

# ABERDEENSHIRE LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM

## MINUTES OF MEETING 84

Monday 25 April 2022, 6.00pm

### Virtual Meeting

**Present:** Gerald Banks, Ken Gordon, Wilson Irvine [*part meeting*], Jonathan Kitching [*part meeting*], Anouk Kloppert [*part meeting*], Gordon Prentice, Ruth Riddell, Graham Smith [*part meeting*], Neil Taylor, Henry Webb, Chris York (Chair).

**Council officers:** Bridget Freeman (A/O).

**Guest observer:** Yvonne Lyburn. (MSc Land Economy student).

*Abbreviations:* **A/C** Aberdeenshire Council; **A/O** Access Officer(s); Hub -- Knowledge Hub; **S/G** Sub-group.

Item	Subject	Action
1	<p><b>Apologies</b> Mark Andrew, Gordon McKilligan.</p> <p><b>Introductions</b> Yvonne Lyburn – studying for MSc Land Economy, University of Aberdeen; interest in visitor management. CY can advise if any questions.</p> <p><b>Deputising</b> Gerald Banks – Land Management (NFUS).</p> <p><b>Declarations of interest</b> (None).</p>	
2	<p><b>Approval of Minutes from Meeting 83</b> Prop. HW, sec. RR.</p> <p><b>Matters arising (relevant action points)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>3(3) Community reps. update (CY)</b> Still to contact community councils, but with much storm damage remediated the access situation has eased somewhat; but issues with access and livestock are still relevant.</li> <li>• <b>4 Countryside Live subgroup</b> Has met. See item 5 below for update.</li> <li>• <b>5(5) Core paths – “proposed” routes to be listed on Hub (CY)</b> To do.</li> </ul>	
3	<p><b>Membership – update on current situation</b></p> <p><b>Community representatives</b> CY welcomed new rep. Ken Gordon and reserve Gordon Prentice. Community sector now has now full complement. [Graham Smith and Paul Davidson have also joined as community representatives, but were not in the meeting at the time]</p> <p><b>Access users</b> John Hughes has sadly passed away recently. CY suggested that the resulting vacancy for an Access User rep. might be sought from the mountain biking community. He has already been contacted by a biker in this connection. JK affirmed that the sector is aware of the value of such representation. Prospective sources include Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland local officer, Aberdeen Trails Association, local clubs, community trail groups, local individual mountain bikers. In addition to gaining an “affiliated” user, JK suggested seeking a rep. from among the “hard-to-reach” individual users; but discussion favoured a single biking rep. vacancy. RR suggested that in addition to this, a rep. might also be sourced from among the wildlife photography community, who are conversant with the need to protect wildlife from disturbance, e.g. by dogs. Contact might be possible via Facebook group “NE Scotland Wildlife” at <a href="https://en-gb.facebook.com/groups/415568265190521/about/">https://en-gb.facebook.com/groups/415568265190521/about/</a> It was agreed to <b>seek 1 biking rep. and 1 wildlife photography rep. Action: CY.</b> [Later discussion noted the growth of wild swimming. It would be good to recognise this in ALOAF’s contact list. <b>AK to consult with her contacts</b>].</p>	<p><b>CY</b> <b>AK</b></p>

	<p><b>Land managers</b> CY reported that Adam Wallace, former ALOAF Chair, sadly has passed away. This left ALOAF short of a Land Management rep., but at the Chair's request Gordon McKilligan has agreed to transfer into that role, for which he is well-qualified. SLE has not come forward with a rep. despite CY's requests and ALOAF's duty to ensure balanced representation among the access sectors. SLE's absence creates a vacancy for a further Land Management rep. Stakeholders suggested included private forestry companies, and large estates with forestry interests. <b>NT to contact CY if he knows of any likely contacts. All to advise CY of possible candidates.</b></p>	<p>NT ALL</p>
4	<p><b>Update on activities and events attended by members of ALOAF since previous meeting</b></p> <p>1) <b>Access users</b> <i>Coastal Partnership</i> – no recent formal meeting, but HW has attended a walk led by Alison Simpson. <i>Equestrian issue</i> RR is aware of an incident where riders were obstructed by a fishing ghillie, but this may no longer be an active issue. <i>Bourtie and District Community Council's</i> stand at an open day in the Oldmeldrum area had a good response to their responsible access message. <i>Access on water</i> JK reported that NatureScot's (NS's) review of access at Loch Kinord had been responded to by the Scottish Canoe Association, but NS went ahead with seasonal access restrictions aimed at protecting wildlife. The site is in the Cairngorms National Park (not ALOAF's area) but JK observed that as a general lesson, wildlife interests tend to be better represented than access interests. HW noted that NS had reviewed all water bodies in Aberdeenshire, but sailing at the Loch of Skene had not been restricted.</p> <p>2) <b>Community representatives</b> [See item 3 above].</p> <p>3) <b>Land managers</b> <i>Improving Public Access</i> GB reported that the deadline for 2022 grant applications is 29<sup>th</sup> April. There is concern that most standard payment rates have not been uplifted since 2014, while actual costs, e.g. for fencing and aggregate, have been rising significantly. CY noted that a revised scheme is expected in 2025. <i>Storm damage</i> NT reported that the remaining tree clearance work is governed by availability of harvester machinery. Back o' Bennachie remains closed; work ongoing at Pitfichie; starting shortly at Dunnottar Woods and Scolty.</p> <p>4) <b>Moray Council</b> CY reported that Moray's Outdoor Access Forum has sought a joint meeting with ALOAF. CY declined a face to face meeting due to the travel implications, but favoured a virtual meeting. BF noted that Moray's Forum had been struggling during the pandemic, and hopes for guidance from ALOAF. Agreed <b>CY to progress with Moray.</b></p>	<p>CY</p>
5	<p><b>Planning for activities, events, training, information</b></p> <p><b>Mediation Training</b> A 3-hr online session has been arranged with Scottish Mediation for any interested ALOAF reps. and reserves. Topics include mediation and conflict resolution – processes, pitfalls, potential to help resolve difficulties. 3 dates offered -- 14<sup>th</sup> June 2022 is the most likely. <b>All are invited to attend</b> (5 members plus Bridget so far) – <b>contact BF or CY.</b></p> <p><b>Countryside Live 2022 – Sunday 29 May; Mackie's Farm.</b> Ideas from 26/2/22 sub-group meeting are now on the Hub (CY to arrange access for anyone not yet on Hub). A further meeting in the past week considered arrangements for the event. The upsurge in countryside visitor numbers,</p>	<p>ALL</p>

<p>causing overcrowding, along with site closures due to storm damage, means that not only should visitors behave responsibly, they should also be prepared with a “Plan B” if their preferred destination is unavailable. Benefits to mental health are also a feature. Discussion at the current meeting centred on ways to get the message across to access users and land managers. Points included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to ensure land managers know where to source appropriate signage.</li> <li>• Need for awareness that some routine land management practices can inadvertently cause access problems. The Outdoor Access Scotland website <a href="https://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/">https://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/</a> can help here.</li> <li>• People prefer to go where they will feel welcome.</li> </ul> <p>At the event, it is suggested that 2 people staff the ALOAF stand, and 2 circulate among visitors, with the emphasis in both situations to be on having conversations rather than on information boards. Examples of topics could include: barriers to accessing the outdoors, greenspace use, responsible access, dogs and sheep. The questionnaire previously used at the Turriff Show could be revised. A couple of new posters could work as conversation starters, along with the Ranger Service’s display boards which BF will source from Gordon House. CY will arrange new banners with a contact supplied by Mark Andrew. ALOAF artwork needed -- <b>action BF</b>. Nothing needed from Mintlaw storage. HW recommended including the core paths information folder (previously used with success at the Turriff Show). <b>BF has this and will supply. She will also supply ALOAF logo file to CY.</b> CY suggested supplementing this with a QR code giving access to Aberdeenshire Council’s core paths webpages. Stand to be set up by 9am; event closes 5pm. Tent and table are booked for a location in the Arboretum. More volunteers are needed to cover a morning or afternoon shift to complete the rota, currently consisting of KG, AK and CY. New sign-ups GB (afternoon), GS, HW, possibly BF. CY and AK will meet again; <b>AK will coordinate ALOAF volunteers and any further arrangements.</b> Discussion also focussed on handouts, giveaways, and branded clothing to identify Forum volunteers in crowd. Leaflets and giveaways were not favoured. BF advised that Council policy stipulates sustainable products only, with no plastics, where Council funding is involved in sourcing such items. Recognising that handing out lots of literature is not productive, CY recommended a simple card with message about rights and responsibilities along with a QR code linking to SOAC, and to webpages for Aberdeenshire’s core paths, and for ALOAF. JK recommended recent research by Visit Scotland on language appropriate to visitors’ ways of thinking, e.g to reach the “buzz-seeker” 18-34 age group, this being part of their Visitor Management Strategy. Further responsible access information for visitors is at <a href="https://www.visitscotland.com/about/responsible-tourism/">https://www.visitscotland.com/about/responsible-tourism/</a> and the Strategy itself is at <a href="https://www.visitscotland.org/binaries/content/assets/dot-org/pdf/about-us/what-we-do/a-visitor-management-strategy-for-scotland.pdf">https://www.visitscotland.org/binaries/content/assets/dot-org/pdf/about-us/what-we-do/a-visitor-management-strategy-for-scotland.pdf</a> In this connection <b>RR will send CY a British Horse Society one page summary of SOAC.</b> It was agreed to adopt JK’s suggestion of having pens and post-it notes available for ALOAF personnel to jot down any information</p>	<p>BF</p> <p>BF</p> <p>AK</p> <p>RR</p>
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	<p>to give to visitors during conversations. BF suggested that the notes could be ALOAF-branded. For clothing to identify ALOAF personnel in a crowd, it was agreed to provide ALOAF-branded high-vis vests of a design a bit above the basic utilitarian version. These could be used for future events too. <b>CY can enquire of two companies who may be able to supply;</b> and <b>[for the cards] Aberdeenshire Council has an Aberdeenshire printer on its list of suppliers.</b> The sub-group (Mark Andrew, AK, CY and new volunteer KG) <b>will meet again within the next two weeks.</b> In response to a query from KG, CY advised that the visitor profile at Countryside Live tends to be access user families, while at the Turriff Show there is a high proportion of land managers, hence differences in ALOAF's offering at the two events. <b>Relevant documents for Countryside Live will be put on the Hub (action CY).</b> As a side issue the relative merits of the Hub, MS Teams, and a Google platform were discussed, with CY favouring MS Teams as a future platform for sharing and accessing ALOAF business in the most user-friendly way. <b>Turriff Show 2022 – 31 July – 1 August</b> ALOAF has a new location near entrance – a smaller spot but with much higher footfall. Thanks to BF for arranging this. Success depends on finding means of attracting people to the stall. Some Countryside Live props may be useful. <b>CY to send "Let us meet" message to recruit volunteers</b> (RR can possibly attend). Apologies in advance from BF.</p>	<p><b>CY BF? S/G</b></p> <p><b>CY</b></p> <p><b>CY</b></p>
<b>6</b>	<p><b>Aberdeenshire Council update</b></p> <p><b>1) Access Officer post</b> Interviews have taken place and there is a preferred candidate. The post is a one-year fixed term contract, full time, starting end of June 2022. Meanwhile, BF continues as permanent, part time A/O, but with additional (until 31/3/23) 2.5 days/week on projects and access. CF observed that the above would equate to 2 full-time access posts. It was agreed that <b>once the new A/O is in post, ALOAF should thank the Council for their positive approach</b> in this regard.</p> <p><b>2) Seasonal Access Rangers</b> BF reported that, subject to NatureScot funding, the Council will employ 2 Rangers from end of June to end of October 2022, in coordination with the Visitor Management Plan for "hotspots". CY expressed appreciation for the Council's desire to continue appointing seasonal staff.</p> <p><b>3) Workload for Bridget</b> CY noted BF's considerable workload, being at present Aberdeenshire's only A/O. He asked members to be mindful of this, and assured BF of ALOAF's support if required.</p>	<p><b>CY</b></p>
<b>7</b>	<p><b>AOCB</b></p> <p><b>Shared space platforms</b> <b>GS and GB to be sent invitations to enable access to Hub.</b> Meanwhile, CY is considering other platforms that could offer an improved facility. <b>Agreed BF could set up MS Teams on Council server.</b></p>	<p><b>CY</b></p> <p><b>BF</b></p>
	<p><b>Dates of next meetings –</b>  27 June 2022 – 6pm, Bennachie Visitor Centre – "Face to face" meeting. <b>BF to book, and arrange sandwiches.</b> If space unavailable, 2nd choice would be Thainstone Mart.  <i>[Subsequent dates 5 September; 14 November Min. Sec.]</i></p>	<p><b>BF</b></p>