

ABERDEENSHIRE LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF MEETING 81

Monday 14 June 2021, 6.00pm

Virtual Meeting (under lockdown conditions)

Present: Gordon McKilligan [*part meeting*], Ruth Riddell, Steve Russell [*part meeting*], Neil Taylor, Adam Wallace, Henry Webb, Chris York (Chair).

Guests: Gerald Banks, Simon Richards.

Council officers: Richard Elliott, Bridget Freeman.

Abbreviations: **A/C** Aberdeenshire Council; **A/O** Access Officer(s); Hub -- Knowledge Hub; **S/G** Sub-group.

Item	Subject	Action
1	<p>Apologies, introductions, deputising, etc.</p> <p>a) <i>Apologies etc.</i> – L Craig, D Fyffe, W Gault, J Kitching.</p> <p><i>Introductions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simon Richards, Chair, Feughside Community Council, deputising for Lynsey Craig, as “guest”. • Neil Taylor, one of two FLS Visitor Services Rangers for Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City, dealing with enquiries, permissions, and responsible access including presence on site. NT reported that a seasonal ranger has been appointed for Aberdeenshire and is about to start. • Gerald Banks, as “guest” for this meeting, but ratification of his intended appointment as Reserve for NFUS will be forthcoming. <p>b) <i>Declaration of Interests</i> – HW, re Item 2(2), advised that he knows a member of the Westhill Paths Group and has discussed the Westhill Orbital Path with him. It was agreed that he could remain in the meeting during the item in question.</p> <p>c) <i>Vice Chair position</i> – The Chair repeated his appeal for someone to volunteer for this role. BF will put the relevant paperwork onto the Hub. To be considered further at next meeting.</p>	<p>BF</p> <p>ALL + BF</p>
2	<p><i>As “guests”, at this point, GB and Simon R left the meeting, which continued in closed session:</i></p> <p>Upholding access rights cases</p>	
3	<p><i>Guests GB and Simon R re-joined the meeting, which resumed in open session:</i></p> <p>Approval of Minutes of Meeting 80 and Matters arising (Action points)</p> <p>References are to the “Actions Summary” from Meeting 80, accompanying the current Agenda.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Item 3 (3) – <i>Visitor Management Plan (VMP)</i> – HW had not received the Mid Deeside paper; consequently had not inputted collated feedback to the Council VMP. CY took responsibility for not circulating the paper, which he would now put onto the Hub. He said there had been minimal feedback other than from Mid Deeside. RE said that the A/Os can bring the aforementioned paper to the attention of the Council team overseeing the VMP, along with any other information on hotspots which Forum 	<p>CY</p> <p>A/Os</p>

	<p>members may wish to report. In discussion, HW stressed that visitors to busy areas should be recommended to be flexible, i.e. have a “Plan B” to deploy if they are turned away from their preferred destination. RE said that the Ranger service is listing busy locations on social media and conveying the “Plan B” message.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Item 4 – <i>A96 dualling</i> – RE reported that in a recent meeting Council officers recommended that Amey/Arup contact ALOAF. He expressed surprise that no such contact has since been made. • Item 6 – <i>ALOAF social media policy</i> – CY yet to prepare this but will include a statement that ALOAF does not maintain a continuously responsive presence on social media. <p>Minutes approved (proposed HW, seconded RR).</p>	<p>ALL</p> <p>CY</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>Consultations / Projects of interest</p> <p>1.1) <i>Aberdeenshire Coastal Path Forum</i> -- BF reported news from Katherine Low that the Project Officer post (a 12-month term) will be advertised shortly. Nothing to report regarding the Coastal Forum; presumably this will follow on once an officer is in post. Meanwhile, specialists have found more loose rock affecting the Sneuk path at Gardenstown.</p> <p>1.2) <i>Formartine and Buchan Way</i> – BF has been advised that the section through Ellon has been upgraded, and the Viaduct has been protected from water damage, allowing repairs to be carried out in a year’s time once the structure has dried out. Elsewhere a diversion will be in place for up to 8 weeks at Willowbank, east of Longside, to enable pipeline work.</p> <p>2) <i>Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan</i> – For details see Hub; also Council website at https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/plans-and-policies/pldp-2020/ Documentation, along with the dossier of unresolved issues arising from the public consultation, has been submitted to Scottish Ministers, whose Reporters will conduct the formal Examination process. ALOAF’s input focussed on (a) Active Travel, and (b) protecting access affected by development.</p> <p>3) <i>Ramblers Scotland – Mapping Scotland’s Paths project</i> – The aim is to map all of Scotland’s paths (not just core paths) using crowd-sourced data, with publication in due course. Following a pilot project in Ayrshire, the process is to be rolled out across Scotland in 2021, with volunteers currently being sought. CY said that he did not see ALOAF itself getting involved, but anyone independently interested can visit the link at https://www.ramblers.org.uk/mappingscotlandspaths The data may be of use to access officers in due course, subject to meeting any data-sharing protocol. Paths will be assessed according to a variety of categories. Volunteers will receive documentation and a smartphone app. Members can spread the word. RR observed that path mapping is also being undertaken by cyclists and by the British Horse Society (BHS). RE noted that the Ramblers and BHS are liaising. The cyclists’ platform “Trailforks” is rather more informal. While access in Scotland is not limited to paths, CY said</p>	

	<p>that most access users prefer to follow a defined line. Some form of quality control of the data would be desirable. CY reported that the Bailies of Bennachie have been awarded a Better Places Fund grant for the post of Visitor and Volunteer Coordinator – the post to continue until the end of October 2021, emphasising an on-the-ground presence, including at weekends.</p>	
5	<p>Update on activities and events attended by members of ALOAF since previous meeting</p> <p>Access users Nothing of note.</p> <p>Community representatives Simon R reported that Feughside Community Council has been liaising with Glen Dye Estate, with the latter responding very helpfully regarding mountain bike trails, and in installing user-friendly gates in a new deer fence at Craig of Delfro. In response to a question from RR, he said that the intention is for the main routes used by equestrians to have gates which can be operated without dismounting. Assurance has been received from a neighbouring estate that newly-installed cattle grids will have bypass gates installed. Regarding links to other trails in Aberdeenshire, reference was made to Aberdeenshire Trail Association as being the organisation looking at the wider network [<i>Note by Min. Sec: ATA specialises in mountain bike trails</i>].</p> <p>Land managers GB advised that the closing date for applications for Improving Public Access (IPA) grants is 30th June 2021. CY noted that IPA applications will be judged more rigorously than in the past, with criteria including relationship to the core paths network and contribution to connectivity, with enhanced emphasis on good path design. NT reported that FLS is collaborating with the Cairngorms National Park Authority on promoting the responsible behaviour message; also liaising productively with Dunnottar Woodland Trust and other parties, including Police Scotland, concerning anti-social outdoor behaviour by young people.</p>	
6	<p>Planning for activities, events, training, information (ALOAF Website, Knowledge Hub etc)</p> <p><i>Countryside Live</i> Event at Westerton, Rothienorman, 29th May 2022. It was agreed that the Forum should continue its involvement, which had previously been planned for 2020 and 2021 (both events deferred due to Covid). CY observed that the event provides the opportunity for ALOAF to meet a wide cross-section of the public, but noted that this is dependent on the stand being in an appropriate location .</p> <p><i>Spring Show, Thainstone</i> Date 2nd March 2022. (For information only – no ALOAF involvement anticipated).</p> <p><i>Knowledge Hub demonstration</i> Intended for Jonathan Kitching, but in his absence from the meeting, CY will consider providing this separately to JK and NT by Zoom (also to any other members who would find it useful).</p> <p><i>Core Paths mapping, categories and numbering</i> CY had received details of how to access this information online, which he will forward to members in connection with Action Point 3 (4) on the list appended to the current Agenda. He reminded the meeting that the intention is for members to assess the routes featured on the core paths maps, without engaging in a formal review of the Core Paths Plan. BF to supply details of which core paths are established and which are still relevant.</p>	<p>CY</p> <p>ALL</p> <p>CY</p> <p>BF</p>

7A	<p>Aberdeenshire Council update</p> <p>1 – <i>Casework (non-confidential)</i> Access Officers are dealing with a busy caseload. Environment Planners are engaging with IPA applications and (along with other environment matters) the access implications of a significant number of development proposals. RE would welcome assistance from anyone with local knowledge relating to the Fettercairn area and also to Park Estate, Drumoak. There have been right-of-way issues with forestry operations on the Crynes Corse Mounth public right of way. RE to liaise directly with NT (FLS) on this. RE emphasised ALOAF's importance in assisting the A/Os.</p> <p>2 – <i>Council staffing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Matthew Watt is now in post as Environment Planner (South). Access Strategy Review team comprises BF, E Munro, C Stewart and M Watt. BF to consult with ALOAF (CY) on including an anonymised case study as an example of access issue investigation procedure. The Chair offered to comment on the Review document, the timescale being by the end of June. BF to enable this. Maureen Corley will be retiring shortly. G McK expressed his appreciation of the hard work undertaken by the A/Os, and noted that the NFUS regularly draws attention to the limited budget available for local authority access work. He commended Aberdeenshire as a good example of the operation of a Council working with a local access forum. CY noted that ALOAF is able to assist the A/Os and to advocate on their behalf. BF and RE felt that despite funding constraints, the A/O posts are not at risk as their work is underpinned by the duties imposed by the access legislation (LRSA). However, it was important that the NFUS maintains pressure on the Scottish Government in this regard. <p>3 – <i>Expenses</i> Forum members engaging in site visits are asked to save their fuel receipts and submit an expenses claim (enquire for further advice if not travelling by petrol/diesel car – BF to check with Jen on relevant details). Since ALOAF has a small budget, it should be made use of or it could be at risk.</p>	<p>ALL</p> <p>RE+NT</p> <p>BF+CY</p> <p>BF+CY</p> <p>ALL</p> <p>BF</p>
7B	<p>Membership</p> <p>The Chair has been advised that Scottish Land and Estates (SLE) are currently unable to provide anyone to serve on ALOAF in the role of SLE representative. He stressed the importance of land management representation to ensure that the balance of the Forum is maintained. In this connection the presence of GB and GMcK was much appreciated, together with NFUS being involved. GMcK said that the question of SLE representation could be raised with NFUS as there a degree of membership overlap. CY highlighted the significance of these relationships, especially given the current issues associated with the Covid-related surge in outdoor access. RE reported that he had received very helpful assistance from SLE's legal section regarding a signage issue in particular, and he commended SLE's interpretation of the access legislation in general.</p>	<p>GMcK, ?GB</p>
8	<p>AOCB</p>	

	<p><i>Access law reference book</i> RE strongly recommended “The Law of Access to Land in Scotland”, by Malcolm Coombes [<i>available from https://www.scotways.com/shop/63-scotways-publications (Min.Sec.)</i>].</p> <p><i>Deeside Way update</i> BF reported news from Environment Planner James Davidson that with the aid of a £200,000 NESTRANS grant, the route has been restored to its full 2.5 metre width between Dinnet and Ballater, and also near Banchory and Drumoak. Steve Russell added that the route is popular with commuters to Aboyne. BF asked if Steve R could supply feedback on this. SR to arrange, perhaps obtaining feedback from Jonathan Kitching too.</p> <p><i>Recognition of former Chair A/Os</i> have written to AW expressing their thanks for all his hard work in his former role as Forum Chair. CY as current Chair added his appreciation on behalf of the meeting.</p>	<p>SR</p>
	<p>Dates of next meetings – Please note the following alterations to meeting arrangements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 August 2021 and 11 October 2021: CANCELLED. • NEW DATE 6 September 2021, evening – <u>Outdoor visit</u> (time and venue to be confirmed). 5pm may be too early for some members. Venue options include Glen Dye or Bennachie. If Glen Dye, Simon R confirmed that shooting is not an issue in the specific area concerned. • NEW DATE 8 November 2021, 6pm – Virtual meeting, unless “face to face” becomes a realistic option, in which case BF will need to be informed in advance to enable booking of venue. It was noted that virtual meetings are less costly and tend to be shorter, which favours the possibility of their continuance. However, a downside is that broadband speeds can be an issue for some members. • All to check with Hub for updates on meeting arrangements. CY to facilitate Hub training for new members. 	<p>ALL</p> <p>Chair</p> <p>ALL</p> <p>CY</p>