

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

Tuesday 28 March 2017 at 7pm
St Magnus Centre, Kirkwall

Present:

Hugh Halcro-Johnston	Scottish Land and Estates
Anne Gascoigne	Orkney Field Club, Vice Chair
Victor Muir	National Farmers Union
Ross Irvine	Orkney Islands Council
Ian Wilkins	Orkney Islands Council
Cllr Leslie Manson	Elected Member of Orkney Islands Council, Chair
Simon Treasure	Orkney Tourism Group
Ian Talbot	Orkney Ramblers
Ian Robertson	Orkney Ramblers
Barbara Scollay	Secretary

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Roddy Mackay, Liz Dennison, Kate Townsend, James Green, Emma Neave-Webb, Christine Skene, Sian Evans, Alan Leitch, Ann Marwick (new Orkney Heritage Society representative) and Ken Lawson.

It was noted that Brenda Blunn had passed on the duties of representative to OLAF which would be shared between three members of the group, two of whom were present. Ian Talbot, Ian Robertson and Sue Tyzack will represent the Orkney Ramblers going forward.

2. Adoption of the minutes from 8 November 2016

The minutes were adopted, being proposed by Hugh Halcro-Johnston and seconded by Anne Gascoigne.

3. Matters Arising

Car park at Standing Stones of Stenness

Council officers are in contact with the landowner and are confident of progress this year. A works instruction has been issued to fill the potholes to make the car park useable. All agreed that progress was good as the area is become an eyesore.

St Magnus Way

Members would appreciate an update on progress given the breadth of interest in the project.

Action: Barbara to ask David McNeil to give a follow-up talk

Hunda access

Some concerns have been raised by the new landowner about parking, and in the community by those who have accessed the land. It was noted that the landowner is not looking to stop access on foot to Hunda but the main issue is ensuring members of the public use the designated parking area and not park in the farmyard or block field gates, and some signage on this has been installed by the landowner.

5. Outdoor Access Strategy

Ross reported a successful consultation on the strategy, taking into consideration views of the forum, members of the public and partner organisations. A stakeholder workshop was held after which the strategy was updated and approved at the Development and Infrastructure committee in February followed by ratification at the General meeting in March. The document is being prepared and will be available on the council website shortly.

There was excellent collaboration involved in getting the strategy updated with a high level of engagement from forum representatives and individual members. The strategy is an ambitious document and it will take time to achieve the goals set out but it gives a road-map as to how to achieve these goals over the next few years. The workplan for the strategy will be a standing item on the forum agendas going forward.

6. Annual Joint NAF and LAFs meeting, Fri 17 March 2017

Anne attended this event at the SNH centre in Battleby, Perth and found the event a great way to meet a wide range of people from a variety of organisations. Most other forums appeared to send a representative on a regular basis, whether an access officer or an access forum member. Some forums are active and enthusiastic with good attendance and some are not fully-functioning. The day began with a session on enjoying the outdoors with dogs and Anne gave some detail on the points raised in this session.

Five breakout groups were created in the afternoon and Anne chose to join the one discussing funding. The most enlightening fact of this was that access officers in many other local authorities spend up to 90% of their time on funding applications. Maintenance was part of the highways section and disputes dealt with by the legal section.

Discussion then took place on various aspects raised at the meeting, such as the importance of engagement with community councils and allowing regular takers of access to feel ownership and responsibility of part of a path or route and the benefits that can have. Ian explained that through the Empowering Communities project small works are now being dealt with in Papa Westray by the community council: when he identifies work required he informs the community council who then put the work out to tender. The tender is awarded, works carried out by a local contractor and a member of the community council visits the site to check the work has been carried out to a suitable standard. Thanks were paid to Anne for representing OLAF at the meeting.

Action: Barbara to write to NHSO to ask them to consider representation of OLAF

7. Election of new Chairperson

Leslie advised of his intention to step down as Chair, in particular due to the upcoming Local Government Election. Informal discussion took place and it was agreed to defer the item to a future meeting.

8. Remuneration of Secretary

The secretary left the room for discussion to take place.
It was unanimously agreed to recommend 5% increase to the Council.

9. AOCB

Simon described some situations he had recently found himself in regarding his dogs and the reactions made by members of the public; this was noted by members present.

A query was raised about the status of the access officer post and it was confirmed that Ross's post has been extended for a further year to 31 March 2018. All were in support of the huge contribution and huge difference Ross has and is making to the forum.

Victor brought up a question on how members felt about the usage of signs warning members of the public not to walk through fields with dogs while lambing is ongoing and suchlike. Members were of the opinion that warning the public of the reasons why they were asked to take an alternative route was supporting responsible access to the countryside and had no objection to sensible usage of signage.

11. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will include the AGM and will be held on Tuesday 13 June 2017 in the Evie Community Room. The usual walk will take in part of the St Magnus Way.

Leslie Manson declared an interest in the Deerness access issue and left the room prior to discussion taking place; Anne Gascoigne took the Chair for this last item.

4. Update on access issue in Deerness

Ross gave some background on the matter for the benefit of our new representatives and advised that an earth heap around 3 to 4-foot-high had appeared after the digging out of a drain – again about 4-foot-deep and with steep walls. The works obstruct the path and while the access legislation allows digging of land to install drains it requires the ground to be reinstated within 14 days. *Action: Ross will provide an update via email in due course*