

ABERDEENSHIRE LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF MEETING 89

Monday, 15th May 2023, 6.00pm

Microsoft Teams Meeting

Present: Mark Andrew (*part meeting*), Gerald Banks, Paul Davison (*part meeting*), **Ken Gordon, MG**, Jonathan Kitching, Anouk Kloppert, Alison Mitchell, Gordon Prentice, Ruth Riddell, Graham Smith, **Geordie Burnett Stuart**, Neil Taylor, Chris York (Chair).

Council officers present: Fiona Chapman, Bridget Freeman.

Abbreviations: A/O Access Officer(s); KHub -- Knowledge Hub; S/G Sub-group.

Item	Subject	Action
1	<p>Welcome, apologies, introductions, deputising, etc.</p> <p>a) Welcome to Fiona Chapman – A/O (South).</p> <p>b) Apologies and declaration of interests – none.</p>	
2	<p>Approval of Minutes from Meeting 88 Proposed by PD, seconded AK. Matters arising (relevant action points)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 88/Item 2: Banchory Lodge – JK was to discuss with former A/O (South) Peter Coldwell (PC) [<i>since transferred to a new post Min Sec</i>] but will do site visit. FC now A/O (South). • 88/Item 2: Community councils (CCs) and access: has been discussion on KHub. Potential engagement of ALOAF with CCs was well-received when mentioned by CY at 2023 NAF/LAF meeting. • 88/Items 2 & 7: Training for ALOAF members – CY has requested this from NatureScot, but no response yet. • 88/Item 3 (2): PC's email address not added to contact list as he has transferred to a new post. • 88/Item 3 (2): Ranger Service support is available for FC. • 88/Item 4: Link to FLS Visitor Strategy has been circulated. BF please re-send to GS. • 88/Item 4: Core paths – see minute for Item 7 of current meeting (below). • 88/Item 5: Advisory note for planners and CCs – notes by sub-group have been sent to CY. PD reported that Kintore Community Council is keen; also need more funding to improve accessibility of paths. • 88/Item 6: Fetternear access issue – was with PC, now for FC. • 88/item 7: Events – Aboyne; Turriff – rotas in hand (JK/CY for Aboyne; AK coordinating Turriff). See minute for Item 6 of current meeting (below). • 88/Item 8: BF reported that documents on the ALOAF webpages will not be affected by the Council's retention policies as ALOAF is independent of the Council – IT is OK with this. 	<p>JK</p> <p>BF</p>
3	<p>Update on activities and events attended by members since previous meeting</p>	

	<p>1)/2) <i>Access users/Community representatives</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RR: looking to identify which Tarland Trails routes are suitable for equestrian use. • RR: Oyne Community Association, with local equestrians, is interested in researching and looking for funding for an equestrian route to Bennachie. • JK: ongoing discussions regarding paddlecraft at Loch Kinord; further limitations on access. • GS: Oldmeldrum has 6 ebikes, has been offered 6 cycles and a tool station for self-guided repairs etc. Aberdeenshire's Cycle App is of interest. • GP: All-abilities path link from northern Westhill to Golf Course is now in place. • GP: Carnie Woods contract is due to commence in August 2023. • AM: Ongoing consultation re overbridges on Aberdeen-Edinburgh section of East Coast Main Line which may be affected by electrification due to proposed overhead wiring; affects south Aberdeenshire (former Kincardineshire). In response to a question from CY regarding whether ALOAF could help if appropriate, FC said she did not know of the consultation. BF is concerned that she herself has not seen anything on this either. As Aberdeen [City] Local Access Forum has been informed, BF asked AM to forward the consultation information to her (BF). <p>3) <i>Land managers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GB: Livestock and horse worrying by dogs is still a horrendous issue; message is not fully getting across. CY doubts that the problem will ever be completely eliminated. RR reports 2 attacks on horses in past 2 weeks (1 in City, 1 in Shire). GS suggested this would be a topic for the Turriff Show. Noting that dog-worrying is an offence, NT advises ALOAF to keep up the message "You're responsible for your dog". Suggesting that points for the Turriff Show could include making people aware of the consequences of a dog attack, AK requested information on the law relating to dogs (useful for the Turriff Show). CY reassured GB of the Forum's awareness of the seriousness of the issue. [Post-meeting note by Min Sec: see information at: scotland.police.uk/advice-and-information/livestock-attacks-and-worrying/] • GB: Improving Public Access (IPA) still dysfunctional; no funding this year. <p>4) <i>Agencies</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NT: Reopened areas are generally OK, but FLS still clearing storm damage in some areas (e.g. Tyrebagger and Kirkhill, where further windblow has occurred). Damage at Cambus o' May has been cleared but still to be checked. • NT: He is giving a talk at the Bennachie Centre on 14th June on "Explaining Forestry to the Public". ALOAF members can book by emailing Neil.Taylor@forestryandland.gov.scot (Neil is out of office meantime, returning on 1st June). 	<p>AM</p> <p>?</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JK: The Council's James Davidson is working on a felling licence application to clear windblow on the Dess-Aboyne path. • AK: See Item 4 below re Shared Prosperity Fund. <p>BF and CY had attended the NAF/LAF meeting. ALOAF is in good heart compared to some other LAFs, who are unsure of their role and unsupported by the lack of a new edition of the "blue book" from NatureScot. Diversity was included on the meeting's agenda. There has been no feedback from the meeting yet, but CY hopes to give an update at the next ALOAF meeting.</p>	CY
4	<p>Aberdeenshire Council update</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Access officers</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiona Chapman started as Access Officer (South) in April 2023, having had previous experience in Environmental Health and as a Seasonal Access Ranger. Her role includes the access issue caseload for her area. Welcoming her to ALOAF, CY encouraged her to use ALOAF for feedback – either at meetings or via the KHub. <i>Environment Project Officers and other staff</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Outdoor Access Team is now up to full strength with 5 staff: Peter Coldwell (Coast Project Officer); Susanne Stewart (Environmental Project Officer North); Murray Swapp (Environmental Project Officer South); and the two Access Officers for North and South respectively – Bridget Freeman and Fiona Chapman. Also, 2.6 vacancies for Seasonal Access Rangers are now being advertised, with hopefully a mid-June start date. <i>Levelling up fund</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AK reported that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund has been launched, with £8.3 million allocated to Aberdeenshire. Businesses and communities are invited to submit expressions of interest (apply for the relevant form; to be returned by 9am on 22nd May 2023). Themes include pride in place; empowering places; improving life chances; enhancing skills. An example of a project might be "Encouraging Diversity in Access". Contact persons in Aberdeenshire Council are the Area Officers. AK offered to share information via KHub. CY emphasised the value of outdoor access in contributing to a sense of place and of belonging to a community. Enhancing or raising awareness of the Core Paths Network might be relevant. It was noted that where a project requires planning permission, the proposer does not have to own the land concerned. GB knows of a couple of projects at Strichen. He advises that the deadline for the current round of applications is 19th June 2023. On LEADER funding, GB reported that it now offers revenue funding only, unlike levelling-up funding which does include capital. MA and CY cautioned that ALOAF itself cannot apply for funding (e.g. for core paths) as it is not constituted to do so, and has no bank account. However, the Forum could encourage other organisations to apply. 	AK

5 Operating principles and membership

CY introduced a discussion on the appropriateness of enabling “corresponding” and “affiliate” membership of ALOAF, as practised by some other LAFs. He noted that (apart from FLS) the “public agency” sector was not engaging with the Forum, but could perhaps be corresponding members. Land manager attendance is faltering. Although widening the options for membership might help, the Forum is constrained by being limited to 20 members and needing to achieve a balance of representation among the 4 sectors. In discussion:

- JK advised that in NAF, a corresponding member must contribute through the medium of an attending member.
- BF was concerned that cycling interests are not represented on ALOAF. CY advised that they fall within the Access User group.
- GB asked if the Council has a link with the walking group sector in Aberdeenshire. BF confirmed it has no formal link.
- CY suggested options which might include
 - All Forum members could ask their relevant contacts if, and in what way, they would like to be involved with ALOAF.
 - Henry Webb (HW) may have a list of contacts.
 - Could a member (e.g. GS) act as a conduit for information to and from community groups (as distinct from groups becoming affiliate members)?
- AM considered that it would be more important for local paths groups to be involved. JK noted that 8 paths groups on Deeside have already formed a forum, opening the possibility of affiliation with ALOAF.
- CY suggested the creation of a mailing list for circulating the approved ALOAF Minutes. BF felt this would be a good way to share resources. CY asked if he should coordinate this measure or should each of the 4 sectors take on the responsibility?
- CY commended MA for his commitment to representing the Land Management sector, and asked for his thoughts on how to encourage a heightened level of attendance by others in this sector. Would an affiliation option help? MA agreed that consistent attendance by land managers was struggling. It was important that the sector is represented by dedicated people. CY saw a need to stimulate more active participation by this sector in a manner which would not be perceived as a waste of land managers’ time.
- GP felt that “widening the net” would help spread the message of responsible access and remind people that the Forum is there to tackle any issues arising.
- JK noted that land managers have access-related responsibilities, and their involvement with the Forum should continue. In response to a query from BF, it was noted that land manager groups in the north-east include the N E Factors’ Group (usually estate managers), Scottish Land & Estates (owners, agents, farmers), NFUS (farmers), CONFOR (forest owners). Sub-groups exist (e.g. The Moorland Group). BF asked if the above should be included on an ALOAF contacts list. Regarding NFUS, GB advised that

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	<p>their members are kept informed via their Environment and Land Use Committee, on which he serves, and which includes access responsibilities in its remit; and the Legal and Technical Committee, on which ALOAF member Gordon McKilligan serves, which deals with related legal matters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GB noted that despite the limitations of the IPA scheme, land managers have contributed to path creation despite lengthy waits before receiving the anticipated funding. CY noted that in some cases the fixed rates of funding have exceeded the actual outlay. <p>Action point for all is to identify groups who might want to link with ALOAF.</p>	ALL
5	<p>Consultations and initiatives</p> <p><i>SSE Beaulay – Peterhead 400kv project</i> With regard to Geordie Burnett Stuart’s communication, CY asked if members had any information on the project (consultation closes on 9th June 2023), and whether ALOAF should become involved. In discussion, it was concluded that the power line would not physically obstruct access, and therefore the Forum should not engage with the consultation.</p> <p><i>Grampian Forest Rally – Section 11</i> BF had received comments from RR. Present at the meeting, RR felt that publicity for such closures could be improved. Also, rallies resulted in damage to track surfaces – especially loose stones which caused issues for cyclists and horses. NT reported that while FLS receives income from motorsport organisers, this does not always fully cover the remediation costs (although there is a beneficial accounting overlap with the road repair budget). Arrangements are governed by a national agreement requiring event organisers to take responsibility for submitting the information for Section 11 notices, for installing appropriate signage (results vary), and for marshalling the event. Closures are publicised on Council and FLS websites.</p> <p><i>Police Scotland – rural crime awareness</i> Responding to an upsurge in rural crime in Aberdeenshire, SPARC (Scottish Partnership Against Rural Crime) is working with BF and NFUS. Police will be contacting farmers to raise awareness. [Post-meeting note by Min Sec: more information at: https://neighbourhoodwatchscotland.co.uk/ruralwatchscotland/the-scottish-partnership-against-rural-crime-sparc/]</p>	
6	<p>Planning for activities, events, training, information</p> <p><i>Turriff Show and Aboyne Highland Games</i></p> <p>CY commented that ALOAF’s presentation will be the same at both events but reaching slightly different audiences. Need to discuss staffing and logistics. Volunteers are needed for the stand, on a half or full-day basis; also for setting up and taking down. Calling for volunteers, AK (coordinator) will email members by the end of May asking them to confirm their availability. Two members of Aboyne Paths and Tracks will be at the shared stand at Aboyne – forthcoming meeting of Deeside Paths Group on 7th June will discuss more details, e.g. ticket availability (contact is Ann Raeburn, Lumphanan Paths Group). From ALOAF, GS volunteered for Aboyne. RR volunteered for Turriff. Materials will be stored initially at the Bennachie Centre, thence to Aboyne, thence to Mintlaw and Turriff – CY may provide transport, otherwise a trailer will be needed. Turriff set-up will be on the Saturday (day before the Show). Gazebo may stay on Deeside for a while</p>	<p>AK</p> <p>GS RR CY</p>

	<p>after Aboyne. AK and BF are handling ticket availability for volunteers, but if any volunteer has to buy their own ticket on the day this will be reimbursed (prompt claim recommended). BF is pursuing a preferred spot for the stand at Turriff. Prices there have increased. BF offered to assist costs for Aboyne – ultimately the meeting agreed that ALOAF would cover all parties' fees for Aboyne. JK to advise on the amount involved. Materials snippets as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CY: Some boards need to be reprinted. • BF will locate Baa-ba-ra the sheep. • There is a ?cardboard horse for sale online – AK to investigate. It would be appropriate for highlighting the recent dog attacks on horses. • BF advised that the sheep puppet is still available as a prize. 	<p>JK ? BF AK</p>
<p>7</p>	<p>Core Paths Plan and the core paths network</p> <p>The subgroup has met. At the present meeting, CY shared a map of Aberdeenshire's community council (CC) boundaries, overlaid with the existing core paths network. This clearly demonstrates the variation in core paths provision among the different CC areas, and the lack of linkage between core paths. The map could be useful in communicating what is and isn't out there. CY is hoping to get the map online, along with maps for each of the 63 CC areas in Aberdeenshire. A three-stage approach is anticipated, as explained by GS:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 – appraising existing provision. 2 – auditing the paths – hopefully to be carried out by local groups. Audit tools are available. 3 – with CCs as intermediary, local groups would adopt paths for maintenance purposes. <p>Regarding the potential role of the Forum, CY explained that although Aberdeenshire Council has the power to conduct a review of the Core Paths Plan, it may not have the resources to do so. ALOAF could act as an intermediary by collating and forwarding CCs' information to the Council for public consultation as appropriate. This in turn could engage the Land Management sector, but it would be desirable if ALOAF representatives could also communicate directly with the sector. CY also mentioned that some CCs are not currently active in access matters. He regarded a CC-area-based approach as being more effective than the existing settlement-based focus on core paths. A proposal to Aberdeenshire Council would be needed. In discussion, GS noted the core paths study in the Formartine Area, conducted by the WSP consultancy. BF advised that the results have been seen by Malcolm White (MW), and he would like to extend the study to Aberdeenshire's other five Areas. It would be the Environment Project Officers' role to follow up on any agreed actions resulting. Action point for ALOAF: CY to ask MW for an update. In ALOAF's possible involvement with core paths, CY saw an opportunity to reflect on the purpose of core paths, to ask if the existing paths are the right ones, and to encourage those currently not engaged with the system to become involved. BF advised that WSP was proposing new linkages, but a limitation is the 2016 commitment by Aberdeenshire Council not to create any new paths, but simply to maintain those which are already the Council's responsibility. However, this does not</p>	<p>CY</p>

	<p>prevent paths being created by local paths groups and/or through the Improving Public Access (IPA) funding. GB affirmed that IPA applications score extra points for linking up core paths. CY observed that a map of IPA applications would be of interest; however, GDPR may prevent such data being made available; and BF later advised that NatureScot (NS) has not created such a map. CY has had no response from NS to his request to see the data, but was sympathetic to a suggestion that a Freedom of Information request might be a next step. He explained that IPA comprises Scottish Government funding available to land managers and those community groups registered as businesses. Qualifying projects include new or improved access routes and associated facilities, with payment on a fixed rates basis, governed by a one-off 5-year management agreement. The rates have not increased since 2013, although some projects have achieved a surplus. No new funding is available for 2023. Other access-related government funding is directed at “active travel”, which is generally less relevant to rural Aberdeenshire, although BF noted that there is one such project in south Aberdeenshire. CY commented that the active travel funding pot is large, and Aberdeenshire is hoping to find ways to meet the necessary criteria. GP added that settlements within applicable distance of a landfill site can benefit from the Scottish Landfill Fund. JK noted that Paths For All is a source of additional funding, with two projects in the Aboyne area benefitting from this. He added that pathwork costs have doubled recently; also, fund-seeking takes time. CY asked whether there is Scottish Enterprise funding – GP to investigate.</p>	GP
8	<p>Working with neighbouring Access Forums Agreed that the 4th September meeting would be a site visit, based on NT’s suggestion of visits to FLS forests at the Bin and the Balloch. Action: ?</p>	?
9	<p>AOCB <i>Deeside Way missing link</i> At Rivendell, east of Aboyne, the field is now in separate ownership from the house. However, the Council’s first priority is the clearance of windblow across the route on other land further east. <i>Mark Andrew retirement</i> Recognising Mark’s long and active service on the Forum, all please sign card for CY to forward. He will be missed. A small gift is also being arranged – the cost having been generously donated by the maker.</p>	ALL
10	<p>Casework: Q&A closed session</p>	
	<p>Dates of next meetings (2023) – 4th September (site visit), 6th November.</p>	