

Peak District Local Access Forum

Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 10 June 2021 Virtual Webex Meeting run from Aldern House, Board Room.

Members Present:

Martin Bennett
Bob Berzins
Richard Entwistle
Clare Griffin
Louise Hawson
Geoff Nickolds
Ally Turner

John Thompson (Chair)

Ben Seal
Edwina Edwards
Charlotte Gilbert
Alastair Harvey
Jez Kenyon
Paul Richardson
Joe Dalton

Others Present:

Mike Rhodes, (PDNPA) (Secretary)
Gill Millward, (DCC)
Karen Harrison, (PDNPA)

Rich Pett, (PDNPA)
Sue Smith, (PDNPA)

76. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Due to John Thompson (Chair) having connection issues at the start of the meeting, Bob Berzins (Vice Chair) welcomed everyone to the fourth virtual meeting of the Peak District Local Access Forum and thanked the Democratic and Legal Support Team for their support, with Karen kindly doing the minutes this time.

Apologies for absence had been received from Ian Huddlestone, Jon Stewart and Steve Martin as members and Sarah Wilks (PDNPA Officer) with her thanks and best wishes to Edwina via the Chair.

77. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

Bob Berzins, on behalf of the Peak District Local Access Forum thanked Roly Smith and Andrew Murley who had both stood down, for their contributions to the work of the LAF. Members were advised that this would also be Edwina Edwards last meeting.

78. MINUTES FROM THE LAST MEETING, 11 MARCH 2021

The minutes of the last meeting held on the 11th March 2021 were approved as a correct record with thanks to Belinda Wybrow for producing them.

79. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Mike Rhodes gave an update on the Peak District Generation Green - Connecting Young People with Nature Project.

Nationally

See <https://www.yha.org.uk/generationgreen>

Funded by the government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund.

10 National Parks involved, with Youth Hostels Association, Scouts/Guides/Outward Bound/Field Studies Council.

12 Posts created in National Parks (Lorna Fisher, Harriet Saltis).

Peak District Generation Green main updates:

- **Youth Engagement Volunteer Ranger** roles created and recruited. Starting in June to act as Green Champions – assisting with youth programmes across the Engagement Team. E.g. Schools sessions, residential stays, Junior Rangers etc.
- **Green Action Residential stays at Youth Hostels across the Peak District, August – November.** Looking for schools (primary and secondary) and youth groups to take part, ages 8-21. These will focus on connecting young people to nature and promoting pro environmental behaviours through exploration, mindfulness and practical conservation. Opportunity to gain the John Muir Award.
- **Green Career Skills, Monthly Volunteering August -March for ages 18-26.** To aid Young people on their journey to becoming Green Leaders. Working with professionals in the field and having a go at various 'Green' roles including Rangers, Ecologists, Cultural Heritage, Outdoor Pursuits, Comms & Marketing. If anyone is interested in showcasing their role to engage young people in a Green career pathway, please contact us. As part of these monthly volunteering days there will be opportunity to take part in weekend residential stays August, Sept & Oct.
- **Junior Rangers 16+ (similar to above, quarterly sessions).**
- **Please pass on updates to groups or individuals who may be interested in taking part and signpost to our website or email GenerationGreen@peakdistrict.gov.uk**

MONSAL TRAIL

John Thompson, on behalf of the LAF, had been in touch with Sarah Dines MP and Robert Lorgan MP regarding the possibility of re-opening the Monsal Trail as a railway. A letter had been received from Sarah Dines, which had been circulated to LAF Members which Mike Rhodes went on to summarise. It was noted that in her view there was no overwhelming support at present to re-open the line, due to the Monsal Trail being a tremendous asset, and that alternative solutions needed to be looked at in conjunction with Local and National Governments.

Gill Millward was asked as to whether an Impact Viability Study had been done since the one done in the 1990's? Gill reported that she would check and report back to LAF Members.

Thanks were given to John Thompson for keeping the Monsal Trail's importance as a recreational route in the UK on the agenda of MP's.

80. ACCESS UPDATE ON RIGHT TO ROAM ISSUES

Bob Berzins gave an update and reported that discussions on right to roam issues were ongoing.

Three main areas had been identified:-

- Paddle Sports
- Wild Swimming
- Mountain Biking

Paul Richardson reported that access issues for mountain biking were ongoing with only a

limited number of bridleways being available – 11% in the Peak District National Park compared to 22% nationally, and that users were wanting more adventurous challenging routes which could impact on other user groups. Project 22 had identified routes that would be suitable for upgrading in Biggin Dale, Abney Clough and Bradwell Moor, and would be looking to the LAF for support to get them upgraded. Paul also reported that following a meeting with Severn Trent Water, a permissive path in the Ladybower area had been opened and they were looking at identifying other routes as well. He would also be attending a meeting with the National Trust regarding the same issues.

It was noted that landowners needed to be engaged as it was a sensitive issue for some due to behavioural issues of some mountain bike riders, and concern over the wildlife disturbance.

The LAF congratulated the work that had been done with Severn Trent Water and hoped that horse riders would be included in any upgrading of rights of way as horse riders also lacked amenities.

John Thompson joined the meeting and thanked Bob for chairing thus far.

81. PRESENTATION - WILD SWIMMING

John Thompson welcomed Suzie Wheway to the meeting and invited her to give a presentation to the Members regarding wild swimming in the Peak District National Park and nationally.

Suzie reported that access to wild swimming in Scotland was much better as you could swim in reservoirs there which you couldn't do here, and that access to the water within the Peak District National Park was not good. It was estimated that in 2019, 2.1 million people swam in open waters, and that during the last year, due to the COVID pandemic this had increased three-fold due to the swimming pools being closed so wild swimming was now more fashionable not just a specialised sport and it also had lots of health benefits.

A discussion followed the presentation – Members of the LAF expressed concern about recent deaths in reservoirs and recognised the concerns of the water companies.

Members of the LAF thanked Suzie for her presentation. It was accepted that there were bodies of water that were not suitable for use due to accountability if something happened, but would like to see a pragmatic approach to finding a middle ground where it was acceptable to go.

John Thompson thanked Suzie for her presentation and asked that the Access Sub Group look at the issues informally.

82. GREEN LANES SUB GROUP REPORT

Sue Smith introduced the item and gave a brief update following the sub-group meeting on the 29th April.

LAF Members were happy to support the amended terms of reference which would reflect the groups composition and the notes from 29th April.

83. PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK PROPERTY DISPOSALS

Louise Hawson gave some background information to Forum Members regarding PDNPA property disposals. A letter was submitted to Adrian Barraclough back in 2019 requesting a full list of future property disposals so that the LAF could give its thoughts to the National

Park Authority.

The LAF then wrote to Emma Stone in March 2021 for an update on the review process and was issued with a “Toolkit” which explained the process of disposal. However, Forum Members would like to see more external consultation at an earlier stage in the process. A set of questions was issued to Emma Stone to consider in advance of the meeting.

The purpose of asking the questions was:-

- to encourage access issues (beyond formal access) to be considered earlier in the process, through consultation with the LAF
- to encourage good practice in engagement and consultation in general
- to ensure the process enables more creative/community ownership models to be actively considered.

John Thompson welcomed Emma Stone to the meeting, who then gave her responses to the four questions, as shown in quotation marks below:-

1. Could you explain how properties are assessed against the Overarching Principles to identify those for potential disposal, particularly with respect to issues around access and amenity? Do you use a checklist/scoring system, or is it more subjective?

“The decision will always be subjective to some degree due to the diversity of the property portfolio.

The Toolkit and Asset Disposal Procedure (ADP) give sufficient detail as to the assessment of properties as being surplus – see 4.1 of the ADP (things like whether the property fits with strategic outcomes/there’s an operational need to keep it, etc). 4.1 sets out the considerations for determining whether a property is surplus. The Toolkit provides that the initial decision is made by the sponsoring Head of Service, taking into account the considerations set out in 4.1 of the ADP (Stage 1), and then consults on the proposal for a corporate decision to be made (Stage 2)”.

2. Alternative ownership models - such as community ownership - often require more time and organisation to develop than standard commercial tenders. Given this, it would be useful to identify sites where this might be an option early in the disposal process, for example if there is already an expressed interest and/or if this might best serve achievement of the overarching principles. This would mean that time (and possibly support) can be given to local communities to develop such options. Is it possible to integrate this, by including provision for consideration of community or other models at Stage 2 of the toolkit?

“The Toolkit first mentions consideration of alternatives to open market sale at Stage 4, however in practice this would logically occur during the earlier internal consultation stage at Stage 2 in the context of how the property would be protected if a decision is made to dispose. This would form part of the Head of Service’s proposal in the ‘provisionally surplus report’ so that internal consultees would be aware of the potential purchaser when considering what protections would be needed for the property (covenants or designations). If an acceptable alternative ownership model were to be proposed (eg community ownership) then appropriate timescales would be agreed with the purchaser. This is happening currently with regard to a site near Foolow where an extension to timescales has been agreed to enable the community to investigate fundraising opportunities”.

3. External consultation is provided for in Stage 9 of the toolkit, once the list of properties for disposal, and the options for disposal, have been identified. This is of course a critical stage for general public consultation. It is suggested that external stakeholder views should be integrated at Stage 2, as you gather input from the various Heads of Service. As well as identifying properties where alternative ownership models may be an option, external feedback at this stage can help identify controversial sites, or issues that may arise later in the process, such as around informal access, or possible connectivity opportunities with neighbouring Right of Way. Is this something that could be integrated, for example making provision for Heads of Service to consult with external parties at this early stage? The LAF could be a useful sounding board here.

“I don’t think there is anything to be gained by utilising our own and stakeholder resources to consult externally when we are not sure that a property is considered surplus. It is more logical and efficient for the Authority to decide whether it considers a property to be surplus before consulting externally. The Access and RoW team would be consulted at Stage 2, via their Head of Service, and should identify any public access issues.

Once a provisional decision is made that an asset is surplus, then the issue of whether to dispose and the method of disposal and constraints to be imposed need to be consulted on and decided (Stages 2 onwards). So we would only consult externally once the property is considered surplus (after Stage 2). In practice it is likely that processes will run in parallel and external consultation will happen between Stages 2 and 9 rather than at the end of the process”.

4. Stage 9 refers to the Head of Marketing and Communication supporting the consultation process. Given the expertise in community consultation that exists within the Community Policy team, would it be useful to also include them in this process, in particular where disposals may be controversial or complex locally? The guidance on consultation here is quite vague, and that team has guidance and principles that could be adapted and integrated here to create a simple but meaningful guide.

“We will utilise the resources we have in the most appropriate way for the situation. It is not anticipated that we would be holding face to face consultation events in relation to property disposals. We will develop a generic communications plan for potential property disposals as part of the development of our disposal strategy”.

Emma Stone informed the LAF Members that an Active Property Disposal Plan should be published later this year and that she would try and let LAF Members know in advance of the paper being presented to Authority Members.

John Thompson thanked both Louise Hawson and Emma Stone for their presentations, information and responses to questions.

84. DERBYSHIRE CC ROWIP UPDATE

Gill Millward from Derbyshire County Council presented her report and asked that if any Member had any questions, then to please email her. The Chair thanked Gill for her comprehensive and well illustrated report.

The report was welcomed and noted.

85. MEMBERS' REPORTS

Bob Berzins will be attending the National Park Management Plan meeting on the 14th July for John Thompson, so can all Members please complete the questionnaire if they hadn't already done so.

Charlotte Gilbert reported that the date for the next Trails Steering Group was still to be arranged by Emma Stone.

86. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair reported that this was Edwina Edwards' last meeting as a Member of the Local Access Forum as she was standing down. Edwina joined the LAF in September 2006 and became its Chair from 2010-2017. Members of the LAF gave their personal thanks to Edwina and a statement from Andrew McCloy, former Chair of the LAF, was read out.

Sue Smith reported that Members had contributed to the Access Fund for improvements in the Lathkill area and that an update would be sent around to Members in due course.

Edwina was invited to say a few words in which she thanked both the LAF and Officers for their commitment and knowledge and promised that she would keep in touch.

87. DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS - 9TH SEPTEMBER AND 9TH DECEMBER 2021

The date of the next meeting will be Thursday 9th September and it was hoped that this could be back at Aldern House, but more details on this would be known nearer the time.

The meeting finished at 12.35pm.