

ABERDEENSHIRE LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF MEETING 31, Monday 18th January 2010 Barn & Bushel, Thainstone Centre, Inverurie

Present: Bill Ashcroft, Molly Atkinson, Hamish Booth, Neil Buchanan, Dan Cadle, David Culshaw, Cllr Isobel Davidson, Bill Dow, Drew Elphinstone, Gordon McKilligan (Chair), Robin Maitland, Brian Martin, Alison Mitchell (from Item 5(c); deputising for Judy Middleton).

Advisers present: Fiona McNally (Paths For All Partnership), Linda Mathieson (Aberdeenshire Council), Colin Miller (Aberdeenshire Council).

1. **Apologies:** Alison Espie, David Finlay, Judy Middleton, Paul Timms.
2. **Minutes of Meeting 30:** Approved, with amendment requested by Ken Thomson via CM re his comments on the AWPR Inquiry.
3. **Matters arising:** None.
4. **Presentation by Robert Belfield, Chairman, Royal Northern Countryside Initiative (RNCI):** Aim of RNCI is to develop a greater understanding of farming and the working countryside by children and their teachers in NE Scotland. This is addressed by visits to schools, a mobile RNCI classroom, teacher workshops, and school visits to farms. This programme is assisted by teaching resource boxes, education packs and DVDs. RNCI also has a presence at shows and other countryside events, including an Estate Day at Haddo Estate. Points raised in discussion included:
 - Recognition that although RNCI materials do address Health and Safety and understanding of the farming countryside, they have so far not focussed directly on access-related safety and responsibility issues (e.g. cattle; dogs).
 - Opportunities for side-by-side information displays at events.
 - Some farmers involved with RNCI may incidentally have general access issues on their farms.
 - Leaflets produced by ALOAF, Council, SNH.
 - Benefits of educating children about the countryside. Getting message to children is possibly an issue for ALOAF. ALOAF to keep strong link with RNCI. Opportunities for exchange of learning materials. Council to supply RNCI with copy of SNH Activity Packs – **Action: CM**. It was suggested that a link should be developed with the Council's Ranger Service. Paths For All to check what other LAFs are doing re education – **Action: Fiona McNally**. RNCI has made all Aberdeenshire schools aware of its work (e.g. attended recent Learning Festival).
 - RNCI gets good press coverage through press releases and link with "P&J".

5 – ALOAF update:

(1) Request from Scottish Canoeing Association (SCA): it was suggested *in absentia* that Judy Middleton might be the appropriate LAF member to be the contact person between ALOAF and SCA – **Action: Linda Mathieson to ask JM**.

(2) Other membership business: Dan Cadle reported that Matt Young has been appointed as his ALOAF Reserve.

(3) Work Programme: A draft revised Programme was distributed. Core Paths Plan to continue as a standing item until 2010. Cllr Davidson asked if ALOAF receives statistics on the number of access queries and cases handled by the Council. RM commented that ALOAF had dealt with very few cases, but thought that increased awareness of the LRSA by land managers may account for this. Council to do update for ALOAF on access issue cases – **Action: LM.** Some of these may be worth seeking a view from ALOAF. It was noted that that there will be CPP objection cases for ALOAF consideration as well. As there was general agreement with the overall contents, the Forum then moved on to discuss items under the “January” heading, viz:

- (a) *Operating Principles:* Any comments to next meeting – **Action: ALL.**
- (b) *Council’s Paths Projects preview for 2010/11:* Focus for next 2 years will be on Deeside Way, Formartine and Buchan Way, and Core Paths delivery.
- (c) *Annual Event:* Agreed that the outdoor emphasis in the 2009 Annual Gathering was beneficial. DC suggested that the introduction of contentious issues would have stimulated more discussion. BM felt that the venue could be rotated to assist those in north (or south) Aberdeenshire. Topic suggestions included: development and access; urban access issues, e.g. paths behind residential properties; Formartine and Buchan Way; paths maintenance; dogs and livestock; brief reports on ALOAF and CPP. Agreed that Ellon would be a suitable venue, with the date to be a Saturday afternoon, either 29/5/10 or 5/6/10. **Actions: ALL to advise CM on their availability for these dates; CM to check venue choices.**
- (d) *Web pages:* Copies of the existing pages were distributed. **Action: ALL to review and comment by next Meeting.**

A further suggestion was to focus on a settlement with poor access provision (see Item 9 below).

(4) NAF/LAF liaison: CM referred the meeting to the paper supplied.

(5) Moray LAF recruitment: CM advised that Moray was seeking 3 new Members, and was hoping that one would have a cycling background.

6 – Aberdeenshire Council Update:

(1) Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan: CM reported, with assistance from Cllr Davidson, that there are to be two rounds of Special Area Committee meetings between January and April 2010. Policies will then be finalised by the Infrastructure Services Committee, before approval by the full Council possibly in June 2010.

(2) Open Space Strategy: CM reported that there was to be a public consultation in February-March 2010, in which ALOAF would be included. Currently the Strategy is being considered by the Council’s Area Committees. After discussion, it was agreed to base the response on a Forum view informed by ALOAF Members’ comments at the next ALOAF Meeting (15/3/10) – **Actions: CM to circulate consultation when available. ALL to review and submit any comments at or before the next meeting.**

(3) Access Strategy Review: LM distributed examples of flow diagrams for Access Strategy development. BM recommended that the Strategy states what its intentions are. LM suggested that the focus should be on identifying gaps in provision.

7 – Core Paths Plan: CPP Subgroup may be asked to review specific cases within next two months. Meanwhile, Linda to circulate the Council’s proposed process for handling objections. Scottish Borders Public Local Inquiry Report has been published. – **Actions: LM to circulate process document; ALL to review and submit any comments at or before the next meeting.**

8 – ALOAF Annual Gathering: See Item 5(3)(c).

9 – Training & site visit dates: Agreed that a visit to a settlement with poor access provision could be the focus for a separate site visit for ALOAF Members, with Alford as the “poorly provided” settlement, to be compared with Inch as the “well provided” comparison.

10 – Access consultations, Issues etc:

(1) AWPR: In discussion, some uncertainty as to the timescale for construction in the current financial climate. Concern re whether access will be obstructed during construction works – **Action: CM to check whether any access undertakings given or conditioned.**

(2) Banffshire Way: Gordon McKilligan will be attending a meeting to be called by Cllr Cox on this locally-originated project, which seeks to use former railway lines for path purposes in the Banffshire area. Some doubts as to practicality as the lines have been fragmented in places. LM indicated that the Council itself must give priority to consolidation of the Deeside Way and Formartine and Buchan Way.

(3) Other: -- Haddo Country Park: Bill Dow asked for an update, as funding has been awarded – **Action: CM to check with Ken Thomson and with Council sources.**

(4) Active Travel consultation: This item came to ALOAF’s attention after the 2/11/09 Meeting, and therefore has not previously appeared on the Agenda. The subgroup’s response, after consultation with other ALOAF Reps, was sent to the Scottish Government and was duly acknowledged. The Chair thanked all concerned, and particularly the subgroup appointed to deal with this, namely Hamish Booth, David Culshaw and Judy Middleton.

11 -- Events, Training, Information:

(1) Equestrian leaflet (national): CM reported that SRPBA was hoping to have this ready by the end of February, but were not wholly confident that they could meet this timescale.

(2) LAF User Reps Meeting 7/11/09: AM reported that numbers attending this national-level event had been declining. Topics covered included: LAFs and the post-CPP scenario; improving communications between local authorities and user groups; shared-use paths.

(3) Scottish Equestrian Access Conference, Oatridge College, 14/11/09: MA reported on coverage which included: implications of court decisions; equestrians and land managers working together; access to funding for rider groups; bridleway mapping; South of Scotland Countryside Trails success story; Oatridge demonstration trails site visit.

(4) SCAN meeting 11/09: -- SCAN’s note to be circulated when available – **Action: CM.**

(5) NAF papers: CM distributed relevant papers.

(6) Access and cattle: CM reported that a joint SRPBA/NFUS information sheet had been produced, which gave useful advice to land managers on addressing potential liability issues.

12 – AOB:

Bennachie signs: AM reported that there had been some adverse reaction to the new signposts, due to their large size and relative lack of information, and asked how this concern could be followed up. DC indicated that the signs were part of the Bennachie project on FCS land, and that comments should go to the Forest District. He would contact AM direct with further details. LM had been on the steering group but had not visualised the signs being on this scale. She noted, however, that there had been major problems with people getting lost because they had descended the “wrong” route. Forum discussion included sensitive sign siting, and the need for some permanent signage at the summit.

13 – Items for next meeting’s Agenda:

Open Space Strategy
Council path projects 2010/11 (update)
ALOAF communications strategy
Annual Event
Annual Report
Access issues summary update
Update on Haddo Country Park
Access Strategy Review timetable
Dates for Annual Event and for site visit to Alford/Insch.

14 – Dates of next meetings: 15/3/10, 14/6/10, 4/10/10, 29/11/10.

The meeting closed at 8.35pm.