

ABERDEENSHIRE LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM

NOTE OF SECOND MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 11th APRIL 2005 AT THAINSTONE HOUSE HOTEL, INVERURIE

Present:

Councillor Jim Anderson
Molly Atkinson (User representative)
John Brownlee (Community representative)
Peter Dawes (User representative)
Bill Dow (Disabled Users representative)
David Fyffe (Land manager representative)
Patricia Goodwin (Land manager reserve)
Alan Harper (Agency [Forestry Commission Scotland] representative)
Neil McLean (User reserve)
Brian Martin (Community representative)
Daniela Mayes (Community representative)
Alison Mitchell (User reserve)
John Risby (Agency [Forestry Commission Scotland] Reserve)
Iain Taylor (Community representative)
Ken Thomson (User representative)
Owen Vaughan (User representative)

Council officers also present:-

Interim Chair: Christine Gore, Director of Planning & Environmental Services
Advisory role: Keith Jones, Head of Law & Administration (North)
Linda Mathieson, Environment Planner (Strategic)
Colin Miller, Access Officer
Alastair Fullwood, Assistant Access Officer
Helen Young, Access Ranger

1. Apologies and Introductions

Apologies were noted from Councillor Jenny Watson and from Jonathan Dymock, Cameron Ewen, David Finlay, Tom Johnston, Ron Macdonald and Robin Maitland. Thereafter Christine Gore introduced herself and also welcomed those who were attending the Forum for the first time. It was noted that certain late papers had been delayed in the post to some members. It was accepted that an earlier deadline should be set for posting the papers.

2. Minutes of Meeting of 21st February 2005; and Matters Arising

It was agreed that these minutes were in order, subject to the following clarifications:

Item 3 (b) (j) refers to election of Representatives and Reserves, not to election of Chair.

Item 3 (b) (k) – it was agreed that the chair may serve two consecutive 2-year terms.

Item 5 – the reference in the final paragraph to a protocol for communications refers to **external** communications.

Under Matters Arising, it was accepted that Reserves would not have voting rights at the election of the Chair (unless deputising for a Representative) as the number of Reserves is not equally distributed across the four interest sectors. The same situation would apply for other Forum business.

3. Call for Any Additional Agenda Items

None were notified. It was agreed that this item should be dropped from future agendas as being poor practice. Members wishing items to be added to the agenda should notify the Chair and the Countryside Access Officer in advance of the meeting.

4. Logistics

It was noted that the Barn and Bushel at Thainstone Mart, although not available for this meeting, should be available for meetings 3 and 4. It was agreed to defer consideration as to whether public meetings should be held in licensed premises. It was pointed out that the important issue was whether premises were fully accessible and whether hearing loops could be made available.

5. Procedures

There was circulated draft Operating Principles under Section 25 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, prepared by Keith Jones in consultation with the Countryside Access Officer, as a discussion document: also a paper prepared by Colin Miller relating to procedures for selection of the Chair and Vice-Chair, their respective roles and possible timings of elections. Also circulated for discussion were draft Nomination Papers. There was considerable discussion, particularly with regard to the draft Operating Principles. Revised draft Operating Principles reflecting discussions at the meeting, and including draft dispute resolution procedures, are to be submitted to the next Forum meeting (23 May 2005). The draft paper on the establishment of the Chair and Vice-Chair role including process and timing was discussed, and alterations will be reflected within the revised draft Operating Principles paper. It was

agreed that the Chair and Vice-Chair be appointed at the meeting scheduled to take place on 27th June 2005. It was also agreed that Nomination Papers should be passed to Colin Miller by no later than 24 hours after the next meeting scheduled for 23rd May 2005. There followed further discussion on the appointment of additional representatives to fill gaps in the current membership interests of the Forum, particularly the fourth Agency place. There was further discussion on allocating this to the National Trust for Scotland or tourism interests generally. It was noted that the structure of tourism in Scotland was currently undergoing change and it was agreed to defer discussion on potential appointees until a future meeting.

It was also noted that the title of the group be amended from Aberdeenshire Local Access Forum to Aberdeenshire Local Outdoor Access Forum, this to ensure clear differentiation from issues relating to disabled access.

6. Support System, Secretariat, Expenses and Insurance

It was noted that, for the time being, a representative of the Council's Law and Administration Service would liaise with the Planning Service over agenda matters and undertake minuting of meetings. With regard to expenses, Colin Miller confirmed that forms for completion would be handed out to those attendees who were not covered by their own employer. Relating to insurance, it was pointed out that the current situation was complicated and not fully provided for in terms of the Council's Insurance Policies. Depending on their own insurance position members may be covered by existing Personal Accident or other Household Policies. It was agreed that insurance arrangements for other Local Access Forums would be researched. In response to a query from one of the reserve members with regard to pre-meeting communications, it was agreed that the particular groupings should keep their reserve members fully informed as to issues, and notify them well in advance should their services as reserve be required.

7. Communications

There was some general discussions on the communication process and when it would be appropriate to issue Press releases. There was general agreement that the trigger for considering P.R. matters would be the appointment of a Chairman. It was, however, considered that the Council's web-site with reference to Local Access Forums would merit updating.

A contacts list was made available to members setting out appropriate contacts and duties for Environment Planners, Access staff, Ranger staff, etc.

8. Events, Training and Information

There was submitted by Colin Miller a paper on the LAF Networking Day held at Battleby, Perth on 2nd March 2005 which was attended by representatives

of 18 of the 26 Forums so far set up. In particular financial issues were seen as a major area for debate. Everyone attending this conference was on a learning curve. The Aberdeenshire events in the Spring Outdoor Access Festival during March were not, unfortunately, well attended but it was agreed that there was a lot of education still to be done. Reference was also made to the Scottish Executive's guidance towards responsible use and the Council's own Countryside Access Strategy, which was to be reviewed over the next few months to take into account the new legislation which has come into effect since it was originally prepared. The hard-copy version of the Executive's Guidance to Local Authorities was no longer available. The Paths For All Partnership had offered to attend an ALOAF meeting in an advisory role. This was noted but it was felt that this should be deferred until after the summer, when the Forum was fully operational. It was noted that the Ramblers' Association and various groups were arranging a seminar on 7th May 2005 aimed at recreational user representatives of local access forums. It was agreed that those wishing to attend should contact Colin Miller for details.

9. Aberdeenshire Council Access Work to Date

Linda Mathieson spoke as to her paper on the teams undertaking access and environment work within the Council which was also a "Who's Who" of staffing resources. She predicted that the service was likely to be swamped with access rights' issues. The circumstances in which it would be appropriate to involve the Forum were under review.

10. Access Funding in Scotland

There was circulated a paper with regard to access funding in Scotland indicating concern at current funding limitations. The Core Path Plan was seen as a duty of the local authority so monies would probably not be available from sources such as the National Lottery. However, funding was not ring fenced and the Council had to balance its priorities. Councillor Anderson expressed the hope that some form of funding could be budgeted for and the Acting Chair pointed out that the Council was subject to a 3-year funding cycle so that funding could be projected over a period of 3 years. It was agreed to work with the Executive to try to secure additional funding for implementation of the access duties arising from the Land Reform (Scotland) Act, including the duty to establish and maintain local access forums.

11. National Access Forum

With reference to the draft Minute of the National Access Forum, which had been previously circulated by mail, attention was drawn to para. 9 (funding for access from Scottish Executive and SNH; paras. 15-17 (representation of LAFs on NAF); and paras. 30-32 (Network Rail level crossings).

12. Work Priorities; Agenda Suggestions for Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting scheduled for Monday, 23rd May 2005 would require to finalise the Operating Principles. Future work priorities would also require to be discussed at that meeting to include preliminary member and officer suggestions. It was agreed that reserves would still be entitled to attend the meeting on 23rd May 2005 in a voting capacity.

13. Any Other Business

There was further suggestion on this point that members should be given a timetable of issues that they might wish to consider and prioritise for dealing with in the medium-term future, e.g. as a list of tasks with suggested timescales .