

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

Tuesday 10 May 2016 at 7pm
St Magnus Centre

Present:

Anne Gascoigne	Orkney Field Club, Vice Chair
Victor Muir	National Farmers Union
Ross Irvine	Orkney Islands Council
Ian Wilkins	Orkney Islands Council
James Green	Orkney Islands Council
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

Leslie Manson declared an interest in the item on ongoing access issues in Deerness and advised of his intention to leave the meeting prior to the discussion taking place. This item was therefore moved to the end of the agenda.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Brenda Blunn, Alan Leitch, Roddy Mackay, Liz Dennison, Sian Evans and Emma Webb.

2. Adoption of the Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 February 2016

The minutes were adopted following the correction of two small typos in item 6. The notes from confidential items 5 and 9 were also accepted as a true record.

3. Matters Arising

Access issue at Banks, South Ronaldsay

Ross explained that he had visited the landowner who was very receptive and agreed to fill in the ditches and reinstate access. The timber is also being tidied up and although it is recognised that there may still be an issue with the boardwalk reinstatement of this furniture would be a matter for SNH. Congratulations were voiced to Ross by those present for the excellent and prompt solution to this matter.

Update on car park at Standing Stones of Stenness

An update on the car park situation was requested and James will endeavour to supply this. Thanks were noted to Sian Evans and HES for the new installation of self-closing gates at the Standing Stones of Stenness site, replacing both the kissing gate and stile.

5. Hoxa Head

Ross recently visited the landowner and the missing kissing gate will be replaced with a timber gate and an additional gate will be installed down the hill near to the café in order to restore the circular route. Ross mentioned that he had a positive interaction with the landowner resulting in a positive and very welcome outcome of reinstating access. Council officers are looking to put in place an agreement between the Council and the landowner regarding maintenance. The landowner raised concerns about responsible dog ownership and this was addressed and advice on appropriate signage given. Ross was once again praised for his swift action in resolving this matter.

A query was raised about access to the buildings and safety; Ross explained that the Access Act does not apply to buildings, only land and so the warning signs not to enter structures placed on the buildings and on the information board at the car park are an appropriate measure. HES recently commissioned structural surveys on the buildings at Hoxa and the landowner has been offered funding to help fence-off the buildings to further restrict access.

6. OLAF Membership & 7. Review of OIC access strategy and core path network including OLAF participation

The review of the access strategy will include an action plan, which could include a role for OLAF. It was suggested that Ross take on the task of contacting the current organisations listed as members of OLAF in order to ascertain their interest in going forward to be part of the team reviewing the action plan for the access strategy. It was noted that the only statutory agencies are the Council itself and SNH – all other organisations are discretionary. Ross will report back at a later date on the feedback received from the member organisations.

It was agreed that members should look at the list of members in the constitution and come back with a list of which groups they would like to see on the membership of OLAF; and at a future meeting proposals for a core membership and potentially a wider correspondence group should be discussed. It is desired that OLAF offer the Council a committed wider partnership to drive and deliver the access strategy. There is a need to inspire others to see the value of being part of and contributing to OLAF.

Ross will draft a letter for Leslie to be issued to the current member groups explain that OIC will be in touch with them in due course regarding their membership of OLAF. Potential funding applications to be a future agenda item.

8. Dutch summer students – core path surveying and grading project

Students contact OIC to offer their services in grading as many of the core paths in Orkney as they can over a 10-week period following the Paths for All grading system (wheelchair-accessible, easy, moderate, strenuous). This will take the pressure off Ian in terms of checking on maintenance required and will be an excellent start in applying the criteria to Orkney that many other local authorities follow.

9. Consultation on proposed Development Plan

A letter regarding the consultation period for the proposed OIC Development Plan had been received and it was explained that the plan sets the strategy for planning over the next 5 years and the consultation ends on 16 June. Core paths will be dealt with by putting them under review then adopted as supplementary guidance and James explained how this would be undertaken. Wind turbines will also be dealt with under supplementary guidance. After discussion it was agreed that it was not necessary for OLAF to provide a group response.

10. AOCB

- Funding Application

An application has been made to the Smarter Choices, Smarter Places scheme for £20,000 and this may be matched by another funding source. The money will be used for a feasibility study into the development of heritage trails in the North Isles (part of the North Isles Landscape Partnership Scheme). As the fund has a 5-year life officers are hopeful that they will be able to apply for other funding over subsequent years. A tender looking for contractors to undertake the feasibility study will be issued soon.

- Grieveship Residents Association

A letter of support for the GRA to help them apply for funding was submitted in relation to

their desire to upgrade the path by the Marwick playing fields.

- Works at Ring of Brodgar

Sian had provided an update via email about the works to be carried out at the Ring of Brodgar with amendments made to the route using fencing for periods of time.

- St Magnus Way

David McNeish of Birsay Heritage Trust, with Anthony Mottershead, OIC Arts Officer, is keen to try and create a 'St Magnus Way' following the route that St Magnus's body or bones took from Egilsay via Birsay to Kirkwall. It was agreed that a positive commendation should be made on behalf of OLAF and that members would be pleased to see Ross offer advice where required.

Leslie Manson left the meeting at this point and Anne Gascoigne deputised as Vice Chair.

4. Ongoing access issue in Deerness

Officers have sent correspondence to the Community Council asking what they knew about this right of way and received a response back to the effect that the Community Council had no knowledge about the right of way and no views upon the matter. The issue of right of way/access remains and the next stage is to compile a short questionnaire to be issued to members of the community asking them what they know of the usage of the path.

The landowner has agreed to install a more suitable gate for access to horses, walkers and cyclists in principle but officers are concerned that if it is found that it is a route used to move cattle and/or agricultural machinery then they would not want new furniture to be installed only to have to be removed at a later date. The results from the questionnaire will be reviewed before proceeding further with this as evidence of use needs to be established. The waste heaps have been removed which is a positive result.

11. Date of Next Meeting

To be confirmed but will incorporate the AGM. Options suggested were for a walk at Hoxa with the meeting at the Hoxa Tearoom or a walk around the loch at Holm with the meeting in the Holm Hall.