

ABERDEENSHIRE LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM

NOTE OF NINTH MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 20TH MARCH 2006 AT THE BARN AND BUSHEL, THAINSTONE CENTRE, INVERURIE

Present:

Ken Thomson
Councillor Jim Anderson
Molly Atkinson
John Brownlee
Peter Dawes
Bill Dow
David Fyffe
Alan Harper
David Finlay
Tom Johnston
Owen Vaughan
Kelley Miller

Council Officers also present:-

Keith G. Jones, Head of Law & Administration (North)
Linda Mathieson, Environment Planner (Strategic)
Colin Miller, Countryside Access Officer

1. Apologies and Introductions

Apologies were noted from Ian Dunlop, Brian Martin, Adam Streeter-Smith, Robin Maitland, Cameron Ewen, Pauline Jewett and Iain Taylor.

2. Minutes of Meeting 8

The Minutes of Meeting of 16th January 2006 were approved subject to deletion of the words "from item 7c onwards" in respect of Linda Mathieson's name in the sederent.

3. Matters arising

None to report.

4. Annual Gathering

There followed considerable discussion with regard to the Annual Gathering. The Chair circulated a Tally analysis of the Evaluation Forms which had been circulated at the meeting and a Minute of the Question and Answer session which forms the Appendix hereto. By and large the feedback was positive and it was agreed that a similar event should be held in the future. There was a view that the link between the nature conservancy and access issues needed to be promoted and explained more fully. Kelley Miller indicated that if members of the Forum wished training on nature conservation issues as affecting access she would speak to an appropriate colleague at SNH: What was being asked was not within her current remit with SNH. It was agreed that options on how the matter would be taken forward would be taken to the next meeting. In the meantime officers were asked to ascertain what the position was with regard to other bodies who may have interests in the matter.

Some of the questions raised at the meeting were then addressed. Nora Radcliffe MSP had suggested that there be coherent sign posting throughout Scotland. It was agreed that although this should be supported there are difficulties as individual groups wanted Signs to represent their own interests. SNH was looking at a

“common visual language”. It was agreed to support a common format, so far as is possible, but to accept that currently there were difficulties. In the meantime, the Chair would write to Mrs Radcliffe to advise that the matter had been considered.

Problems caused by horse-riders, dogs and mountain bikers on paths were discussed, and the need for users to exercise consideration for others, and responsibility for their actions was reiterated.

It had appeared difficult for attendees to distinguish between questions within the competence of the forum and those that involved a wider remit. Many of the questions were addressing issues for the Council. Linda Mathieson advised that in future questions would require to be organised in a more topic related manner to avoid questions on national issues. It was considered that at future meetings the forum must be prepared to answer questions more effectively, perhaps with a number of experts available on the panel. It was agreed that a letter be drafted to those who had attended the Gathering thanking them for their attendance and sending a note of what the forum is currently doing. A future meeting would try to take a more strategic approach and define the remit of the Gathering more clearly.

5. ALOAF Membership

The Chair raised the subject of a request from the Cyclists' Touring Club that the Forum consider co-opting the group as a member. The CTC had failed to have a representative elected when the Forum was originally set up. It was pointed out that the elections took place at a public open meeting and that representatives on the Forum were there to take a broad interest in access issues, not simply support the individual vested interest of a particular organisation. In the meantime, it was always open for someone to attend public meetings of the Forum and that such organisations could be asked to act in an advisory capacity if need be. In the future it may be appropriate to set up a subgroup for cycling interests for example. In the meantime it was important not to upset the balance and size of the Forum. It was agreed that the Chair would write to the CTC to find out what issues they had.

It was confirmed that, in terms of procedure, Daniella Mayes's membership should be formally concluded as she had not attended meetings for some considerable time. It was agreed to put out to appropriate community groups a request for nominations towards a successor.

It was also reported that Pauline Jewett has had to withdraw from membership of the Forum due to family circumstances. As she had been co-opted in order to contribute her individual expertise it was agreed to leave the question of a replacement in abeyance meantime.

6. Communications

There had been delays by the Council's IT section in producing a page for the Forum on the Council's website. It was agreed that this was best handled by the Chair and Alastair Fullwood in liaison with a member of the Council's IT staff. There was a view that the whole section covering outdoor access needed to be presented in a better way and that a list of Forum members should be available on the website.

Linda Mathieson reiterated the need for members to complete and return the skills register. Including reserves only 12 of the 26 forms had so far had been returned to her.

Peter Dawes reported that he had spoken to the AGM of the Ramblers. The event appeared to have been a success.

7. Core Paths Plan

There was circulated a list of the workshops proposed to take place during April, May and June 2006. It was anticipated that three members of staff would be available at each venue. Settlement maps would be available along with displays. It was also hoped that the Forestry Commission, SNH and the Council's Ranger Service would have displays available on the Access Code and there would also be a display representing ALOAF. Forum members were encouraged to attend, particularly at their local venue even if not for the whole of a session. Individuals and locals who have a relevant interest would be circulated and a CPP Survey form sent out to appropriate organisations.

8. Access Issue: Kinneskie Fishings, Banchory

There was submitted a Report prepared by David Fyffe as to the Dispute Panel's review of the complaint Banchory Community Council over access to the riverbank at Kinneskie, following the erection of fencing along the top of the bank by the landowner in the mid to late 1990's. It was agreed that the Chair prepare a letter to the Community Council intimating the Panel's finding that the arrangement for gaps in the fence (as agreed between the landowner and Aberdeenshire Council) was acceptable, subject to some specific remediation work near the pumping station.

The Chairman would write to the parties involved having agreed the terms of the letter with David Fyffe. Keith Jones undertook to check the letter from the legal point of view.

9. Access Issue, near Dyce

With regard to the dispute at Dyce nothing had happened as the party owning the ground over which access is disputed wanted to see the Minute of the Forum's January Meeting in order that it could assess the competence of the Forum to consider the dispute. It was agreed that a copy of the Minute could be sent out to the party.

10. Letter from Mr. R. Stephen, Cairnbulg

A copy of a letter from Mr. R. Stephen was circulated. It was agreed that this was not an issue for the Forum but for Aberdeenshire Council and it was remitted to the Council to respond.

11. Events, Training, Information

There was circulated for information SNH Update No. 28 covering issues such as land reform, free signage packs available and other matters of relevance to the Forum. It was noted that Adam Streeter-Smith from the Paths for all Partnership had now been appointed to the new Access Officer post at Cairngorms National Park.

There was also a paper circulated setting out revised LAF guidelines including a delivery chart setting out the duties of the various groups in outdoor access. Also circulated was a paper summarising the views emerging from recent consultation with Local Access Forums on liaising between National and Local bodies and seeking views on strengthening of communication between national and local levels.

Also mentioned was the SCAN conference to be held on Friday 12th May at Birnam Institute near Dunkeld focusing on developments where access and planning come closely together. It was agreed that the Chair and Molly Atkinson be authorised to attend and the Council would be asked to fund the shared transport costs. It was also reported that a meeting would be held on Monday 3rd April to look at new forestry strategy.

12. AOB

Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route: Peter Dawes requested an update on the current position. It was indicated that whilst the Northern section had been agreed, due to the uncertainty over the routing of the Southern section including the connecting road from Stonehaven, it was likely to be the end of April before the Executive proposals for the Southern sections firmed up and probably Christmas before the public consultation exercise was concluded. Linda Mathieson did indicate that there were to be a number of meetings between the engineers and officers to discuss matters of concern including access and effects on pathways. There had previously been expressed concern over access for cyclists. It was important that there was early dialogue maintained in order to have a chance of influencing views.

Relationship with the City Council's Local Access Forum was raised. It was noted that there was no formal exchange of members but that Kelley Miller sat on both bodies whilst Alison Mitchell was a member of the City Forum and a reserve for Aberdeenshire.

13. Agenda Suggestions For Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting should include Agenda Items on the up-dated work programme for 2006/7, feedback on the revised LAF guidelines referred to above, relationship between access and nature conservation and where appropriate a report back on other items discussed at the meeting. David Fyffe recommended that the Forum should look at producing its own leaflet stating aims and objectives. The leaflet could be based on the standard folded A4 format. The Chair undertook to design a first draft for discussion. There was also felt the need to produce a corporate style of badge with logo for events.

14. Date of Next Meeting

The dates of the next meetings were confirmed as 22nd May, 24th July and 18th September 2006. It was agreed that the July meeting could be a practical session.