

Stanage Forum Annual General Meeting 2015

**Minutes of the meeting held in the Memorial Hall, Oddfellows Road, Hathersage
on 31 October 2015**

Some 50 people attended the meeting

Apologies were received from Jean Monks, Julian Dunk, Tim Grice, Terry Howard, Dave Brown, Adge Last, Roly Smith, Phil Robins, Louise Hawson, Graham Parkes, Peter Judd.

Welcome and Introduction

1. In welcoming everyone to the meeting, Jacque Bevan, Chair of the Stanage Forum, stressed that the purpose of the meeting was to hear people's views, ideas and opinions. Questions and comment were welcome at any time.

2. She gave a special welcome to Sarah Fowler, CEO of the Peak District National Park Authority (PDNPA), Andrew McCloy, Chair of PDNPA's Audit, Performance and Resources (ARP) Committee, Danny Udall and John Mead from the Eastern Moors Partnership (EMP) and Burbage, and to the North Lees Estate and camp site staff. She asked John Horscroft, a Steering Group Member, mountain biker, climber and enthusiast to set the scene.

Setting the Scene

3. John said that despite the pressures of running Stanage we should perhaps worry less and wonder more at the sheer magic of the place. It had been a roller coaster of a year, but Stanage was in good hands. Supported by Mary Bagley and Rebekah Newman from PDNPA, the Steering Group had produced a Management Plan and Business Plan that had been approved by ARP Committee.

4. There was a number of short presentations to stimulate discussion and comment, whilst response to questions posted around the Hall was particularly welcomed.

Management and Business Plan

5. Rebekah Newman, the PDNPA's Property Manager for North Lees, began by enumerating some of her highlights of the year. These included Bill's tweets on the history of Stanage and topical issues, the sighting of an adder and a golden ringed dragonfly, the crucial link North Lees was playing in the wider landscape for people and wildlife, the arrival of the camping pods, the approval of the Management Plan, a visit by refugees and asylum seekers, led walks and talks, the response from climbers and mountain bikers to the Ours to Care For donation sticker and the individual contributions of many people.

6. The 2016 stickers were available, and a ring ouzel T-shirt would be ready for Christmas.

7. The four elements of the Vision – Landscape, People, Connections and Resources – were mirrored in the **Management Plan**. The Management Plan was displayed in the Hall, and will be available on the web site by the end of November

www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/stanageforum

8. Landscape initiatives, particularly bracken spraying, limits on sheep numbers and their control, and woodland management and creation were discussed in some detail in response to questions. The aim was to produce a more varied habitat throughout Stanage that would be better for wildlife and better in the landscape.

9. Under People she drew particular attention to enhanced opportunities for outreach through the camp site, and other initiatives, including better ties with local youngsters from Hathersage School.

10. Connections were crucial because North Lees did not exist in isolation, but as part of the Sheffield Moors Partnership (SMP) area, and indeed as part of the family of National Parks. It was important both nationally and internationally, and for its wildlife it attracted the highest European conservation designations.

11. The aim regarding resources was that Stanage should be cost neutral, achieving full cost recovery. This included costs attributed to Aldern House. It would be important to broaden the base of people visiting Stanage.

12. Introducing the **Business Plan**, Rebekah asked particularly for ideas from those present for income generation, and for suggestions on how to increase donations through the Ours to Care For Sticker. This was already successful with some 500 sold generating an income of over £6000.

13. For 2015/16 income was projected at £172K whilst expenditure was projected as £164K + £38K PDNPA Management costs, leaving a notional deficit of £30K.

14. Risks included the fact that £24K would be derived from Surprise View car park, £6K from North Lees Hall (which would not be achieved due to the collapse of Vivat Trust) and the fact that 50% of the cost of the full time warden was met from another budget. Looking ahead the income contributed by the High Level Stewardship scheme was bound to reduce when that scheme is succeeded by Countryside Stewardship in 2017.

15. An agricultural rent was charged for the farm and farm house. The PDNPA element was derived from human resource, IT, legal and property support costs.

National Park Authority Perspective

16. Andrew McCloy explained the PDNPA had two Committees – a Planning Committee and an ‘everything else’ Committee, namely ARP Committee, which he chaired.

17. Whilst the management of its Roaches and Eastern Moors Estates had been passed to other organisations which could deliver the PDNPA's purposes, a conscious decision had been made to maintain North Lees in house in public ownership. The new Management Plan had now been ratified by his Committee and commitment given to the way forward.

18. That said, as a consequence of PDNPA's grant from Central Government having been cut by over one third in recent years, things would have to be done differently in the future. It would be necessary to persuade visitors to put a lot more back into the upkeep of the National Park.

19. It would be hard to meet current requirements but things would be getting potentially yet more difficult as there was prospect of a further cut back to the DEFRA grant in the range of 25% to 40% in the Autumn Statement.

20. That was why he was pushing positive partnership working as a way forward.

21. The Forum too offered a different way of working. There may have been tensions and disagreements in the past, but trust was being built up over time. PDNPA was committed to the Forum and 100% behind it.

22. PDNPA had made substantial cut backs at the centre, and had also made redundancies. None of the Senior Management Team had taken any pay rise in the last five years. Efficiencies had been made in central costs. Some assets were being disposed of: he mentioned some of the 120 plus woodlands owned by PDNPA, and confirmed, in answer to a question, that where this happened there was a presumption in favour of prior dedication for open access, though that might not be appropriate in every case.

23. In response to another question he confirmed that all income generated at Stanage went directly to benefit the property, not to the upkeep of any bureaucracy. Details would be posted on the web site of how such income had been spent.

Two short videos

24. After a tea break Bill Gordon, the North Lees Estate Warden showed short videos on the Standedge Pole, and on the arrival of the camping pods at North Lees Camp Site.

Eastern Moors Partnership and Burbage

25. Danny Udall, the Estate Manager for Eastern Moors and Burbage said that the National Trust (NT) and RSPB had been managing the Eastern Moors on behalf of the nation since 2011. It had now been agreed they would now be taking on the management of Burbage, Houndkirk and Hathersage Moors, on a 25 year lease from Sheffield City Council (SCC), though not all the paperwork would be completed before April 2016. The RSPB would be able to bring in fresh resource.

26. Burbage was very much part of one landscape, with Eastern Moors, North Lees and Blackamoor, for both people and wildlife, and with its own strong sense of place and tradition. Stakeholder representation would be via the Easter Moors Stakeholder Group, though there would be a more open public meeting in April. A Management Plan would be in place for November 2016.

27. A suggestion from the floor was that it should be given to the National Trust by SCC so the NT could dedicate it inalienably for the Nation, and thereby guarantee the land was retained for the public in perpetuity.

28. There were questions and discussion about the removal of the Great Britain Plantation at Burbage: the extraction had cost more than the value of the timber. The aim was to create a more natural landscape, as newly planted native trees established. This would be better for people, wildlife and landscape. Additional woodland work was in hand at Surprise View with the same overall objective.

People, outreach and engagement

29. Rebekah Newman described some of the wide range of engagement with people, and of the volunteering that was taking place at North Lees. She also referred to a recent conference at Hallam University themed on Sheffield, the City for Adventure, and to a nascent bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

30. A critical question at the conference had been how to fund the upkeep of public open spaces for the benefit of the nation. A suggestion from the floor was for a 'Stanage Summit' to talk collectively about how to pay for the countryside. Rebekah agreed this should be followed up outside the Forum meeting.

Cultural Heritage

31. Stella Maguire described how diverse traces of travel through the landscape over the last 4000 years were etched within the relatively compact area that was North Lees, and illustrated her talk with a series of slides. The cultural heritage embraced social as well as physical heritage, as typified by the campaign for better access.

32. She took us on a quick tour of the Romano British heritage, the many holloways, the Buckstone, Holy Trinity chapel and well, the remnant millstones, Marion marks carved into some rocks and Green's House Mill, and to investigation into the built heritage being undertaken by Castleton Primary School.

Minutes of the Last Meeting and Steering Group Membership

33. Jacque Bevan announced her intention to stand down from the Chairmanship of the Steering Group at its next meeting. On behalf of PDNPA Mary Bagley paid tribute to her long service as a Member of the Group, and her role as Chair since its inception as an independent body. She was warmly applauded.

34. The minutes of the last Forum AGM, held on 1 November 2014, were accepted as a true record – proposed by Heather Rogers and seconded by Jean Hodgkinson. There were no matters arising.

35. Henry Folkard, Secretary to the Stanage Forum, described the representative membership of the Steering Group, and its main activities during the last year. There would be some vacancies in Membership during the coming year. Anyone who wanted to put his or her name forward was invited to let him know.

36. He proposed one amendment to the Constitution *'any member of the Steering Group who fails to attend four consecutive meetings without good cause as notified to the Secretary, or otherwise contribute to the work of the Steering Group, will be deemed to have resigned from the Steering Group'*. This was unanimously adopted by the Forum, which also endorsed the current membership of the Steering Group for a further year – proposed by Andrew Derby and seconded by John Horscroft.

Open Forum

37. The question of conflict between different recreational users was raised, particularly between walkers, especially blind walkers, and mountain bikers. In response it was acknowledged that there were some cases of bad behaviour, but representative user groups were working hard to address this important issue and work within peer groups to embed good practice.

38. A Trustee of the Peak and Northern Footpath Society reminded the Forum that as well as assisting with signage and footpath repairs, the Society could also install bridges on footpaths.

39. Several questions were raised regarding wild deer – though this issue is not currently of particular concern at North Lees. Danny Udall explained that a population of feral escapees had established themselves on Eastern Moors 20 years ago, and, without any natural predators to keep numbers in check, the size of the herd had increased significantly. Its range had also expanded well beyond the original core area, to the extent this was creating a public nuisance for some local residents and a possible road safety hazard. There was also a landscape effect due to grazing activity.

40. Whilst it was good to retain a core population, which was welcome and many visitors enjoyed coming to see, a balance had to be struck between unrestricted expansion in numbers over an ever wider area and the number that could be supported and remain in good health within the upland area. Besides red deer, roe deer were also establishing themselves within the Sheffield Moors. Whilst there was no annual cull as a matter of course, numbers, and their impact, were reviewed after the rut count, and management action was only taken if it was deemed necessary.

41. Other questions related to the presence of cattle within the wider Sheffield Moors. There was a general sense that members of the public felt threatened by them and did not welcome their presence despite the ecological benefits they might bring.

42. With that the meeting closed, with an invitation to anyone who had yet to respond to the questions, or wished to add any further comment, to do so now, or via the web site during the next month.