

ABERDEENSHIRE LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF MEETING 93

Monday, 17th June 2024, 6.00pm

(Deferred from 3rd June 2024)

Microsoft Teams meeting

Present: Gerald Banks, Paul Davison, Ken Gordon, Gordon McKilligan, Gordon Prentice, Ruth Riddell, Graham Smith (*pt mtg*), Neil Taylor, Cllr. Iris Walker (*pt mtg*), Henry Webb, Chris York (Chair). **Council officers present:** Fiona Chapman, Bridget Freeman.

Abbreviations: A/O Access Officer(s); KHub -- Knowledge Hub; S/G Sub-group.

Item	Subject	Action
1	<p>Welcome, apologies, introductions, deputising, etc.</p> <p>a) Welcome. b) Apologies – Anouk Kloppert.</p> <p>No declarations of interest.</p>	
2	<p>Approval of Minutes from Meeting 92 Deferred (see “92/4 Daviot” below). Matters arising <i>Woodland paths</i> PD questioned apparently over-engineered path construction in Corsee Wood, Banchory, adversely affecting informal woodland paths. While accepting that informal paths might need more frequent routine maintenance, he asked if there were guidelines for path specification. CY advised that Paths For All (PFA) has provided information on lowland path construction; also, specifications are stipulated in funding conditions and reflect anticipated user needs. Active Travel might be involved at Corsee. A recent change to standard specification has increased standard path width to 1.8m – as part of the Improving Public Access (IPA) scheme.</p> <p>Relevant action points</p> <p>92/6 <i>Turriff Show</i> -- “the sheep” In store at Mintlaw; to be actioned.</p> <p>92/6 <i>Training for LAFs</i> The National Access Forum (NAF) has advised CY that training resources for LAFs are to have space on the NAF website.</p> <p>92/4 <i>Dogs and livestock</i> See Item 4 (3) below.</p> <p>92/4 <i>Daviot equestrian issue</i> CY noted that RR’s input to the previous meeting was in response to KG’s email on the subject – details of which were not provided to that meeting. Consequently the draft Minute appeared to be one-sided. At the present meeting, members agreed to CY’s proposal that he should circulate, for members’ approval, a summary of KG’s input with a view to the Minute being augmented accordingly. For details of KG’s original input and resulting discussion, see Item 4 (2) below.</p>	<p>CY</p> <p>CY</p> <p>CY</p>
3	<p>Planning for activities, events, training, information</p> <p><i>Turriff Show (4-5 August 2024)</i> CY emphasised the need for the stand to be staffed by at least 2 people at all times. Including input from the present meeting the current complement is as follows:</p> <p>Sat 3/8/24: CY to transport gear and to set-up.</p> <p>Sun 4/8/24: KG all day; BF most of day; CY for the morning.</p> <p>Mon 5/8/24: FC and BF to divide the day between them.</p> <p>Mon 5/8/24, pm + take down: HW, CY.</p>	

	<p>CY will look into tickets in discussion with BF. In advance of the event CY will brief those involved. GMcK and RR can attend at various times but cannot commit to staffing. Funding for the stand and the new information banners has been provided by Aberdeenshire Council. Design and print is in hand with Turriff Printers (BF).</p>	<p>CY CY BF</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>Update on activities and events attended by members since previous meeting <i>Community representatives – Daviot</i> [During discussion under Item 2 above, KG reported that there is a depth of feeling among Daviot Community Trust (DCT) directors regarding the path situation. The matter needs to be resolved before it becomes a serious issue in the community. He felt that ALOAF could help. While infrastructure solutions are potentially straightforward, dialogue with equestrian users has not been possible. The paths were constructed according to PFA guidelines]. In further discussion, RR has contacted the British Horse Society (BHS) but no response yet – perhaps their enquiries have been unsuccessful. Mindful of the distinction between the status of individual horse riders and that of the livery stable business, CY asked if DCT has contacted individual riders. KG advised that he is not a director of DCT, but the Trust had written to the livery stable asking for consideration for other users, including moving onto adjacent grass when passing other path users. The main issues are (1) disturbance of the quarry-dust path surface, and (2) horse poo, which causes issues for wheeled users and children. Riders involved claim that there is a safety issue if they dismount to clear poo, due to reduced ability to control the horse. KG noted that a local farm provides equestrian trails with jumps, etc. but at a charge to the user, while the paths on Daviot Estate (which includes those upgraded by DCT) are a free resource. In hopes of a compromise, KG feels that mediation by ALOAF could improve matters – failing this, he sees a risk of escalation. CY clarified that mediation brings two sides together but it is then up to the parties involved to find solutions as part of that process (rather than ‘solutions’ being arbitrated by ALOAF. If the BHS does not get a response, perhaps there might then be a role for ALOAF? RR noted flaws on both sides of the dispute: (1) it is incorrect for riders to claim that riders who have dismounted to clear poo have less control of the horse; (2) damage to path surface can also be caused by mountain bikes. However, KG observed that the DCT network is not of interest to mountain bikers, cycle use being of a more relaxed nature there. RR advised that where a group of horse riders is involved, it is important to determine whether it comprises individuals who happen to be riding together – in which case each of them has responsibility for their own actions; or whether, alternatively, the group is an “escorted ride” – which implies responsibility bearing on the organisation concerned. CY observed that it would be useful to know whether riders are resident in the village. He recommended that BHS be advised that it would be best if BHS could successfully engage with equestrian users, but failing this ALOAF would be willing to help. He hoped to avoid a situation where the A/O might need to officially intervene as an access issue. He suggested that RR should press BHS for a response to her enquiry, and if BHS is unable to make headway, ALOAF could then offer to meet separately with each of the disputing parties, with the ultimate goal of bringing the parties together. KG</p>	<p>RR (Done)</p>

favoured this proposed course of action, with the proviso that he was too close to the problem for him to take part in the proposed mediation. He observed that Daviot Estate is extensive enough to potentially accommodate routes for equestrian and non-equestrian users.

Access users / Community representatives

Deer grids and fencing RR reported a recent issue at Tarland where deer fencing and an associated deer grid had been installed without a bypass gate for horses – the contractor being unaware of equestrian use; while the terrain restricted available space for a bypass. Happily, the landowner has now made a bypass, but it was an example of a general lack of awareness of equestrian matters. Deer grids are a potential issue generally, their installation being prompted by the threat of high deer numbers to new plantations. A grid is a death-trap for a spooked horse. For FLS forests, NT advised that they try to minimise fencing etc. despite high deer numbers. For privately-owned woodlands, grant applications are administered by Scottish Forestry (SF). BF informed the meeting that the UK Forestry Standard, which SF’s funding role observes, has been updated to say that “there shall be provision for some public access, subject only to limited exemptions”. BF placed relevant link in Teams Chat window.

Meldrum Paths Group GS reported that 1000 path map leaflets have been distributed, and the leaflet is available online. 8 ebikes are being procured. Aberdeenshire Council is consulting on links between Oldmeldrum/Daviot and Inverurie – closing date for responses 4/7/24. Further information on KHub. GS affirmed his continued interest in the Core Paths Plan.

Deeside Way Complimenting local path groups on their work, PD reported a notice that the Deeside Way is closed at Peterculter until 11/24 due to fallen trees. It was unclear to the meeting whether the section concerned is in the City or Shire. FC not aware of the closure but **will update if she hears anything.**

Westhill GP reported that £220,000 funding has been awarded for upgrading paths in Denman Park, including 2 new bridges; completion date early July 2024. **He will update ALOAF in due course.** Meanwhile, the sought-for drainage advice for a separate location had been obtained. It is now up to the factor and homeowners to resolve that problem.

Daviot link For the ongoing consultation on the Oldmeldrum / Inverurie link, KG had had to remind Aberdeenshire Council that links with Daviot were also part of the original scheme. This has now been taken on board. The links are critical for avoiding busy roads. Once established they will also allow users to reach beyond Daviot on the existing quieter road network.

Land managers

Scottish Government (SG) funding As a local member involved with the SG’s Rural Community Local Lead Fund (successor to Aberdeenshire LAG and with continuing local coordination by Aberdeenshire Council), GB advised that the Fund hopes to continue this year in its role of assisting path groups and addressing problems, as per 2023.

Unrealistic SG standards for IPA infrastructure GB reported that farmers in the Improving Public Access (IPA) scheme have found it impossible to source picnic tables that match the high specification set by the SG.

FC

GP

	<p><u>No IPA funding this year</u> GB reported frustration among farmers due to lack of IPA funding for the current year, despite being willing to build paths and link communities. CY had in the past received assurances from SG that the IPA scheme would continue. There is also an issue for this and other environmental schemes regarding the limited number of years for which a project will be funded.</p> <p><u>Dogs and livestock</u> GMcK reported that this is an ongoing issue. Farmers can face negative responses when challenging irresponsible dog owners. Gathering effective evidence is frustrating, because incidents are rarely filmed – Cammie Wilson’s graphic social media posts being a positive exception. Pilot schemes for DNA registering for dogs in parts of England and Wales may offer some hope for improvement. A dog that chases livestock once will probably repeat the offence if given the chance. It was noted later in discussion that a dog in chase mode is uncontrollable. Access through livestock is especially contentious. Farmers are requesting that the advice for dogs to be kept under close control should be changed to require dogs to be kept on a lead. It was noted that cows with calves can be fiercely protective. CY asked if the Forum could collate incidents already recorded, for use at the Turriff Show, where the public could be asked “Is there a way we can stop these incidents?”. (Later, RR mentioned a video of sheep being chased, which could be useful at the Show). GMcK enquired whether a meeting between ALOAF representatives and the NFUS would be useful. Members supported this idea – GMcK to follow up with NFUS. In discussion it was observed that there is a general trend towards “naming and shaming” on social media, something which might possibly be beneficial in regard to the dogs issue. Reporting of crime is encouraged by Police Scotland. Also, while farmers do complain among themselves, there is a lack of dialogue between the farming sector and dog owners, which needs to be redressed. Finally, it must be noted that livestock is of considerable financial value.</p> <p><i>Agencies</i></p> <p><u>Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS)</u> NT reported that the use of banksmen has enabled the Gordon Way to be kept open during forest operations. Meanwhile, (on a one-off basis) he has assisted local volunteers in manual clearance work on the Elsie Mounth, and is hoping that the local community council will receive a formal FLS permission (similar to an example at Bennachie) to continue such work using hand tools. GP noted that PFA has offered grants for power tools, and wondered if FLS could offer relevant training. NT commented that the potential for power tool use by volunteers on FLS land is harder to address due to the Health and Safety context.</p> <p><i>Chair (regarding North East Scotland Coastal Trail [NESCT])</i></p> <p>CY had attended 2 meetings of the NESCT which is moving towards becoming a SCIO charity with the aim of coordinating and managing the Trail, including fund-raising and Trail development. CY has encouraged the organisation to focus on the more practical aim of coordinating local groups rather than attempting to manage the whole Trail itself. Previous work should be recognised. Climate change and coastal erosion pose challenges in respect of sustainability and use of resources.</p>	<p>ALL</p> <p>GMcK</p>
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5	<p>Aberdeenshire Council update</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Response to ALOAF's letter to Council leader and CEO.</i> This gave assurance that outdoor access is taken seriously; and ALOAF's emphasis on the Council's duty in this respect was seen to be helpful. Also, it was hoped (although could not be guaranteed) to maintain the complement of 2 A/Os permanently. CY observed that ALOAF's expressions of support for the A/Os was helpful to managers. He saw the allocation of funding for participation at the Turriff Show as a successful result. GMcK said that Aberdeenshire was fortunate to have 2 A/Os available to contact, in contrast to some other authorities. Commending the Council for their support, CY noted that ALOAF should keep up the pressure for resourcing the A/Os. 2. <i>Caseload</i> FC continues to deal with a mix of old and new cases in her area, especially in south Marr. A routine section 11 application, on which ALOAF will be consulted, is being processed for the forthcoming Grampian Forest Rally. Regarding caseload, CY encouraged provision of statistics as this would enable ALOAF to understand when progress is slow and when successes have been achieved – and thus offer support and praise as appropriate. BF resolved 41 cases, including some in south Aberdeenshire, in the year to 31/3/24. More recently the obstruction to woodland access near Turriff has been resolved. The Council now has no Section 14 notices outstanding. <i>Staffing</i> FC's current post runs until the end of September but it is hoped that this will be extended. The closing date for applications for the Formartine Ranger post is 21/6/24. 3. <i>SOAN</i> The AGM and networking event is on 14/11/24 at Battleby. Suggestions for the Agenda (e.g. topics for breakout groups) should be emailed BF in time for a SOAN meeting in the week beginning 24/6/24. BF sees a need for SOAN to integrate more with LAFs. 4. <i>General Election</i> Council staff response times will be slower for a while due to many staff being engaged in Election duties. 	ALL
6	<p>Operating Principles and membership -- Opportunities for wider membership and corresponding / affiliate members. CY requested all to suggest organisations to be invited for corresponding / affiliate membership of ALOAF, with a view to them submitting input to ALOAF and receiving Forum Minutes. All community councils would be an obvious choice. Other examples might be community paths groups, over-50s walking groups, other user groups. Suggestions arising in discussion included water access users (CY to contact canoeing clubs); river fishings (action CY); National Sheep Association (action GMcK); SL & E (A rep from a large estate would be ideal -- CY has been persevering; GMcK to enquire locally); outdoor swimmers (action KG); NTS (action CY). BF suggested that ALOAF might want to produce a leaflet to encourage recruitment and signing-up to a mailing list. CY said that the 17/6/24 Minute, once approved, could be sent out to potential corresponding / affiliate members.</p>	ALL CY; CY GMcK GMcK KG;CY CY
7	<p>Core Paths Plan</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Update on WSP Project</i> CY asked for comments on the WSP report which had been distributed to members. Discussion included: 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disappointment with the emphasis on existing core paths, without mention of joining up the network. CY advised that this was not in WSP's remit, which was to audit existing paths, although perhaps the analysis section could have mentioned joining-up as an opportunity. This need not detract from ALOAF's role regarding core paths. • GP appreciated the recommendation for upgrading two paths at Westhill, which would potentially help make a case for funding. He asked if he could engage with the Council or WSP to discuss further with a view to possible community council and volunteer involvement in the future. BF cautioned that the report's data was exclusively shared with ALOAF so could not be disseminated meantime. Also clarification would be needed as to whether such a project was to be treated as emanating from ALOAF or from elsewhere. It would be up to Malcolm White (MW) to decide whether GP's idea could be progressed. CY to contact MW. • Concern was expressed regarding recommendations for path lighting, which in the countryside would adversely affect the dark skies experience. The consensus of the meeting was that lighting should not be encouraged outwith settlements, and within settlements it should only be provided where there was a genuine case on grounds of safety. <p><i>2. Designating and de-designating core paths</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening the discussion, CY asked whether a coastal core path that physically disappears due to erosion should be de-designated; and if so, how would this equate with core paths being seen as necessary for the community? It was noted that riverside paths have similar erosion problems. Apart from abandonment, practical options offered in discussion included rebuilding in situ if practicable, or moving the path back, which could involve fencing adjustments and possible compensation to the farmer. It was noted that people want to see the coast and enjoy being on the interface between land and sea. Perhaps it should be accepted that the alignment of such paths will move over time, as per sections of the English coastline, although in some instances "moving back" may be impossible for a variety of reasons? CY identified the dilemma, for any particular site, as being a choice between de-designation due to physical loss of the path, or preservation of the core path concept (in the face of public demand) typically on a re-located route alignment. • CY then noted another scenario where a core path is found to be "overgrown and inaccessible". It was suggested that a survey of user numbers would be appropriate. The point was made that a path can be overgrown for part of the year but seasonally accessible when the vegetation dies back. WSP's audit maps show the dates of their visits to each path. It was suggested that local paths groups could monitor conditions and report back to ALOAF. • On the topic of designation of new core paths, concern was expressed that WSP's approach favoured applying PFA criteria to all core paths, which might not be appropriate in some situations. CY emphasised that not every core path has to be suitable for all types of user. Authority for designation of new core paths, rests with the Council, not ALOAF. However, CY suggested that ALOAF could at least look at "what is the 	CY
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	<p>absolute minimum for linking things up”. This could be an area for the sub-group to see what might be done, if anything (subject to someone re-starting the sub-group). It was felt that it would be more fruitful to concentrate on improving path connections, rather than de-designation. CY observed that lack of use of a path does not mean that the route does not have potential for the future. It was suggested that ALOAF could base its approach on the recommendations in the WSP report. Discussing the use of maps to identify missing links, a suggested starting point could be the Google mapping which shows where people are walking.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now that many years have passed since the introduction of the concept of core paths, CY wondered if people now had a better idea of what core paths are, but it was suggested in discussion that very few people did. Responding to BF’s idea that the question should be put to visitors at the Turriff Show, CY will prepare a suitable survey procedure, while being careful not to imply that ALOAF is doing a review of core paths. • CY will ascertain when the WSP report will become publically available. 	<p>?</p> <p>CY CY</p>
8	Casework (CLOSED SESSION)	
9	AOCB No items raised.	
10	Provisional dates of 2024 meetings 2 nd September / 4 th November.	