

Minutes of a meeting of Hamsterley Trailblazers held on Monday 7 February 2011 at 6.30pm in the Cross Keys Pub, Hamsterley

Trustees Present: Vicky Chilcott (Secretary)
Ollie Graham (Vice Chairman)
Mat Clark (Treasurer)

Members Present: Graeme Bond
Corinne Church
James Dods
Gary Ewing
Chris Goldsworthy
Kathryn Gander
Neil Gander
Kaye Graham
David Holmes
Lisa Jobling
Rob Myers
Dave Nicholson
Bill Pike
Martin Stout
Andrew Walker

In attendance: Carole Atkinson (Horse Riding Association)
Jennifer Atkinson (Horse Riding Association)
Patrick Bonnet (Durham Fell Runners)
Helen Coatsworth (Horse Riding Association)
Helen Kirby (Horse Riding Association)
Julia Howells (Horse Riding Association)
J Halcyon
Ted Liddle (IMBA)
Bill Oxbrough (MPs office)

Apologies for absence were received from Richard Bower, Marie Brown, Alan Hazlett, Alex MacLennan and Andy Samanjoul.

1. Minutes of Last Meeting The minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2010 were approved as a correct record.

2. Matters arising from the Minutes

- **NatWest Community Fund** It was noted the club had been successful in receiving a £1000 NatWest Community fund award and it was AGREED a letter of thanks be sent to NatWest.

3. Dave Church Members paid tribute to Dave Church, a founder member of Traiblazers and former Club Treasurer, who had sadly died in an ice climbing accident on 26 December 2010. It was AGREED a tribute to Dave in the form of a memorial be arranged and his widow, Corinne was asked what she felt would be appropriate. Corinne said Dave had always wanted his ashes to be spread in the forest under an oak tree. Ollie Graham and Mat Clark agreed to liaise with Corinne to organise this.

3. Statement of Accounts and Membership The Statement of Accounts to the end of January 2011 was received together with club membership details for the same period. It was noted the club had recently received a £10,000 grant towards training and help with trailbuilding for young people and family riding. It was also noted marshalling at the Duathlon and the December car rally had raised nearly £1000 for club funds and the 1-2-1 race had also raised approximately £1000 for the club. This money, together with the NatWest Community Award meant that there was £13,925 in the bank at the end of January 2011. A vote of thanks was made to all members who had volunteered to marshall at the various events.

4. 2011 AGM It was AGREED to email members seeking Trustee and Member nominations. It was AGREED to postpone a decision on the format of the evening pending discussions on the Future of the Forests Consultation Document.

5. Orange Bike Frame Raffle It was noted that due to inclement weather, plans to raffle this Orange Bike Frame prior to Christmas had been postponed. It was AGREED to reorganise this raffle in time for the AGM on 4 April 2011.

6. Calendar of Events 2011 Noted:

- Ride leaders were still needed for certain Sunday month club rides – offers to lead invited
- Duck Race and BBQ – to be held on 21 May, not 18 April
- Club ride away – date still to be agreed

7. Trailbuilding It was noted that severe winter weather had stopped trailbuilding since December. FC were setting up a trailbuilding meeting in early March with Trailblazers to discuss 2011 plans and the next trailbuilding session was on 19 February.

8. Consultation Document – ‘The Future of the Public Forest Estate in England’ Members welcomed those attending from the Horse Riding Association, the Durham Fell Runners and the MP’s office to the meeting to jointly discuss the implications of this important consultation document on the future of Hamsterley and other English forests.

It was noted comments were needed on the document by 21 April 2011.

The consultation document proposed dividing FC owned land in England into 4 categories with separate disposal suggestions on each as follows:

- Large commercially valuable forests eg Kielder – lease for c 150 years to the private sector whilst retaining landlord requirements to safeguard key public access and benefits
- Small commercially valuable forests – eg a small section of the North East edge of Hamsterley and Slaley – sell off separately
- Multi purpose forests eg the bulk of Hamsterley – offer a ‘Community Right to Buy’ where the land could be sold or leased at its market value to community or civil society groups. These groups would have first option to buy or lease at the market value within a set window of

opportunity. If not taken up, FC would be free to sell to whomever they chose.

- Heritage sites eg Chopwell, New Forest and the Forest of Dean – forests of national historical, biodiversity or culture (including recreation.) The ownership or management of these would be transferred free of charge to a charity or charities via a trust or lease.

Detailed discussion took place on the proposals during which the following concerns were expressed:

- Deep, unanimous unease was expressed over the proposals and the tight timescale for consultation.
- The proposals did not make any provision for maintaining (let alone improving) the permissive rights of cycling, horse riding etc. Whilst walking was protected under CROW, there was no such protection proposed for existing permissive rights.
- The CTC had identified that one third of all recreational cycling took place on FC trails – this would be significantly affected under the proposals.
- 82% of English forests were privately owned, but 50% of public access was through FC owned forests and this was a recreational resource that was extremely valuable to the public as a whole. Public access to forests and woodland needed to be protected and improved, not jeopardised as appeared probable from the proposals.
- The likelihood of a charity or community organisation being able to raise funds to purchase and run a forest the size of Hamsterley was slim, especially as the window of opportunity was likely to be short (28 days at present to put in place a definite funding proposal for other community buy out schemes being launched by the government.)
- The worst of all 4 disposal options appeared to be the multi purpose option outlined for Hamsterley. Hamsterley was Co Durham's second largest recreational resource after the Beamish Museum with over 200,000 visitors in 2010. Everyone present did not wish to see it sold off to a private organisation.
- Incredulity was expressed at one statement in the document that said there would be no significant impact on public access because, 'Should access be reduced it is likely users would substitute their preferred wood for other woodland or outdoor area.'

It was noted that the consultation document has produced a national public outcry against its proposals with a number of petitions and demonstrations being organised. In particular 38 Degrees had an online petition; the Teesdale Mercury was organising a campaign 'Hands off Hamsterley' with a demonstration at Hamsterley on Saturday 26 February, led by Helen Goodman MP. A demonstration was also being held at Chopwell on Sunday 13 February.

It was AGREED to ask members to sign petitions, contact their MPs and the press, to attend demonstrations and to clearly tell the Government that they did not support the proposals. (It was agreed the February club ride should be based at Chopwell to support the demonstration on Sunday 13 February. Ted Little kindly offered to lead a member ride in advance of the demonstration.) In addition it was AGREED to set up a working party to

produce a formal response to the proposals from Trailblazers. Members of the working party were Vicky Chilcott, Mat Clark, Gary Ewing, Neil Gander, Ollie Graham and Lisa Jobling. It was further AGREED to liaise closely with other organisations such as the Horse Riding Association, the Fell Runners, IMBA and the CTC to fight the proposals.

10. Date and Time of Next Meeting Annual General Meeting to be held on Monday 4 April at 6.30pm in Hamsterley Village Hall.