



Peak District Local Access Forum (LAF)
C/o Peak District National Park Authority
Aldern House
Baslow Road
Bakewell
Derbyshire DE45 1AE

Peak District National Park Authority
and all Constituent Authorities Chief Executives
Sarah Fowler, Peak District National Park Authority

18th January, 2016
(sent by email)

Dear Sarah

Future Resources for Access & Countryside Services, including Rights of Way

As you know, last September we wrote to the Secretaries of State for Communities and Local Government; and for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs expressing concern about the effects of government funding cuts on resources for local authorities and the National Park Authority on countryside access and rights of way. Constituent MP's covering the area of our Forum were copied in (see Annex A).

Forum members were very disappointed by the responses received which lacked acknowledgement or support for addressing our concerns, suggesting authorities and the National Park had been allocated appropriate resources and it was up to them to decide how they were used. We are writing to make you aware of the issues raised, the responses received and seek your support for positive action in partnership.

The Peak District Local Access Forum is a statutory body of volunteer members, appointed jointly by the Peak District National Park Authority (PDNPA) and Derbyshire County Council (DCC) under the provisions of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000. It covers the National Park area and the countryside of north-west Derbyshire around Buxton, New Mills and Glossop. Our role is to advise both the authorities on the improvement of public access and opportunities for the purpose of open-air recreation and enjoyment of the area. Our last Annual Report is available at http://www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0009/577881/LAF-Report-2014.pdf.

Our letter to the Secretaries of State last September made particular references to the Peak District National Park Authority and Derbyshire County Council as our sponsoring authorities, but the issues apply to all constituent authorities which is why we are seeking your input, involvement and support. Key points from the letter sent to the Secretaries of State follow:

Ongoing stringent government cuts imposed on Derbyshire CC, other constituent authorities and the Peak District NPA are causing problems in delivery of economic, recreation participation, health and accessibility by all benefits. We stressed key strategic points in our experience in the Peak District Local Access Forum (PDLAF) Derbyshire County Council consulted us on priorities as a result of the cuts they faced in government funding and we wrote to them with our suggestions about priorities. The response was welcomed by the Leader of the Council.

We urged the government to look at the benefits of access and the rights of way network, and its management in good condition, in the wider context of the economic benefits they bring across the whole of the County and the area of our Local Access Forum where the economy is a National Park Authority duty, in addition to the twin purposes of conservation and promotion of understanding and enjoyment.

The local economy is significantly dependent upon tourism and recreation. Perceptions of visitors (particularly for return visits), are conditioned by impressions of the state of the place, and particularly ease of access to the countryside. Here the maintenance of countryside access and public rights of way is absolutely fundamental - so fundamental ones takes them for granted at ones peril. It has been threatened by layers of cuts in terms of officers, maintenance, access furniture and so on. Neglect of the network will have repercussions upon the vibrancy of the local economy. Additionally, other benefits you (the government) should consider are:

- the health and wellbeing agenda and benefits of increased activity
- the enormous enjoyment it brings to users
- opportunities being created for accessibility by all
- the scope for developing further partnerships, involving volunteers more and attracting external funding and sponsorship
- building on very good practice and achievements to date.

Local Access Forum members commented on the work of the Derbyshire Countryside Service as it approaches 50 years of positive action and achievements. They include the Council having established an excellent reputation for public satisfaction with its rights of way network from users, being ranked top of 25 participating County Councils in 2013 and 2014.

The County Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) and process has been exemplary from our point of view with the current Statement of Action through until 2017. The ROWIP is a great credit to the authority and provides a positive framework for standards, targets and future improvements to the network. This needs continued staff support at its present level to go forward successfully. Past experience has shown that, when linked to Local Transport Plan funding, it leads to tremendous improvements for users in the County, including the area within the Peak District National Park. We welcome the planned involvement of members of this LAF together with the Derby and Derbyshire LAF in the review of the County ROWIP. We have asked other authorities responsible for ROWIP reviews for involvement.

As I'm sure you are aware, the issue of the use of unsealed highways by recreational motor vehicles ('off-roading') continues to be a significant issue for both residents and visitors to the National Park. A strategy and action plans for the management of these 'green lanes' was approved by the PDNPA in February 2012. This included options related to surface improvements, voluntary restraint (working with User Groups) as well as the use of Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO's). The Strategy and routes involved can be found at <http://www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/looking-after/vehicles>

The strategy emphasises the need to protect the special qualities of the NP and that responsible and sustainable use and a partnership approach is inherent in doing this. The Priority Routes Action Plan identifies actions on 29 priority routes considered to be potentially unsustainable and requiring improved management. There are 18 routes in Derbyshire and 11 in areas covered by other Highway Authorities. We have a good partnership with Derbyshire CC in relation to action related to routes in their part of the National Park and hope that can be extended to other authorities. We would very much welcome your support please in pursuing approaches for the sustainable management of the priority routes throughout the National Park. Our letters to constituent authorities asks if they can help in some way, but in Derbyshire's case recognises ongoing involvement.

The National Park Authority has a proud record of promoting access to the countryside dating back over 50 years, initiating the country's first Ranger Service in

1954 and playing an instrumental role in the implementation of the CROW Act, 2000. We told the government we considered that every effort and resource should be given to maintaining that wonderful achievement and improved opportunities for all. The cuts will reduce enjoyment and confidence of users in the availability, ease of use and safety of the rights of way network at a time when recreation and health strategies are encouraging more people to be active and enjoy the countryside. A clear contradiction and lack of a joined up approach.

We recognise the effective management and sustainability of all routes is extremely important. Although the pressures are extreme. We urged that adequate resources are made available for our constituent authorities for countryside services, including access and rights of way work. It is crucial for the reasons listed above to deliver government and local priorities.

The response received from Sarah Hill of the Customer Contact Unit at Defra dated 3 November (attached) ignored the fact we had written direct to them as well as to the Department for Communities and Local Government. It was very disappointing as it was not from a Minister, ignored key issues in our letter and put the onus for funding solely onto local authorities. It was also misleading regarding funding for National Park Authorities in 2015-16 which was cut. We also received (see attached) a copy of a letter from Marcus Jones MP (Minister for Local Government) to Patrick McCloughlin (MP for Derbyshire Dales) indicating the government's commitment to rural authorities which some of you may wish to comment on.

Your comments on the above issues and support to essential and positive action through ongoing partnership with the National Park Authority to achieve wide ranging benefits would be most welcomed please. As we feel that this matter is of such importance we would like to meet to discuss the most effective way of taking these matters forward. Would you be prepared to do that when we have other responses please?

Yours sincerely

Edwina and John
Edwina Edwards MBE and John Thompson
Chair & Vice Chair Peak District Local Access Forum

Circulation to Chief Executives of the Peak District NPA & constituent authorities

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Copies to Secretaries for Chairs of adjoining Local Access Forum's (LAF's)

Derby and Derbyshire LAF - Anne.Barrett@derbyshire.gov.uk

Staffordshire, Stoke and Wolverhampton Joint LAF jonathan.lindop@staffordshire.gov.uk

Cheshire East LAF - laf@cheshireeast.gov.uk,

Barnsley LAF - SarahFord@barnsley.gov.uk

Sheffield LAF - katrina.chandler@sheffield.gov.uk

Calderdale LAF - Julie.Swift@calderdale.gov.uk

Peak District Local Access Forum: Mike Rhodes (Secretary) and all members,
Richard Taylor & Gill Millward, Countryside Service, Derbyshire CC

Attachments

- List of Constituent MP's
- Copy of the letter received from Sarah Hill, Customer Contact Unit, Defra
- Copy of a letter from Marcus Jones MP, minister for Local Government written to Patrick McCloughlin which he forwarded to us

Annex A

Constituent MP's in the Peak District Local Access Forum's area:

Debbie Abrahams **	Lab	Oldham East & Saddleworth	debbie.abrahams.mp@parliament.uk
Jason McCartney MP *	Con	Colne Valley	jason.mccartney.mp@parliament.uk
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Rt Hon Nicholas Clegg MP	Lib Dem	Sheffield Hallam	cleggn@parliament.uk
Natascha Engel MP	Lab	Derbyshire North East	engeln@parliament.uk
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