

ABERDEENSHIRE LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM

NOTE OF MEETING 5 HELD ON MONDAY, 22ND AUGUST 2005 AT THE BARN AND BUSHEL, THAINSTONE CENTRE, INVERURIE

Present:

Cllr Jim Anderson
Molly Atkinson
John Brownlee
Peter Dawes
Bill Dow
Cameron Ewen
Patricia Goodwin (deputising for David Fyffe)
Alan Harper
Iain Taylor
Ken Thomson (Chair)
Owen Vaughan

Also present

Adam Streeter-Smith (Paths For All Partnership)

Council officers present:-

Advisory role: Keith Jones, Head of Law & Administration (North)
Colin Miller, Countryside Access Officer
Linda Mathieson, Environment Planner (Strategic)
Alastair Fullwood, Access Officer

1. Apologies and Introductions

Apologies noted were from Ron Macdonald, Tom Johnston, Robin Maitland, Daniela Mayes and Cllr Jenny Watson. Patricia Goodwin noted that she was attending as Reserve for David Fyffe, who was unable to be present. Bill Dow was welcomed to his first meeting of the Forum as all-ability access representative Adam Streeter-Smith, adviser from Paths For All Partnership, was welcomed.

2. Minutes of Meeting of 27th June 2005

The minutes were approved subject to the additional apology being noted of Tom Johnston.

3. Matters Arising

With regard to the reference to a "scene setting paper" in the previous minute, Colin Miller explained that this was actually more a matter for the Council at the present time and a meeting was to be arranged between SNH and the Council to look at their respective roles. The outcome would, however, be reported back to the Forum.

4. Procedures

(a) Insurance

Linda Mathieson reported that she was still awaiting confirmation of the position but hoped to be able to report to the next meeting.

(b) Operating Principles

The final version was signed in front of those present. CM advised that this would be circulated to all members.

(c) Expenses Claims

Colin Miller noted that all relevant members had been sent the necessary form to enable compliance by Members with the Council's procedures for payment of expenses by BACS.

(d) Membership Changes

It was pointed out that a formal reserve for Tom Johnston required to be ratified by the Regional Board of the NFUS, together with the Infrastructure Services Committee of the Council. A named NFUS reserve was necessary. Action point: NFUS to advise ALOAF (per CM) in writing. With regard to the appointment of a fourth agency representative, there was further discussion with regard to this and whether Pauline Jewett of the National Trust for Scotland should be invited to join. It was agreed that a tourism representative would be appropriate and there was discussion as to whether Ms Jewett would cover this role or whether a further approach should be made to Visit Scotland and Enterprise North-East. It was agreed to write to Visit Scotland, Enterprise North-East and the National Trust, giving them an opportunity to make their views known.

There was also discussion as to the lack of reserves for the Community sector on the Forum. It was agreed to focus on geographical areas not well represented on the Forum and to initially approach Community Council Forums in those areas to ascertain if they wished to make a nomination.

5. Council's 2005-06 Access Work Programme

A Schedule was produced showing projects totalling over £185,000 currently proposed. Currently £160,000 was available. It was thought that there would be slippage on the total programme so current year's funding would match expenditure. Funding comes from various sources including the Council, Sustrans, SNH, EU, etc. It was noted that some projects complement other works funded from Forestry Commission Scotland sources. In future the Forum could propose projects to be considered for the annual rolling work programme.

Regarding the revenue budget for maintenance and repairs, in response to a question Linda explained that there was no provision for emergency spending in the budget so if a contingency did occur other areas within the Landscape Services budgets would lose out. Other issues identified include extending disabled access, which could entail some additional base funding. Also needing to be taken into account were paths which came within the Landscape Services budget. Work required on individual paths was variable but funding of £170,000 out of a total of £240,000 had been identified. Linda explained that a proper audit had been done, with a view to establishing an integrated rural paths maintenance programme in 2006/07.

The capital projects list was community-driven through Community Councils, local landowners and individual community groups. To this list had been added the strategic link of the Formartine and Buchan Way (F&BW). In future the Core Paths Plan consultations may contribute input.

At present the Council was only likely to be formally promoting the F&BW but other groups were looking at producing new leaflets or collating existing leaflets, e.g. the Banff and Buchan Tourism Forum was in the process of combining all footpath leaflets in its area into one folder. It was agreed to note the position and await a further report in due course.

6. Core Paths Planning

Alastair Fullwood reported on the paper which had been circulated. This was a long-term project with formal consultation on a draft plan scheduled for 2008. Guidelines had been produced by Paths for All and SNH. The Council's first task would be the raising of awareness (in which ALOAF would have a vital role) and a display would be put on by access staff during "Doors Open Day" at Woodhill House, Aberdeen on 10th September 2005. Bill Dow responded to an invitation to ALOAF members to attend. Informal (i.e. non-statutory) consultations would be undertaken with landowners and the public, probably during 2006. KT noted that it was important to find out what the public wanted and what they would use. A paths audit already existed but it was important that, at the first round of consultations, any information given out about existing paths should include only those routes which were already fully accepted (this possibility would be subject to further discussion by ALOAF as this needed to be balanced against the aim of extracting generic information about access needs, as distinct from lines on a map). There were various types of paths, e.g. those used by parents and children going to school, for Sunday walks, etc. Community Councils and local groups can assess what is missing based on what currently exists. Footpaths which would be Council maintained would not necessarily be Council-owned and agreement would be needed with landowners, etc. All core paths would require to be signposted. The position of landowners would require to be examined, particularly with regard to paths through fields used by livestock. It was also agreed that it would be premature to consult too soon. It was agreed to await a further report, particularly as to a recommended timetable for consultation and as to the means of consultation, whether at meetings, events such as local markets or by way of targeted questions to individual groups from Community Councils to walking groups. The help of rangers would be sought in the process. KT noted that it was to be a demand-led drafting process and that ALOAF could visit user groups. There was discussion as to whether the land managers' stance might be reactive or proactive (e.g. land managers advising on the most appropriate path routes on their land). Cameron Ewen noted the need in agricultural land to steer path routes, while also there was an opportunity to restore old paths or create new ones. Linda Mathieson offered ALOAF the opportunity to comment on its proposed subdivisions of Aberdeenshire for Core Paths Planning purposes.

7. Communications Strategy

There was circulated a paper on the Forum's communications with various groups and individuals, with the Council and with the public at large. An upgrade of the Council's website with regard to the Forum was considered appropriate. Adam Streeter-Smith recommended establishing links with Forums in surrounding areas, e.g. by exchange of Minutes and occasional joint meetings. This would assist in consistency of approach. Minutes could also be exchanged with neighbouring forums. The position of the City was of particular importance as a considerable number of City residents would use the Aberdeenshire paths network. Joint meetings would be another way forward and also by way of members of the Forum attending meetings of local groups and organisations. This

was felt to be particularly important during the Core Paths Plan consultation process, which would provide a focus. Similarly, KT offered to write articles, etc. for local magazines. Members expressed the importance of keeping the website up-to-date and with an impact to attract attention. Alastair Fullwood advised that although he would be the portal for placing material on the Council website, such material would need to be created by ALOAF itself. It was considered that some brief description of members of the Forum, including photographs, would be useful, that minutes of meetings be in summary format only and in the interim a website working group be set up comprising the Chairman, Owen Vaughan, John Brownlee and Alastair Fullwood.

It was agreed that there should be an early Press release and that the Chairman and CM discuss its terms along with the Council's Public Relations Service. "Notes for Editors" would be added and these would include member contacts to enable the local papers to contact a member in the relevant circulation area if they so wished. It was considered that the next meeting of the Forum, which was to be held at Haddo Country Park, would provide a suitable focus for a Press release and, if possible, a group photograph. It was agreed that the Press and public would be allowed to attend future meetings, commencing with the meeting to be held on 3rd October 2005. The Press would also be routinely informed of future meeting dates.

The idea of an ALOAF newsletter was not favoured, due to the workload involved and the distribution requirements.

Adam Streeter-Smith reported that he is hoping to convene a "north of Scotland" LAFs meeting.

8. Work Priorities

There was submitted the revised Outline Work Programme. It was agreed that the format was now much improved. Linda Mathieson explained that at present much of what was required was a reaction to the decisions of the Council. It was agreed that a group should be established to review the Work Programme. It was also agreed that the Forum should establish a skills register in respect of the individual members which would be added to their biography for Forum purposes, but not necessarily made public.

9. Events, Training and Information

Colin Miller reported on the event organised by FWAG at Knock Farm on 29th June 2005. This had been very successful and access issues had been fully discussed. Various other events were diaried:-

- User representatives' training on 10th September 2005, organised by the Ramblers Association.
- NAF Local Access Forums Event to be held on 21st September 2005 at Pitlochry at which two delegates plus an Access Officer would be welcome. Peter Dawes indicated that he would wish to attend.
- For information only, CM intimated the proposed SNH access training for Land Managers at Newton St. Boswells on 18th October 2005, to be repeated at Thainstone on 30th November 2005. Attendance at either of these events would not be considered to be under the aegis of ALOAF, but it was appropriate to let land managers know of them. CM could provide the necessary information to enable anyone wishing to attend to make their own arrangements.

- Additionally, support was requested for the Doors Open Day on 10th September 2005 at Woodhill House, where the Forum would have a presence. Bill Dow indicated that he would hope to attend.
- Finally, it was agreed that the Annual Gathering of the Forum would be held on Monday, 6th March 2006, probably as an evening event. This might include a feature on the Core Paths Plan. It was agreed that the subsequent ALOAF meeting should be held on 20 March 2005 to provide a timely opportunity to review the event.

10. Agenda Suggestions for Next Meeting

Immediately before the next meeting, which would be held at The Peatyards, Haddo House on 3rd October 2005, there would be an optional outdoor session at Haddo Country Park looking at practical issues relating to access problems, with support from the Ranger Service. This would commence at 3pm at the Country Park Car Park, and would be open to Reserves as well as Representatives. It was indicated that of those present 5 or 6 were likely to be able to attend. Thereafter the formal meeting would commence at 6.00 pm, with refreshments available from 5.30pm and Reserves would be eligible to attend as observers. Wheelchair access availability to be checked by CM.

11. Any Other Business

Cllr Anderson submitted his apologies in advance for the 3 October meeting, but would be contacting Cllr Watson in this regard.

12. Dates of Next Meetings

3 October 2005 at The Peatyards, Haddo House.

21 November 2005 at the Barn and Bushel.

16 January 2006.

It was agreed that the subsequent meeting should be on 20 March 2006.

The meeting closed at 8.15 pm.