

**Aberdeenshire Local Outdoor Access Forum**  
**Minutes of Meeting 53**  
**29<sup>th</sup> September 2014 -- Haddo Estate Office**

**Present:** Hamish Booth (Acting Chair), David Culshaw, John Fyall, Judy Middleton, Adam Wallace, Chris York.

**Council officers present:** Marsaili Aspinall (*here noted as MSA*), Matthew Watt.

**Observers present:** Mark Andrew (RAFTS), Mairi Dillon (AWPR Community Liaison Officer), Diana Spencer (Haddo Country Park Visitor Services Officer).

	<b>Apologies, introductions, deputising</b>	<b>Action</b>
	The Chair welcomed all and thanked Haddo Country Park and Haddo Estate for their hospitality in hosting the Forum's visit. <b>Introductions</b> "round the table". <b>Apologies</b> Alison Espie, David Fyffe, Gordon McKilligan, Linda Mathieson. JF gave retrospective apologies for the June meeting, having not been on the notification list at that time. The meeting expressed appreciation and best wishes to Piotr Gudan (formerly Access Officer, South), whose contract with the Council expired this month. Marsaili Aspinall resumes her former role in this post from 1 <sup>st</sup> October.	<b>Council</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Minutes of Meeting 52</b> Minutes approved by CY, seconded AW. <b>Matters arising</b> CY: Loch of Skene dog issue? – on present agenda.	
<b>2</b>	<b>ALOAF administration</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Update Operating Principles</b> MW noted 3 issues for review: (1) quorum level; (2) advice to 3<sup>rd</sup> parties by individual Forum members; (3) future status on ALOAF of RAFTS (currently "observer"). Discussion to be continued at next meeting.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Updated leaflet/Newsletter</b> The Chair advised that new leaflets were now available, together with a revised Newsletter current through 2015 (ample stocks available), with a new edition proposed for 2016. MW encouraged future contributions to be submitted in good time rather than at the last minute. Current version to be put on website (in hand). CY noted the importance of the public being able to see what ALOAF, as an accountable body, has discussed. The Chair noted that an exception applied where the ongoing work of a sub-group may remain confidential.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Banners and gilets</b> Some gilets still available; to be distributed at next meeting. Banners used at Turriff Show can be used elsewhere in future. Discussion took place about the relative merits of free-standing teardrop “flag” banners, and roller banners, with DS advising that the latter were more stable in windy weather. HB commented that the ALOAF tent needed a prominent logo to identify it for the public.</li> </ul>	<b>Council</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>FCS representation</b> Ian Cowe’s role has changed. It is not known who will be the future FCS representative on ALOAF. Update at next meeting. Agreed that Ian deserved the Forum’s thanks for his very positive contribution to ALOAF.</li> </ul>	<b>Council</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>NFUS Reserve vacancy</b> No update available.</li> </ul>	<b>Council</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Meeting dates for 2015</b> Agreed to be Mondays in the same place in the calendar as for 2014. Min. Sec. to identify these dates for confirmation at next meeting. <i>[Post-meeting note by Min. Sec.: 2 February, 11 May (in 2014 this was rescheduled to 28 April, but I think this was a 1-off change), 22 June, 5 October, 23 November].</i></li> </ul>	<b>Min Sec (actioned)</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>ALOAF activities</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Joint LAF meeting with Moray</b> Proposing evening in May 2015, to include walk/site visits in Deveron area as on Moray/Aberdeenshire border, with early start to reduce late finish. MW asked re level of interest. Some concern re journey length, but noted that the same applies to Moray LAF members. Proposal to be firmed up at next meeting.</li> </ul>	<b>Council</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Turriff Show – feedback</b> The Chair remarked that ALOAF’s role at the Show had further improved on 2013. CY and DC observed that visitors had wanted walks information (as per existing cycle leaflets), but CY felt this is not ALOAF’s role. MSA noted that the Core Paths Maps available in 2013 had been popular, and advised that LM had now managed to fit this information onto 3 sheets. MW suggested that even a folder would be useful. CY said that it would be good to have copies of such walks information as does exist. This led on to discussion of gifts etc. which would draw in the public and thereby help ALOAF to deliver its message. MD cited a Borders event where rugby balls with a website address had</li> </ul>	

	<p>worked well as freebies. For ALOAF, the website address would enable people to get route information once the Core Paths Plan is on-line. JF felt that although the stand was well-grouped with FCS, the internal layout could have been improved. MSA thought that this may have been remedied somewhat on Day 2. JF noted 3 enquiries about access provision or issues. Although the FCS stand brought people to ALOAF as well, MW asked for ideas on how the Forum's stand could attract more people in its own right. 2 successful items were the trail and dog bags. MSA advised that a new quiz (or new venue) will be needed for 2015, the current quiz having been used 2 years in a row. The quiz did provide a good chance to talk with parents. CY cautioned that the time involved in preparation was a constraint for ALOAF members, noting that Council staff made a key contribution. For the future, MW asked members to think about a more southerly venue. Noting that they stock walks leaflets, HB was keen to involve the Tourist Information Centres, e.g. Banchory, in future such events to help them gain more exposure and to publicise the Forum's work. Discussion followed on various annual events in south Aberdeenshire, which tended to be smaller than the Turriff Show. MSA undertook to inform ALOAF of any further RNCI event (as per Dunecht), but CY observed that this mostly attracted a countryside-savvy clientele. DS suggested the Haddo Country Park egg hunt, attracting 5-6000 people at Easter weekend. The meeting considered this an appropriate audience. Venue discussion to be continued at next meeting. HB cautioned members not to over-commit to events, as ALOAF had other time-heavy roles, e.g. access complaints. Agreement that a balance should be struck, but events did provide the chance to get the message across and thereby nip some problems in the bud. MSA stated that if ALOAF dropped Turriff for a year, it would be important not to lose the ability to return. In conclusion, the Chair's view was that the Forum should continue at Turriff Show.</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Induction pack</b> In progress, more detail at next meeting.</li> </ul>	<b>Council</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Access checklist</b> Reprint underway, ideally for next meeting.</li> </ul>	<b>Council</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Themes for 2015</b> Suggestions sought for discussion at next meeting. CY recommended access workshop run by British Horse Society – opportunity to bring together ALOAF and local</li> </ul>	<b>ALL Council</b>

	equestrian interests. The Chair asked for this to be pursued. JF raised possibility of site visit to his land for summer 2015.	
<b>4</b>	<b>Upholding access rights cases – update</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Loch of Skene – dog issues</b> MW reported a reduction in dog fouling and improvement in behaviour, following Dog Warden involvement including signage and paint-marking of dog poo. Green Dog Walker scheme in prospect. Perhaps this course of action could be repeated elsewhere. JM questioned whether there was any action re parking there by the public, as she understood it to be limited to Sailing Club and residents. Compared to 5 years ago, DC observed from Deeside Way that most people now pick up after their dogs; likewise observed by JM at Newtonhill after introduction of bag dispensers. However, MSA reported situation not improved at Alford’s Haughton and Murray Parks. DC noted improvement re horse droppings in city, after writing to City Council. MW to update on Loch of Skene at next meeting.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Haddo Riding Club</b> Having been asked by Council officers for a view on the matter, the meeting considered the Council’s current legal advice, together with the Rules governing riders in the Country Park. Those wishing to ride in the Country Park have been required to pay a Haddo Riding Club administration fee since before the Land Reform (Scotland) Act came into effect. Extensive discussion centred on whether it was justifiable for this to be deemed an entry fee and thus be acceptable for continuation in terms of Section 6(1)(f) of the legislation. The rationale for the current system at Haddo was to minimise conflict between equestrians and other Park users, which was causing safety and comfort concerns at pinch points on the Park’s paths network, and in the car park at busy times with horseboxes occupying several spaces thereby preventing parking by non-riding families. In the event of any anticipated issues (e.g. events) or incidents, the system provided a means of contacting all riders, which would not be possible in an open access situation. Against this was the view that the fee and membership requirement was not in the spirit of the access legislation, although new Management Rules of the post-LRSA type could allay this concern. The Council suggests that those concerned seek independent legal advice, yet the Council itself is the landowner. Commenting on the existence of arguments</li> </ul>	

	for and against, MW explained that the Council wanted to come up with a coherent view, hence the desire for a view from the Forum – necessarily at the next meeting, the current one not being quorate. It was suggested that it would be helpful to ask the British Horse Society for a view on the Council's current legal advice.	<b>Council</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>New proposal to include specific case/themes at all future ALOAF meetings</b> MW proposed highlighting emerging access issues, which would enable members to remain informed and engaged. This met with no objection.</li> </ul>	<b>Council</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Summary of all access cases in February meeting</b> MW advised that a summary of the Council's current access cases would be brought to the February 2015 meeting.</li> </ul>	<b>Council</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>ALOAF briefing</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Proposed themed presentations:</b>  <i>November 2014 – Joanna Dick: River Dee Trust.</i>  <i>February 2015 – SNH &amp; Dog Warden: responsible dog access OR Police Wildlife Crime Officer</i> JF asked that the issue of irresponsible commercial dog-walkers be included in discussion. DS noted similar problems at Haddo Country Park, sometimes involving groups of dogs being walked on a non-commercial basis as well. As a separate event (outwith ALOAF) MSA urged a repeat of a recent SNH workshop which had been held in Aberdeen for dog wardens and commercial dog-walkers. CY noted that there is now a code of practice for this activity. MSA suggested that this might be worth targeting at the Forum's next Turriff Show visit.</li> </ul>	
<b>7</b>	<b>Aberdeenshire Council Update</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Core Paths Plan</b> Some technical issues, but should be on website within a few days.</li> </ul>	<b>Council</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Access consultations, issues, etc.</b> No new business.	

9	<b>Events, training, information</b>	
	<p><b>(1) National Access Forum/Local Access Forum Joint Meeting – 4/11/2014 Gleneagles</b> MW called for ALOAF delegates – none immediately forthcoming. CY had attended a previous one in the west of Scotland, but as it was largely an information exchange he wasn't sure how useful it had been. MW to forward Agenda when available.</p>	<p><b>ALL</b></p> <p><b>MW</b></p>
	<p><b>(2) Deer Management Group</b> No recent meeting to report.</p>	
	<p><b>(3) Paddlers Meeting feedback</b> Anticipated from Joanna Dick at next meeting.</p>	
10	<b>A.O.B.</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Builg Mounth</b> Despite Scotways signposts, JM recently found it to be heavily overgrown in parts, perhaps due to temporary closure for windfarm construction. With permission from Chair, the Minutes Secretary advised that Scotways signposting did not necessarily imply path maintenance; also, he was not aware of the route having being put on the Council's list for path maintenance. <i>[Post-meeting note: Historically, Council agreements with FCS over Eastern Mounth routes included checking of waymarking, but not vegetation control].</i> MSA will note JM's report.</li> </ul>	<p><b>MSA</b></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Nortrail (Old Portlethen – Newtonhill section)</b> JM found this to be overgrown. MSA advised that a consultant is looking at this route, including issues of coastal path erosion.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Grants</b> With regard to maintenance issues, JF mentioned the renewed prospect of Landfill Tax grants; and communities should be encouraged to seek windfarm community funding for maintenance.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Deeside Way</b> DC still awaiting news on the "missing link". MSA advised that although there is a Council commitment to progress the matter, it is a complex issue legally. JM asked about an extension of the Way from Ballater to Braemar. CY advised that this had been looked into, but any further work would have to await completion of the Aberdeen-Ballater route.</li> </ul>	
11	<p><b>Date of next meeting:</b> 24<sup>th</sup> November 2014. The Chair closed the meeting, thanking the Forum's hosts at Haddo.</p>	

