

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

Wednesday 15 April 2015 at 7pm
St Magnus Centre

Present:

Stephen Jenkinson	Scottish Kennel Club/Chair
Anne Gascoigne	Orkney Field Club/Vice Chair
Roddy Mackay	Orkney Islands Council
Alan Muir	Orkney Islands Council
James Green	Orkney Islands Council
Simon Treasure	Orkney Tourism Group
Ken Lawson	Scottish Government's Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate
Elaine Clarke	Historic Scotland Ranger Service
Victor Muir	National Farmers Union
Roderick Thorne	Sanday Ranger
Hugh Halcro-Johnston	Scottish Land and Estates
Alan Leitch	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Rob Crichton	Orkney Islands Council Councillor
Barbara Scollay	Secretary

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Liz Dennison, Ian Wilkins and Brenda Blunn.

2. Adoption of the Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 February 2015

Two corrections were made to the minutes of the last meeting; in paragraph one of Item 5, third sentence corrected to read "A first round bid will be made in May..."; in paragraph one of Item 6, first sentence, committee name corrected to Policy and Resources. Following these amendments the minutes were proposed by Simon Treasure and seconded by Ken Lawson.

3. Matters Arising

Core Path Maintenance Update

At Marwick the RSPB have removed a lot of stone from the path and realigned the fence on RSPB land. The wall has not been repaired fully but has been saved and made safe where possible. The work to the bridge at Newark in Deerness has been completed. The committee noted their thanks to Ian Wilkins for these useful regular updates.

January NAF Update

Steve gave an update from the notes of the January NAF meeting, noting that the website would soon be updated and the use of SMART adverts on social media. The meeting had discussed level crossings, SRDP and grants for access, resolving disputes using LAF's and encouraging meetings between LAF's in different areas.

4. Orkney Edition of the Pocket Mountain Guide

Further to the appeal on Radio Orkney for members of the public to come forth with information little follow-up had been made in the local media. Anne had suggested that OLAF get involved and invited John Ferguson to attend this meeting but he seemed to feel he had enough information and time constraints meant that he would be unlikely to attend. Members commented that it would have been nice to have had some input and/or been able to endorse the text. Anne will try to keep

in touch with John for updates on when the guide, which is a standalone publication solely featuring Orkney, is due to be published.

It was commented that OIC own the 'Orkneywalks' web address and consideration might be made whether this should now fall under Andrew Learmonth's remit at Orkney.com; Simon offered to speak to Andrew about this and find out whether there were any plans to get the website underway.

5. SRDP Agri-Environment Climate Scheme Grants

Ken Lawson spoke about this item and distributed some handouts with further information. Applications from farmers and land managers are being invited through www.ruralpayments.org and one of the articles they can apply for funding under is improving public access. The deadline for this year has been pushed back to mid-June but as farmers will be busy with their CAP returns it is not expected there will be many applications this year. The next window for applications will be 1 January to 31 March 2016.

Of particular interest was that local authorities could apply which may present an opportunity for OIC officers, although of course it would be capital funding. All projects would be expected to be kept up/maintained for 5 years. A further point was that OIC ought to be able to review applications to ensure that they fit with the access strategy. This scheme may be an opportunity for information/interpretation boards to be renewed and installed in areas lacking such items. Ken will bring further updates back to OLAF in future.

6. RSPB Update

Alan Leitch explained that an RSPB app had been launched quietly and is available now from most app stores for free. Some issues over collating the walks to be published as part of the app had been encountered so the number of walks is smaller than originally envisaged but what has been produced is looking good. Three other points of interest from RPSB are the official opening of the Cottisgarth Hide on 21 April, the completion on the Loons Listening Wall and the replacement of the Birsay Moors hide (formerly the Burgher Hill Hide).

Alan went on to talk about the presence of sea eagles on Hoy; the pair have been present for the last three years and are currently breeding near the Dwarfie Stane. It is because of the close proximity to a popular visitor attraction that the RSPB decided to let the public know about it in order to be proactive about explaining why they can still visit the site but not linger too long, or to go walking in the area of the nest. Not everyone was happy with their decision but overall there has been a very positive reaction from the public. A sign has been installed in the Dwarfie Stane car park and RPSB staff/volunteers are on hand to discuss the birds and inform visitors.

7. Review of the OLAF Constitution and Operation

Steve Jenkinson has pulled together a draft new constitution although he is not aiming to get it ratified at this year's AGM as he believes the OIC need to think about the structure and working of the forum, perhaps closing the current forum and beginning a fresh one. Steve believes it would be good to finish this work by the end of 2015, perhaps for adoption at the 2016 AGM. A suggestion was made that member groups that do not attend, and have not attended for a considerable time, be asked to resign in order to reduce the membership. It would be necessary to ensure that OLAF remains representative according to the legislation that sets out the requirements of Local Access Forums. It was agreed that the secretary should send an email to the mailing list and ask that everyone who is still interested in being involved in OLAF should let us know; otherwise they can be removed from membership. As part of this email the new draft constitution should be attached for comment.

Discussion then took place on participation in dispute assistance, OIC representation both from officers and Councillors and the need to add information into the constitution of how disputes will be dealt with.

8. Orkney Outdoor Access Strategy

James Green explained that a report on the Orkney Outdoor Access Strategy had gone to the Development and Infrastructure committee on 26 March recommending the review of the OOAS prior to completion of the review of the Orkney Core Paths Plan, although it had still to be ratified by full Council on 28 April. James would like to run a workshop in order to launch the strategy and give the opportunity to link up with partner agencies. He then went on to go over the questions posed by the review (as previously circulated) and invited comments. A question was raised over spatial strategy, meaning indicative connections on a plan or map and how an action could support those connections.

It was felt that the current strategy has lots of excellent aspirations but not a lot of progress to show, while the new strategy ought to be a living, working document that all can use and follow. It is hoped to include agencies not currently involved and the delivery mechanism will be looked at. A comment was made on that often communities would like to do things but there is perhaps not enough communication between the Council and those communities to get things moving.

Roddy Mackay explained that an Empowering Communities pilot project is getting underway in Stronsay and Papa Westray from which it is hoped will arise some positive outcomes. Other comments made by the forum members included the need to ensure the new strategy makes a difference, the need to prioritise items that are deliverable and ensure the action plan is no more than two pages and a realistic timescale and costs are needed to instigate a strategy. It was suggested that a project officer might be needed to support the strategy and that HIE and/or Economic Development could be approached with business cases to access funding.

James aims to take the strategy to the November meeting of the committee for approval and invited further feedback and responses to the list of questions on the review.

9. AOCB

None

10. Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 9 June incorporating visit to Newark bridge then AGM and Committee meeting at 7pm in Deerness Hall. *(note from Secretary: this was later amended to Wednesday 10 June with visit to Newark bridge at 6.30pm and meeting at Deerness hall scheduled to begin at 7.15pm)*

Thanking everyone for their attendance the Chair closed the meeting at 9.15pm.