

ABERDEENSHIRE LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM

NOTE OF FOURTH MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 27TH JUNE 2005 AT THE BARN AND BUSHEL, THAINSTONE CENTRE, INVERURIE

Present:

Councillor Jim Anderson (Council representative)
Molly Atkinson (User representative)
John Brownlee (Community representative)
Peter Dawes (User representative)
Bill Dow (Disabled Users representative)
Cameron Ewen (Land Manager representative)
David Finlay, (Land Manager reserve)
David Fyffe (Land Manager representative)
Patricia Goodwin (Land Manager reserve)
Alan Harper (Forestry Commission Scotland representative)
Ron Macdonald (Scottish Natural Heritage representative)
Neil McLean (User reserve)
Brian Martin (Community representative)
Robin Maitland (Land Manager, SRPBA representative)
Daniela Mayes (Community representative)
Alison Mitchell (User reserve)
Iain Taylor (Community representative)
Ken Thomson (KT) (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)
Colin Miller (CM), Countryside Access Officer
Alastair Fullwood, Assistant Countryside Access Officer
Helen Young, Access Ranger
Robert Gray, Acting Head of Service, Planning Policy & Environment

1. Apologies and Introductions

Christine Gore welcomed those attending the meeting and advised apologies from Councillor Jenny Watson, Jonathan Dymock, John Risby and Linda Mathieson. She noted that she would be demitting the role of Acting Chair at the current meeting, with effect from the election of the Chair. However, as senior Council officer for access, she would be happy to attend ALOAF meetings, when appropriate, on invitation and would wish to be invited to the annual gathering.

2. Minutes of Meeting of 23rd May 2005

The minute of meeting of 23rd May 2005 were held as read and approved, subject to minor typographical changes only.

3. Matters Arising

Any matter arising was agreed to be dealt with as part of the substantive agenda items to follow.

4. Procedures

(a) Insurance

CM reported that he was still awaiting confirmation of the insurance position but hoped to be able to report at the next meeting of the Forum.

(b) Operating Principles

Revised Operating Principles were circulated reflecting discussions, which had taken place at the meeting of 23rd May 2005, together with a number of consequential changes relating in particular to public attendance and confidentiality and procedures for amendment to the Operating Principles, including attendance by the Director of Planning and Environmental Services at any special meeting called for amendments to the Operating Principles. The revised draft was agreed, subject only to minor amendments. It was agreed that the Operating Principles would be signed off by the new Chairman as soon as possible.

(c) Public Attendance

With regard to public attendance at the meetings, it was agreed that this would be permitted as from the meeting after next. This would allow the new Chair to settle in and also to allow the future communications strategy of the Forum to be considered.

5. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

The two candidates, Ken Thomson and Cameron Ewen, having each been given the opportunity to make a short presentation to the membership, the meeting proceeded to a secret ballot. Thereafter, Keith Jones reported that having counted the ballot papers, Ken Thomson had received 8 votes and Cameron Ewen 7 votes. Accordingly, Ken Thomson was elected as Chair and Cameron Ewen thereafter accepted the role of Vice-Chair.

Christine Gore then passed over the Chairmanship to Ken Thomson who thanked members of the Forum for their support and undertook to represent all members of the Forum to his best ability.

6. Work Priorities

There was submitted (a) revised Outline Work Programme (OWP) based on discussions at the previous meeting; (b) draft Section 11 Exemption Order procedure in respect of excluding land from access rights and (c) a paper with regard to draft Council procedures for upholding access rights.

There then followed considerable debate relating to the order and priority of aspects of the workload. It was stressed that the proposals had to be viewed in the context of what was achievable in terms of Council staffing. The ability to bid for resources for next year's programme was also relevant. It was agreed that the OWP would be reported at each meeting and that, accordingly, a report would be presented to the August meeting of the Forum. This would include a full-length timeline for the preparation of the Core Paths Plans. The OWP would have clarified titles, and would also differentiate between core ALOAF tasks and other access activity.

Ron Macdonald subsequently suggested that a scene-setting paper be presented for the next meeting on "where we are and where we're going". SNH would be keen to help with communications regarding SOAC and more generally.

KT suggested that priorities for the next meeting might be Core Paths Planning and the communications strategy.

It was agreed that CM would supply representative samples of access agreements prior to the next meeting.

David Finlay sought clarification on SNH's interaction with ALOAF regarding promotion of responsible access. Ron Macdonald said this was under discussion with the Council at present and would be included in the scene-setting paper.

With regard to the Section 11 Exemption Order procedures and the flow chart attached to the report, it was agreed to accept the procedures in principle. It was agreed, however, that applications for exclusions of more than 5 days would not necessarily require to be advertised in a regional paper such as the Press and Journal. The need to reduce cost to the public was stressed.

After discussion the procedures with regard to upholding access rights were agreed. It was pointed out there was no guidance available at present on a standardised approach. It was agreed that every effort should be made in advance to obviate further dispute procedures having to be instituted. It was suggested that the ALOAF option could be mentioned earlier in the correspondence, e.g. in Letter No. 1. It was agreed that each meeting would have a report on disputes notified. If ALOAF wished to become involved, procedures under Section 2 of Appendix 3 of the Operating Procedures would apply.

It was agreed to defer discussion on an ALOAF Press release and public relations issues to the next meeting.

7. Events, Training and Information

It was noted that there would be a farm walk at Knock Farm, Huntly on Wednesday, 29th June 2005 led by Roger Polson. Anyone interested in attending was asked to let CM know as soon as possible.

CM also noted that the National Access Forum was to be asking Local Access Forums to an event to be held on Wednesday, 21st September 2005. CM would advise further when information becomes available. CM also advised that the Scottish Executive had set out Monitoring Returns to authorities on how they were fulfilling their duties under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. This would be dealt with by officers.

8. Agenda Suggestions for the Next Meeting

No new items were brought forward.

9. Any Other Business

Robin Maitland reported that the SRPBA would be appointing another Reserve, as Jonathan Dymock will require to stand down. The NFUS would be appointing its Reserve in the near future and, again, the name of the individual appointed would be reported to the next meeting. The SNH Reserve, Dr. David Bale, would be moving to a new post shortly and a replacement Reserve would be appointed here also.

It was agreed that, when the Chair signs the Operating Principles on his return from holiday, a Press release and photo opportunity for local newspapers would be provided.

It was considered that March 2006 would be a suitable time for the first ALOAF annual gathering.

A vote of thanks was accorded to Christine Gore for her role as Acting Chair, which had taken ALOAF forward from its inauguration to the election of the Chair at the current meeting.

10. Future Meetings Dates

It was agreed that the meetings would be held on Monday evenings, if possible within the Barn and Bushel, on 22nd August 2005, 3rd October 2005, 21st November 2005 and 16th January 2006.

At the conclusion of the formal part of the meeting, members discussed further examples of access issues. This was followed by a plenary session with regard to issues raised.