

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

Wednesday 23 September 2015 at 7pm, following the EGM  
St Magnus Centre

## Present:

Anne Gascoigne	Orkney Field Club, Vice Chair
Victor Muir	National Farmers Union
Roddy Mackay	Orkney Islands Council
James Green	Orkney Islands Council
Brenda Blunn	Orkney Ramblers Association
Cllr Leslie Manson	Elected Member of Orkney Islands Council, Chair
Simon Treasure	Orkney Tourism Group
Ken Lawson	Scottish Government's Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate
Barbara Scollay	Secretary

## **1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Kate Townsend, Hugh Halcro-Johnston, Rod Thorne, Stephen Jenkinson, Rob Crichton and Ian Wilkins.

## **2. Adoption of the Minutes of the Meeting held on 10 June 2015**

The minutes were adopted on the proposal of Ken Lawson, seconded by Anne Gascoigne.

## **3. Matters Arising**

- None

## **4. Core Path Maintenance**

Leslie commented on the complaints he had reported on behalf of constituents about the state of core paths over the year; he believed that they were taken seriously but that there appeared to be a long process of around 6-8 weeks in which inspection was carried out and action taken, possibly meaning several weeks of the use of a path being lost.

James noted Ian's role as the sole officer working on maintenance on a part-time basis. Ian has completed the route mapping of all current core paths and will now start again on the rolling inspection and maintenance programme but this and subsequent years will be quicker and easier as all the details of furniture have been recorded. Some discussion took place over furniture and its replacement with more access-friendly versions – self-closing gates for example. A question was raised over the OIC's budget for maintenance of small furniture items and it is believed to be around £20,000.

Some background was offered with regard to core paths in that OIC's review of the Core Path Plan had begun in 2014 but that concerns came to the fore from various areas and the overall view was that officers needed to go back and revisit the Outdoor Access Strategy first to identify important strategic issues and also consider and incorporate the costs of maintenance before changing the Core Path Plan.

Brenda noted the Orkney Ramblers desire for a proper joined-up network, as the current Core Path network is not really a network, more a collection of unlinked paths. It was agreed that both circular and connected paths are desired by all representatives on OLAF and that core paths need to give opportunities for not just walking but running, horse-riding, cycling etc. The previous plan achieved its ambition of creating a wide range of paths but was perhaps overly ambitious in terms of the ongoing maintenance and the subsequent required.

Leslie suggested that he would like to see the introduction of categories for the standard of paths, which would focus resources on where it was needed. There could incorporate a gold standard (suits various levels of fitness, well maintained, highly accessible including potential access for wheelchair users), silver standard (more uneven ground, slightly tougher walk etc) and bronze standard (rougher paths for the more adventurous). These are of course merely suggestions but with proper categorisation, maintenance and marketing it could have considerable benefit to Orkney in terms of the offering to tourists as well as raising the profile of paths and associated health benefits of outdoor exercise to locals.

A joint view is needed with OIC's partners of what is needed and wanted and the access strategy is the way to undertake this work. Simon offered to start talking to OLAF stakeholders over the winter about their interest in the work of OLAF and the Outdoor Access Strategy/Core Path Plan and report back on the outcome by the next meeting early in 2016.

Leslie invited all OLAF members to feed back to him their comments on any core path problems and issues.

## **5. NAF Update**

The agenda for the next NAF meeting and the draft minutes of the meeting on 20 May were circulated with the meeting papers and Barbara noted that the annual NAF/LAF meeting was due to be held again in November 2015; Barbara to circulate the details once they are received to ask for any interest. It was agreed that some assistance with travel costs would be possible from the OLAF funds.

## **6. OIC Access Update – Access Officer recruitment**

An advertisement has been issued by OIC for a full time access officer for the term of one year; there is no guarantee of continued employment after that time but officers are hopefully that it will be extended. There is a strong set of applicants and 4 or 5 people will be interviewed on 1 October, with someone in post hopefully by the mid to end of November. The postholder's tasks will include the review of the access strategy; the setting up of a workshop with OLAF, OIC partner organisations/stakeholders and Elected Members; and dealing with access queries and disputes.

There is a risk that the processes will be started but there will be no-one at the end of the year to take them forward, and the work will stall again. It is hoped that the requirement for the post has been made obvious to Elected Members and a growth bid as part of the OIC budget setting process has been submitted (pending approval) in order to make the post permanent from 2016/17. OLAF members present agreed that the recruitment to this post was very good news.

## **7. Review of OLAF constitution and membership**

Discussion ensued on the membership of OLAF and how to encourage more representation. Making organisations aware that we welcome their contribution is important and even if they are unable to send a representative regularly, comments and suchlike via email would be appreciated. The point was raised that if all the possible representatives attended then the meetings could become unwieldy.

Simon offered to approach the various organisations that are not currently engaged over the winter months and speak to them about the work of OLAF and how they can participate, and find out

whether or not they are willing to remain as part of the group. James will investigate the process of how to change the constitution or how to cease the current forum and begin a new version.

## 8. AOCB

- Historic Scotland meeting - Stones of Stenness car park  
Anne had attended the public meeting held by Historic Scotland and noted the main areas of concern were the flooding of the car park which made the Stones of Stenness site inaccessible even for able-bodied persons, and the number of coaches parking in the vicinity. Anne herself had raised the problem of the kissing gate which is not suitable for anyone with mobility problems or aids, nor for anyone with a pushchair. Provision of further car/coach parking areas was discussed but questions were raised about how they would fit in with the surrounding landscape and area. Leslie offered to write to the Chief Executive of Historic Scotland to emphasise the need to resolve the parking issues; Secretary to obtain contact details.
- Stromness to Kirkwall walking trail  
Brenda had been asked by the Orkney Ramblers Association to raise the question of a Stromness to Kirkwall walking trail that they believe had been spoken about some years ago. OLAF members recalled Richard Walker speaking to the group a few years back about his idea for this; Secretary to check the filed minutes for this matter and report back.
- North Isles Landscape Partnership Scheme  
James gave an update in that the RI was submitted in May 2015 and site visits were held in Papa Westray and Shapinsay during August by the assessment team. The scheme has passed the scrutiny of the Scottish-level committee and will be presented to the UK committee which meets on 27 October 2015. OLAF members voiced their congratulations at getting this far and wish the team well for the next stage.

## 9. Date of Next Meeting

Wednesday 13 January 2016, 7pm at St Magnus Centre  
*(this was postponed so that the new OIC Access Officer would be able to attend a meeting early into their new role)*