

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

Wednesday 6 December 2017  
St Magnus Centre, Kirkwall

## Present:

Cllr Steve Sankey	Elected Member of Orkney Islands Council, Chair
Hugh Halcro-Johnston	Scottish Land and Estates
Anne Gascoigne	Orkney Field Club, Vice Chair
Ken Lawson	Scottish Government's Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate
Iain Talbot	Orkney Ramblers
Ian Robertson	Orkney Ramblers
Simon Treasure	Orkney Tourism Group
Ross Irvine	Orkney Islands Council
Victor Muir	National Farmers Union
Ian Wilkins	Orkney Islands Council
Sandra Miller	Historic Environment Scotland Ranger Service
Sian Evans	Historic Environment Scotland
Ann Marwick	Orkney Heritage Society
Pat Shields	Access Panel Orkney
Emma Neave-Webb	Sanday Ranger Service
Jessica Jones	NHS Orkney
Barbara Scollay	Secretary
Amy King	Scottish National Heritage (for item 4)
Sarah Sankey	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (for item 4)

## **1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Alan Leitch, Liz Dennison and Jan Blatchford.

## **2. Adoption of the minutes from 6 September 2017**

Some adjustments were made to the text in paragraphs two and three of section 4, Outdoor Access Strategy Workplan, after which the minutes were adopted, being proposed by Steve Sankey and seconded by Hugh Halcro-Johnston.

## **3. Matters Arising**

None not already on the agenda.

## **4. Orkney Native Wildlife Project**

Sarah Sankey and Amy King gave a comprehensive run-through on the issue of stoats in Orkney and an introduction to the Orkney Native Wildlife Project. The first sightings of stoats were from two different areas in 2010, Wideford Hill and South Ronaldsay. Attempts to remove the stoats were made and appeared to be fairly successful in South Ronaldsay as there were no further sightings there until several years later. Unfortunately, the stoats were not fully removed, and they have now multiplied and spread very quickly to all areas of the mainland and linked isles. There is concern that the stoats, being very effective and wasteful killers, will be detrimental to various species of native wildlife and could even cause extinction of species from the area.

A consultant with experience of stoat eradication in New Zealand was commissioned to carry out a feasibility study and their conclusion was that it would be possible to eradicate stoats and keep them out of Orkney. The major part of the project is an eradication scheme with kill-traps around every 250 metres (10,000 traps in all), and the use of trained dogs to seek out trap-shy stoats and in areas where traps cannot be deployed. HLF funding has been obtained and an application for match funding submitted to EU Life that the team are waiting to hear the outcome on.

At the present time the project is in the development stage and community engagement is a key part of Amy King's work to get the Orkney population on board with the project, get them interested in monitoring local wildlife and participating in events, talks, questionnaires etc. Since August biosecurity trapping has been taking place at five areas along the coast with traps checked every two to three weeks.

Sarah explained about the proposed development of biosecurity measures and a land access protocol that is in development and needs input from landowners and members of the public. Currently RSPB and SNH are the partner agencies, and are looking to get OIC on board as a further partner next year. Weekly *Stoat Snippet* news items are published on the RSPB Orkney Facebook page, but an Orkney Native Wildlife Project Facebook page is in development. A Q&A session followed with an opportunity to view and get a demonstration of the traps that are planned for use.

**Action:** Barbara to circulate briefing provided by Sarah Sankey and link to questionnaire

## **5. Historic Environment Scotland update**

The wet and mild winters we've been having in Orkney are causing issues with the ground at the Ring of Brodgar along with the volume of visitors. In 2015 a small section of the ring was closed off, but the barriers were ignored so in 2016 more robust fencing was installed and this proved more successful. In 2017 a new area was cordoned-off and in the last few weeks the whole inside path has been fenced off to allow the ground to recover. Extensive drainage measures have been installed and the turf replaced, and the area will remain closed until early spring 2018. It is likely that parts of the site will be closed off in a similar fashion each year to allow recovery, but it is very much business as usual at the site and the regular tours etc are taking place.

**Action:** Barbara to circulate briefing provided by HES

## **6. Outdoor Access Strategy Workplan/Core Path Plan Review**

The workplan has been adopted by the Council and will be a standing item at each OLAF meeting. The main item action at present is the Core Path Plan Review and the informal consultation carried out earlier this year obtained a good number of responses from individuals and organisations. Officers had intended to present the findings to committee in November but have deferred to February 2018 to allow full consideration of all the responses, and replies to these to be made.

After the committee meeting in February 2018 there will be a period of formal consultation, amendments to the plan, and further down the line, adoption of the revised core path plan. The next OLAF meeting will likely take place after the committee meeting so there will be more details available for the next meeting.

## **7. Maintenance update**

The bridge at the Bu of Orphir was damaged and is not safe to use although it is possible to cross at low tide via the beach. Options have been reviewed but some of the costs are high and budgets are being looked at to see if another source of funding is available to cover the costs, otherwise Ian may have to spend around half of his maintenance budget for next year on fixing this one issue, which will have the knock-on effect of a much-reduced budget available for other maintenance required across the year in all other areas.

## **8. OLAF event**

The aim of the event, to take place in 2018, would be to focus on access law and its revisions, and how it affects Orkney. An opportunity also presents itself to include the Orkney Native Wildlife Project within the event, to further engage with landowners. After some discussion it was agreed that a date in early May would be best, before Folk Festival and ideally tying in with the Orkney Nature Festival if it goes ahead this year.

A suggestion was made for the venue to be the Cottisgarth Hide with shuttles from Finstown, and, to allow access for those with physical disabilities, permission will be sought to use vehicles to

transport people up to the hide. There is around £3,000 in the OLAF bank account at present available to fund aspects of the planned event.

**Action:** Steve to speak to RSPB about permission to use vehicles at the Cottisgarth site

**Action:** Steve to speak to RSPB about Orkney Nature Festival

## **9. AOCB**

It was noted that there appears to be a lack of recent minutes available on the National Access Forum website and Amy King will enquire about this matter.

The annual joint National Access Forum/Local Access Forums meeting will take place at Battleby on Friday 16 March.

## **10. Date of next meeting**

Wednesday 7 March at 7pm in the St Magnus Centre.