

ABERDEENSHIRE LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF MEETING 82

Monday 8 November 2021, 6.00pm

Virtual Meeting

Present: Mark Andrew*, Lynsey Craig, Wilson Irvine*, Anouke Kloppert, Gordon McKilligan, Ruth Riddell, Neil Taylor, Henry Webb, Chris York (Chair).

Council officers: Bridget Freeman*

[* -- Part meeting]

Abbreviations: **A/C** Aberdeenshire Council; **A/O** Access Officer(s); Hub -- Knowledge Hub; **S/G** Sub-group.

Item	Subject	Action
1	<p>Apologies, introductions, deputising, etc.</p> <p>a) <i>Apologies etc.</i> – Wayne Gault, Jonathan Kitching.</p> <p>b) <i>Declaration of Interests</i> – [None].</p>	
2	<p>Minutes of Meeting 81 Approved (HW, 2nd NT).</p> <p>Action points [by item no.]</p> <p><u>Updates</u></p> <p>3 (<i>hotspot info</i>) – nothing received.</p> <p>6 (<i>core paths status list</i>) – carried forward – BF to action.</p> <p>7A/1 (<i>Fettercairn/Park Estate</i>) – response unknown – RE to advise.</p> <p>7A/1 (<i>Crynes Corse Mounth</i>) – NT not heard from RE – RE to advise.</p> <p>7A/3 (<i>Expenses claims</i>) – Site visit expenses can be reimbursed (provision in budget for this and should be used where appropriate). See Hub for claim procedure.</p> <p>8 (<i>Deeside Way commuting info</i>) – no report – Rep concerned has stepped down from ALOAF.</p> <p><u>Minuted below</u> 1a) (<i>NFUS Rep/Reserve</i>); 1c) (<i>Vice Chair</i>); 3 (<i>social media</i>); 7A/2 (<i>Access Strategy Review (ASR)</i>); 7B (<i>SLE Rep</i>).</p> <p><u>Actioned</u></p> <p>3 (<i>Mid Deeside paper</i>); 6 (<i>core paths online info</i>); 7A2 (<i>Chair to comment on ASR</i>).</p> <p><u>Not actioned</u></p> <p>6 <i>Hub demo</i> – Action: CY to consider.</p> <p>Matters arising [Minuted below]</p>	<p>BF</p> <p>RE</p> <p>RE</p> <p>ALL</p> <p>CY</p>
3	<p>Consultations and External events</p> <p>1) National Access Forum (NAF) 25/11/2021 Sheep worrying and enforcement of relevant legislation: draft letter to NAF by Wayne Gault is on Hub. In order that an “ALOAF view” can be reached, all please review and comment to CY re whether it should go further. G McK plans to attend NAF as NFUS Access Rep. He said the issue has had much discussion; conclusions have been reached, so he is doubtful if new feedback would be appropriate at this stage. If CY not attending NAF he will discuss with G McK in advance.</p>	<p>ALL</p> <p>CY</p>
4	<p>Update on activities and events attended by members of ALOAF since previous meeting</p>	

<p>1) Access users HW attended, as a committee member, the inaugural meeting of the Aberdeenshire Coastal Pathway Forum – which will focus initially on the Cullen -Peterhead coastal strip.</p> <p>2) Community representatives <i>Mediation training</i> CY attended course provided for the Scottish Outdoor Access Network – a topic relevant to ALOAF’s work. Key point is that it’s the parties involved who resolve disputes -- the mediator’s role being to facilitate understanding of the situation. CY’s review will be placed on Hub. <i>Community Action Plan (CAP)</i> As other communities may find it useful to know, LC reported that Feughside Community Council’s (FCC) CAP proposes a paths network including a link to Banchory. <i>Windfarm funding</i> LC observed that some community councils have access to funding from windfarms. FCC had been told it could not be spent on projects on public roads or pavements. She asked if it can be spent on maintenance of core paths. As Aberdeenshire Council has no legal obligation to maintain core paths, CY felt that they might welcome community involvement. He advised that the key step is to obtain landowner permission for such work. However, he recommended consulting with James Davidson, Environment Planner for FCC’s area.</p>	CY
<p>3) Land managers <i>Land Management Reps</i> MA has been seeking to recruit Reps; also using access himself as dog-walker. <i>LRSA/SOAC/Access funding</i> G McK reported on moves by Edward Mountain MSP, with cross-party support, to achieve additional funding for local authority access staff and path maintenance, etc. G McK to find out more and report in due course. Edward Mountain is also looking to the agricultural support mechanism to fund path maintenance by land managers, but if this proposal is accepted it would not take effect until 2024/25. <i>Scottish Paths Map</i> G McK reported concern about the Scottish Paths Map launched by Ramblers Scotland (RS). Main concern is that routes through working farmyards have been included. However, routes subject to NFUS complaints have been promptly removed from the online map. CY, having been involved with path assessment on Bennachie, noted that the routes on the map have not necessarily been verified, but this phase of the Map is now underway and RS is seeking volunteers to assist. <i>E-bikes</i> MA has had reports of powerful e-bikes being used in the hills, with potential hazard to other access users. Access law has not caught up with this development. CY noted the existing law (max. 15mph and rider must be pedalling), but enforcement is an issue; safety of e-bike riders also a concern. NatureScot and the Scottish Government recognise the matter needs attention. G McK reported that the matter has been discussed by NAF – CY to put relevant Minutes on Hub.</p>	G McK
<p><i>FCC and Glen Dye Estate liaison</i> LC reported that the Estate is open to the idea of an ALOAF site visit. CY suggested that if progressed it should be scheduled earlier than the September to benefit from more daylight. Action? <i>Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) and paths</i> NT advised that FLS’s Paths budget is limited. Proposals for new path construction would need to check if planning consent is required. While FLS works with professional</p>	CY ?

	<p>contractors who can meet the health and safety procedures, this topic can be a stumbling block for communities (whose volunteers are legally defined as employees). FLS has its own set of requirements, while work on privately-owned land would need to meet the landowner's health and safety procedures. NT will check whether FLS [or its predecessor] has issued guidance for communities. Successful relationships exist between FLS and Banchory Paths Association, also with volunteer projects organised through Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service. HW noted that the Ranger Service can organise volunteer path maintenance, and can handle the procedural requirements. CY suggested a possible role for ALOAF in providing communities with the information needed to help them comply. Action? Cattle and access G McK noted concern about safety of users of path through grazing land where not feasible for farmer to move the livestock.</p>	<p>NT</p> <p>?</p>
<p>5</p>	<p>Planning for activities, events, training, information</p> <p>Countryside Live Agreed that ALOAF should take part. Unsure whether appropriate to be present on 2nd day (schools day) which might be fully covered by the Ranger Service – CY to check Child Protection rules. An ALOAF working group would be needed with a view to start planning at next Forum meeting. CY to consult with BF and report to next meeting on costs etc. [Joining the meeting later, BF advised that equipment and materials have been in storage at Mintlaw for some considerable time, and therefore their condition will need to be checked].</p> <p>Turriff Show [Sunday 31st July – Monday 1st August 2022] Assuming it does go ahead (Covid-permitting), it was agreed that ALOAF should participate. The Forum had built up awareness of its presence over the years. If it were to withdraw, it might not have the opportunity to return in future. For 2022 a more advantageous location within the showground would be desirable, but may not be possible due to grouping of exhibitor categories. Suggested ALOAF offerings: paths and access information; advice for land managers; “responsible access” educational material (e.g. quiz). CY to consult with BF and report to next meeting on costs etc.</p> <p>Other events Portsoy Boat Festival [aka Scottish Traditional Boat Festival Portsoy] understandably not themed on land-based access. However, events involving the Aberdeenshire Coastal Pathway Forum may be relevant.</p> <p>Newsletter / Blog In discussion it was felt that these were potentially time-consuming. LC suggested that instead, ALOAF could feed into other, existing newsletters.</p> <p>Publicity -- Aberdeenshire Council PR Team CY and BF reported interest from Aberdeenshire Council's PR Team Communications Manager in publicising ALOAF through Council and media channels. A “who we are and what we do” channel is needed, as a starting point – Action? Interview with CY to be arranged – CY to contact Comms. Manager “Ken”. Opportunities to emphasise multi-sector representation and name Rep's; trail ALOAF presence at events; trail ALOAF meetings.</p> <p>Social Media Statement CY has prepared a draft Social Media Statement (previously circulated). He noted that ALOAF has facebook and Twitter accounts but content is not monitored on a regular basis, and ALOAF has not found a way to express a Forum view on these platforms. This raises the</p>	<p>CY</p> <p>?</p> <p>CY</p> <p>CY</p> <p>CY?</p> <p>CY</p>

	question of whether a social media presence should be maintained. Also, a relationship with the Council's PR team offers an alternative way forward. BF offered to see if ALOAF could contribute to the Coastal Path group's social media.	BF
6	<p>Aberdeenshire Council update</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Staffing BF currently Access Officer (North) 2.5 days/week; plus (until 31/3/2022) 2 days/week as Core Paths Signage Project Officer (North). She may need ALOAF help with the latter project. Matthew Watt has the corresponding post for core paths in Aberdeenshire South. CY commended this new project, which should help allay some land management concerns. Staff re-structuring is still underway at the Council. 2) Deeside Way / Formartine and Buchan Way Report from James Davidson that £200,000 has been spent on route upgrades in the past 18 months. Active Travel audits on both routes are currently out to tender. 3) Coastal Partnership WI reported that the project officer will welcome assistance from other organisations. The project area (Cullen – Peterhead) includes up to one mile inland, and covers parking and toilet facilities as well as access. There will be a social media presence on facebook. 4) Draft Outdoor Access Strategy 2022-24 To be published soon in draft form, when it will be available to ALOAF via the Hub but the content is not to be copied beyond the Forum. CY emphasised that members should read it, consider if it is up to date and if there are any omissions, identify its good points, and feed back to the Council accordingly. ALOAF is mentioned in the document. In response to a question from CY re whether FLS has an Access Strategy, NT explained that they do not have a specific document. The FLS policy is to provide waymarked trails (generally multi-user) for the less confident, while the remainder of the forest estate is subject to rights of access under LRSA. Some long-distance routes also traverse forests. Specific access matters are dealt with on a site by site basis. 5) Seasonal Access Ranger – feedback BF and Fiona Chapman held Seasonal Ranger posts in the summer, until 31st October, which were funded by NatureScot and focussed on access “hotspots” impacted by staycation visitors. More than 300 site visits were made. Negative issues included irresponsible camping, fires and barbecues, littering, human and dog waste, and irresponsible parking. On a positive note were the opportunities for awareness raising about SOAC; and building a relationship with regular visitors. 8 out of 10 visitors responded positively if given a “Plan B” option when turned away from full car parks. If repeated in 2022, which is desirable, the season needs to start before Easter, allowing time for seasonals to learn their patch, and should continue until the end of October as in 2021, because hotspots remain busy right through the season. Also, NatureScot needs to cue local authorities well in advance to allow them time to react. CY noted that ALOAF had written to Aberdeenshire Council at the start of 2021 urging that sufficient resources be allocated to the problem. He trusted that in any further correspondence it would be appropriate to record the positive 	ALL

	<p>impact of the Seasonals in 2021. Responding to LC's suggestion that the "Plan B" option could be the subject of a promotional article by ALOAF, CY spotted that this concept could also be something to present at Countryside Live and the Turriff Show. To have a "Plan B" ready could be seen as part of the "responsible access" approach. G McK reported that BF's experiences reflected the situation across Scotland. In particular, field gates and farm roads had been obstructed by parking. BF has found that many private estates have been seeking advice from her, with what may well be a permanent change resulting from the negative aspects of "staycation access". CY noted that there is currently a Ranger Service Review consultation survey [Online at https://engage.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/ranger-service This link is also on the Hub]. Members are encouraged to take part.</p> <p>6) ALOAF budget</p>	ALL
7	<p>Membership, recruitment and deputising Steve Russell and Wayne Gault are stepping down from the Forum, resulting in new vacancies for Reps.</p> <p>Community Representatives Anouke Kloppert's interest in becoming a Community Representative, attending in her personal capacity, was accepted by the meeting and she was welcomed to the Forum.</p> <p>Scottish Land and Estates (SLE) Moves to appoint a replacement SLE Rep. on the Forum have so far been unsuccessful. Two local estates have shown some interest, and at the next meeting it is hoped that a new Rep. could be appointed. David Fyffe may also have a contact. Action: CY.</p> <p>National Farmers Union Scotland (NFUS) It is understood that Wilson Irvine is the NFUS Rep. Reserve person to be confirmed – either Lorna Paterson or Gerald Banks – G McK to check.</p> <p>Agency Sector It was noted by G McK that there had been no formal Council presence at meetings for some time.</p> <p>Vice Chair The Chair repeated his invitation for a nomination for Vice Chair as he would value their assistance. To be on agenda for next meeting.</p>	CY G McK CY
8	<p>AOCB Enquiry – access for visually impaired BF had been asked if Braille maps were available. NT knows of a service which might be able to fulfil the enquiry; also, there is an adventure company specialising in clients with disabilities; also, tandem bikes with sighted co-rider are an option for cycling for the visually impaired. CY noted the existence of the equalities legislation, but was aware that trail providers were currently struggling with core work in the present circumstances.</p> <p>A96 dualling HW asked if there was any update. Nothing heard recently -- ALOAF and Access Officers have had no response from the A96 project team.</p>	CY

	<p>Deeside Way and AWPR RR reported that there has been a multi-modal study regarding the arrangements for the Deeside Way to cross the AWPR. She will put her information on the Hub.</p> <p>Knowledge Hub updates All to check their settings to ensure weekly updates are received (e.g. material put on Hub by Richard Elliott recently).</p>	<p>RR ALL</p>
[9]	[Closed session – Confidential – no publicly accessible minute]	
10	<p>Dates of 2022 meetings – proposed to remain virtual except for site visit (date to be arranged):</p> <p>7 February 25 April 27 June 5 September 14 November</p>	