

Minutes of the meeting of Orkney Local Access Forum and Countryside Committee

Monday 7 April 2014 at 11am
St Magnus Centre, Kirkwall

Present:

Ian Thain	SCROWS
Stephen Jenkinson	KC/SKC
Ian Wilkins	OIC
James Green	OIC
Alan Muir	OIC
Ken Lawson	SGRPID
Hugh Halcro-Johnston	SLE
Sandra Miller	OHS
Simon Treasure	Orkney Tourism Group
Victor Muir	NFU
Sandy Firth	OHS
Elaine Clarke	Chair
Barbara Scollay	Secretary

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Liz Dennison, Alan Corrigall, Rob Crichton, Roddy MacKay, Jenny Campbell, Caroline Wickham-Jones, Anne Gascoigne, Alan Leitch, Barbara Foulkes and Rod Thorne.

2. Adoption of the Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 February 2014

Stephen Jenkinson noted one change of word in Matters Arising, under Dog fouling/control of pets in the countryside, bullet point 2; amend *split* to *multi-use*.

With this amendment the minutes were adopted on the proposal of Ken Lawson, seconded by Stephen Jenkinson.

3. Matters Arising

It was noted that circulation of the current OIC project list and the link to the Battleby conference presentations had been done. Sharing information with other groups will take place very shortly.

4. Core Path Maintenance: discussion on current progress

Ian W reported that work at Muddisdale is now complete and the bridge at Newark is progressing slowly. He is reacting to reports received from members of the public but has to prioritise the work.

Stephen asked whether some fixtures could be removed to improve access for multiple users (cyclists, pushchairs, horses etc) where there is no livestock to enclose; Ian W commented that he would need to have more information on grazing issues to consider removal of fixtures; usually if he sees something that is broken he makes arrangements to have it repaired as in the case of the kissing gates at Mull Head.

Wooden furniture is in the process of getting treated but Ian would like to get a set plan of wood treatment organised. Ian W will pass on a template sheet to the secretary for circulation which can be used for recording details of paths and their furniture, as well as any issues.

5. Process on dealing with access disputes

James firstly introduced Alan Muir from the OIC Planning team who has been assisting with the recording of the Core Path network and doing research. James explained the reasons why OIC were keen to involve the LAF in the decision-making process and went through how some other Scottish Councils deal with issues, the stages of the process for disputes and the suggested procedure for OLAF.

Simon asked how many disputes were likely to come up and James advised that they have around 20 at present but some are very simple so would not have to be presented to OLAF. Ian T noted that he is currently dealing with 6 blocked rights of way.

James will refer to the OIC's Standing Orders for advice on declaring conflicts of interest. It was agreed that OLAF's role would be purely advisory, not judiciary, and all were keen that the process should empower OIC officers. The question of site visits was raised and it was noted that the requirement for site visits would be decided upon on a case-by-case basis. A minimum of 8 committee members would be required in order to make a decision on behalf of OLAF however the number of attendees at a site visit could be fewer. A further point noted was that in the case of a site visit, no discussion would be held on site with the landowner.

The next meeting of OLAF may see the first case being brought for discussion.

6. Core Path Plan: feedback received and OLAF's vision

After distributing copies of the work programme (copy attached to minutes) James explained the process and timetable, noting that points 1 to 4 are complete, with point 5 (informal consultation with OLAF) due for completion this month. OIC are trying to get the message out to landowners and be open about the whole process; they are aware that some landowners may be disillusioned by the last process some years ago and they are keen to tread carefully. James intends to present the proposed changes to OLAF at the next meeting in July/August.

There was some concern on why the plan is being reviewed as some other Local Authorities had intimated they were not intending on carrying out a review of their Core Paths. It was commented that officers wished to bring the plan up to date, and the review would tie in paths that were added to or amended by the Scapa Flow Landscape Partnership Scheme.

Some of the many comments and suggestions as part of this discussion made were:

- Promote Orkney as a walking holiday destination; corporate sponsorship for routes
- Consider alternative delivery methods for access – is the Council best placed for this role?
- Cut out smaller 'bitty' paths and focus on larger routes, coastal routes and circular paths; identify the most important strategic routes.
- Clear and consistent budget from OIC; access to the countryside has many benefits to the community of Orkney (tourism and economic development, landowners, healthy living etc) and we feel access is not currently recognised fully for the benefits it provides in terms of the amount and way that the budget that is applied.
- Work with landowners to promote feeling of 'ownership' of paths; promote benefits of having people on paths rather than walking through fields (concerns about litter, dog fouling, worrying of livestock, damage to fences/crops etc); will not be disadvantaged by having to pay for gates, fencing etc.
- Signage – corporate design makes it easily identifiable that a route is 'approved'; stone signposts/markers rather than wooden ones (less/no maintenance although more costly in first instance); must be clear, accurate and not misleading.
- Format for promoting cycling routes, days of walks etc – bearing in mind that leaflets need checking and revising every 3-4 years.
- Infrastructure needs to be based on the least restrictive principle – think about cyclists, horse riders, those with buggies.
- Coastal route on each of the North Isles; 'Island-bagging'
- Coastal route round the whole of mainland Orkney

It was agreed that the Secretary and Chair would pull the comments together into a response and circulate for comment prior to submission.

7. AOCB

- Ian Thain made a suggestion that it would be useful to see the basic outdoor code translated to other languages.
- Hugh asked for the group's views on electric fences; generally members were not keen on them although there were situations where they were obviously needed. The Secretary will circulate the NAF paper on electric fences to members for information.
- James noted that work at Newark Bay and Rackwick Burn had been approved through the Council's Capital Project Appraisal programme and work will be carried out in these areas although some additional funding is required.

8. Date of Next Meeting

Another Doodle poll will be issued to narrow down a date for an evening (7.30pm start) including the AGM between mid-July and mid-August. Finstown was noted as a preference with a walk at Cuween and visit to the community garden.

Thanking everyone for their attendance and for keeping to the times allotted to each matter, the Chair closed the meeting at 1pm.