

TERMS OF REFERENCE

COUNTY DURHAM LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Title

1. The Forum shall be known as the County Durham Local Access Forum.

Role and Responsibilities

2. The primary purpose of the County Durham Local Access Forum is to provide advice to the local authority and to Natural England on how to make the countryside more accessible and enjoyable for open air recreation, in ways which address social, economic and environmental interests. The Forum will assist access provision, giving advice on issues of particular local relevance. Advice is also to be given to a range of other bodies and organizations as laid down in Regulations and guidance from the Secretary of State.
3. The County Durham Local Access Forum will give advice on three main topics:
 - the development of recreation and access strategies which cater for a wide range of people;
 - improving the rights of way network;
 - implementation, management and review of the statutory right of access to the countryside.
4. The County Durham Local Access Forum will work to:
 - develop a constructive and inclusive approach to the improvement of recreational access to the countryside;
 - respect local circumstances and different interests while operating within national guidance;
 - provide advice on issues of principle and good practice which is consistent with national guidance;
 - engage in constructive debate and seek consensus wherever possible;
 - where consensus is not possible, make clear the nature of differing views and suggest how they might be resolved.

In carrying out these functions, the Forum shall have regard to:

- the needs of land management;
- the desirability of conserving the natural beauty of the area for which it is established, including the flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features of the area;
- guidance given from time to time by the Secretary of State;
- proper liaison with neighbouring authorities.

Membership

5. The membership will:
 - be balanced to avoid dominance by any single interest group or coalition of like interests; and
 - include a cross-section of local interests in the countryside.
6. The membership will include:
 - an independent chair; and
 - an optimum number of 12 - 20 and a maximum of 22 members.
7. Members in total must bring a wide range of experience, including;
 - recreational use, for example walking, riding, climbing, cycling;
 - land management, for example tenants, landowners and occupiers and others with an interest in the land; and
 - nature conservation, heritage, tourism, health, business, trade unions and transport.
8. Members not experienced in the topics at paragraph 7, or aligned with any particular interest group will be appointed as independent members. One of the independent members should be an elected representative of Durham County Council.
9. The Forum shall contain roughly equal numbers of members ascribed to each of the categories in paragraphs 7 and 8. Members who genuinely have experience and credibility in relation to the categories in paragraph 7 will be particularly useful.
10. Members will be appointed by the authorities according to selection criteria which assesses whether candidates have sufficient experience of access to the countryside to be able to make an informed and constructive contribution to improving local access provision.
11. Before appointment, members will be asked to confirm:
 - their support of the positive purpose of the Forum;
 - commitment to working within the terms of reference and achieving the aims of the Forum through constructive working with other members; and
 - that they are able to devote the necessary time to attend meetings, attend training and to network with a wide range of interests outside meetings.

Administration

12. Meetings will be held at least twice a year and more frequently when necessary.
13. Meeting agendas will be agreed between the Chairman and the Secretary.
14. Meetings will be advertised in advance and held in public.
15. Agendas, papers and minutes of the meetings will be available to the public.

16. The quorum for all meetings will be one quarter of the total membership.
17. The Chairman will invite observers to the meetings when appropriate.
18. Observers will be able to contribute at the meetings at the discretion of the Chairman.
19. The public will be able to ask questions on the business of the meeting at the discretion of the Chairman.
20. Durham County Council will have the right to review the chairing and membership of the Forum on an annual basis if necessary.
21. The Forum shall produce an Annual Report to be published by Durham County Council, with a copy to be provided to Natural England.