Written evidence submitted by the Tees Valley Local Access Forum (RUT0034)

A view from Tees Valley Local Access Forum, a statutory body; volunteers working in public access and making observations across the Appointing Authorities of Hartlepool, Darlington, Middlesbrough and Stockton on Tees.

All remarks here are confined to the area of access.

1. Whilst we are sure that some farmers do benefit from tourism; there are many for whom increased tourist access has a serious down side. Any initiatives must take these into account. Encouraging farm visits, petting animals and visitors spending money in a tearoom might boost farm income, but taking their dogs onto agricultural land raises another set of problems. For instance, farmers who are part of a quality assurance scheme are required to demonstrate and record all farm dogs vet and medicine history, particularly with regard to worming. Visitor’s dogs do not. Encouraging the development of touring caravan sites is one way of diversifying, but can cause issues on narrow country lanes.

2. Access improvements must encourage sustainable use of the countryside, with a view to promoting active (sustainable) travel and increasing levels of physical activity through walking and cycling. This might be achieved through the development of more walking and cycling hubs, such as those created by the Forestry Commission in Dalby Forest. However, this example is a very large (regional) development and would not be suitable for many areas. The development of smaller, more local hubs might be beneficial. These hubs might hire out mobility devices such as four wheeled mountain bikes.

3. Some of the existing PRoW would benefit from being more accessible to the elderly, disabled and those pushing children in buggies, by the replacement of stiles with kissing gates. Some work has been done on this already - the Cleveland Way is now fully accessible. It is likely that such PRoW would be near to honey pot sites, with parking and toilet facilities.

4. Publicity would need to be enhanced too. It’s a shame that many Tourist Information Centres have closed, due to funding cuts in recent years. Many people do use the internet to find information, but some can’t/won’t. For visitors from overseas, searching UK sites might be problematic.

5. Some serious consideration needs to be given to the issue of walking in the countryside around livestock – either cattle, sheep or horses. In this day and age no one should lose their life or conversely their livelihood by the simple use of a RoW. Can evidence be gathered of projects that work managing the meeting of livestock
and public, or financial assistance be provided to pilot projects to fence off paths between the public and stock?

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