and informing people had been attempted with varying levels of success.

Louise suggested there are different solutions for different areas, with varying levels of resources available.

Craig Best, who works for the National Trust, gave a presentation from the NT perspective on public access to their sites.

Craig agreed that dogs are a problem, and NT are looking at setting aside dog run areas.

The National Trust operates as a business that gets its income from visitors, members, car parks and tenant farmers. Visitors are a valuable part of the running of the NT. Some sites don't need promoting. Dovedale is a very busy site, and Mam Tor has half a million visitors every year. It's estimated there are easily over a million visitors to National Trust sites in the Peak District. Better monitoring of those numbers could lead to more resources being put into those sites, but it's not easy to count visitor numbers to countryside areas.

Litter isn't something the NT can influence too much, but having a presence, engaging with people, and clear signage helps.

Dovedale attracts a diverse audience that is not typical of NT visitors. People are travelling up to a couple of hours to get there. It can't be staffed fully till late in the day – there may be scope for adding facilities there, such as designated BBQ areas. A pragmatic approach is needed.

At Mam Tor, where there is a hill fort, there is erosion. As there are high visitor numbers there, there is a need to invest to protect the site. A bid has gone in for Heritage Lottery funding to support that work.

Ben Seal was glad to hear that the NT are being open minded on measures such as BBQ areas, which acknowledged that people are using the countryside differently – they want to swim, canoe and BBQ.

Craig stated that the river at Dovedale is part of a large national nature reserve, but the people impact is small.

Charlotte Gilbert recognised that the money is important. The National Trust have funds to support visitors. Chatsworth is supporting both visitors and farming. Funding for access should be adequately reflected in any payment schemes. Individual farmers need support.

Craig responded that the NT work closely with tenants, and supports them to tap into funding, and to develop whole farm plans. Income purely from farming is small, whereas payments from environmental outcomes and diversification, including woodlands, can be worth while.

Clare Griffin left the meeting at 12pm

Martin Bennett queried why people are still buying bottles of water when reusable containers are widely available. It could be that there is limited opportunity to refill them, and people need support to do the right thing.

Louise felt that when looking at what landowners are rewarded for, access is the poor cousin. Money is needed to trial things and encourage innovative thinking.

17. UPDATE ON THE FIPL SCHEME

Rebekah Newman, Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) lead Engagement Officer, gave a presentation to update LAF on the FiPL scheme.

The scheme runs across all AONBs and National Parks. The delivery grant funding is from DEFRA and the bids are assessed against a set of 30 outcomes based on four themes of Climate, Nature, People and Place. The scheme is due to end in March 2025, so moneys need to be spent by then, and as far as possible, capital works to be completed by the end of December 2024. Rebekah ran through the structure of the team and how the funds have been allocated. The scheme is monitoring intensive. Further resource has been given through PDNP by way of staff time.

Most Access projects have come in under £10k, with just 7 over that amount.

Clare Griffin said that this was a great project, especially to keep in budget with the governance required and the standard of work achieved, and asked if FiPL go out to every scheme. Rebekah advised that FiPL will aim go out to every project to assess that all criteria are met to secure the funding for each scheme, and will also gather photo and documented evidence of the work.

Craig Best felt that there should be communication to celebrate the work achieved. Rebekah responded that there are press releases. Some of the projects may have access implications. Some thought is needed on the publicity of the work carried out under the scheme, but it is good to celebrate the bigger projects.

Craig asked if there will be funding continued for further schemes once the FiPL scheme is ended. Rebekah advised that FiPL had been part of a transition phase, to set up schemes and ways to access further funding through ELMS in the future. There shouldn't be the same need for the localised FiPL funding, although funding at a local level is valuable. There will be ongoing funding which will be distributed through national schemes.

Martin Bennett queried the new permissive footpaths and bridleways in regard to timing and promotion.

Rebekah advised that although landowners may choose to remove this access, hopefully many of them will continue. Although they aren't mapped, there will be publicity through signage, website information and local meetings.

Charlotte Leech noted that only one large access project had been undertaken by a private farmer and wondered if this is because there are additional costs to supporting a piece of work which can't be fully covered by the FiPL grant. Larger landowners such as Chatsworth and the National Trust can more easily cover those extra costs. Archaeologist advice may be needed, planning permission may be required for some work, and the National Park can support an applicant through the process, but they can't fund the planning application.

Louise suggested that the success of the FiPL scheme so far was because of good relationships with local farmers.

Rebekah mentioned that although there may be funding through ELMS and other national schemes, it was uncertain if PDNPA would be able to continue their support in the same way. Although there is a trial that PDNPA are part of to act as a local convenor for national schemes funded by DEFRA.

18. FORMAL REVIEW OF ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

It is 20 years since the introduction of the CROW act, where long term directions were issued to balance landowner needs and Access requirements. There is a statutory responsibility for National Parks to deal with applications for long-term directions. A six week consultation has started, with a deadline of 5 April 2024, relating to the rifle rights at Deer Hill, Diggle and West Nab.

The activity at these sites is ad hoc, with participants turning up with minimum notice. The applications include a modification of the boundary to allow for climbing, and a repositioning of the rifle ranges allowing for continuity of access.

Sue will take any views or comments made by LAF members to the landowners and applicants as part of the consultation process.

John Towe queried if there is a requirement for red flags to be flown when shooting is taking place.

Sue advised that there is a requirement. It hasn't been included in the outline direction as due to the topography of the site, red flags aren't always visible.

Martin Bennett asked in relation to Deer Hill, if it is OK to use footpaths around the site, why restrict the access when people can shoot over footpaths.

Sue responded that shooting stops if people are on a ROW, but on Access land, sight lines are not as clear.

Jez Kenyon questioned whether the site needs this level of restriction as the incidence of shooters and walkers being in the area at the same time is rare.

Sue responded that the possible fall of shots is based on a plan which doesn't have regard to topography. This is a requirement for insurance purposes where misfires are part of the risk assessment. The Rifle Association requirements are that the risks are identified. PDNP can ask about the risk assessment, but public safety is paramount. There will still be access around the site, and guided walks can still take place.

Action:

Details to be circulated to collect the comments from LAF members.

Sue briefly went on to highlight this year's thank you certificate for the Access Fund, which is coming up to its tenth year. There are some books available for members to take away if they would like to make a donation to the Fund.

There will be a lunchtime event with Cultural Heritage volunteers speaking to LAF members about digital imaging work at Thor's Cave regarding changing the access, and linking into the access work taking place through FiPL.

19. DERBYSHIRE CC ROWIP UPDATE

Gill Millward presented the Derbyshire CC update.

Aim 1: Existing Rights of Way Network

As road repair has been a priority in recent months, progress on footpath repairs has been

limited.

Louise mentioned the sub meeting between PD LAF and DCC in 2023 where priority routes were discussed. There will be a further meeting in May 2024 for LAF members who want to join the discussion, ahead of the next full LAF meeting in June.

Aim 2: Definitive Map and Statement

Work is still ongoing, and discussions are possibly needed at this point to look at the applications for unrecorded Ways.

Aim 3: An Improved Network

Pennine Bridleway – actively progressing to the alternatives to avoid the Dinting Viaduct and Woolley Road.

White Peak Loop – DCC will speak to the FiPL team as they are preparing to submit a planning application.

Buxton Walk and Ride Network – improvements to a section of the network are due to start.

Active Travel Masterplans – this is a new area of work being developed using recent Active Travel England Capability and Ambition funding.

Preparing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Derbyshire – this will involve PDNP

Walk Derbyshire – improvements have been made to the website.

Martin stated that the LNRS deadline is tight for producing a strategy. Derbyshire will be divided up into characteristic landscape areas.

The Green Towns Initiative pilot at Harpur Hill of reducing the speed limit to 20 mph is a backward step – speed limits are not effective.

Roadside signposting – letter to relevant cabinet member to support this work continuing and commending DCC for being able to undertake the work with such limited resources.

Gill advised that a letter should go to both DCC Highways and Rights of Way cabinet members to show the appreciation of the work being done in this area.

Action

Louise asked Martin to draft a letter as discussed.

Nick Doran thanked DCC for looking at the routes and the positive survey north of the railway, as well as a good outcome for an active travel plan from Glossop onto New Road.

20. MEMBERS' REPORTS

Louise updated the LAF members on the responses to the Sheffield CC consultation regarding the Moscar TRO.

The responses to the consultation on Swan and Limer Rakes have gone in to Staffordshire CC.

LAF members are happy with both those responses.

Action

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