

**The Highland Council
Ross and Cromarty Local Access Forum**

Minute of Meeting held in the Council Offices, High Street, Dingwall on Wednesday 9 April 2014.

Present:-

Mr Robin Forrest (Chairman)
Mr Robin Chalmers
Mr Norman Chisholm
Ms Marj Donaldson
Mr Tom Forrest
Mr Fraser Fotheringham
Mr John MacKenzie
Mr Hector Munro
Mr Ian Cockburn
Ms Maxine Smith

In Attendance:

Mr Philip Waite, Access Officer, Planning and Development Service
Mr George Duff, Countryside Ranger and Long Distance Route Manager
Mrs Alison MacArthur, Administrative Assistant, Corporate Development Service

Mr George Duff was welcomed to the meeting as the Access Team line manager. .

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Dr Stewart Campbell.

2. Confirmation of Minutes

The Minute of the Meeting of 3 October 2014 was submitted and approved.

3. Highland Core Path Implementation Programme

It became evident, towards the end of 2013, that a number of projects throughout Highland would not be completed before the deadline of January 2014. A change request was submitted to Leader on two counts:

i) to extend the deadline; and

ii) to replace some projects with other projects that could be achieved within the extended deadline.

The change request was granted with a new deadline of 30 August 2014 and the replacement of some projects. Ross & Cromarty area was able to add two new projects at Tain Links and Torridon Shore path due to shortfalls in other areas..

Maps and photos were shown and updates were provided as follows:-

1) Signposting

The majority of signposts were now in place, with just five further posts required to complete the project.

2) Community Projects:

- Strathpeffer to Jamestown Path – the path had finally been completed just before Christmas. The path had been very well received in the area, and over 50 people had attended an official opening of the path. A people counter had shown that more people had used this path already than a similar path in Gairloch had been used in a year. The local community had taken on the maintenance of the path.
- Invergordon - Polish Memorial Circuit – After a long delay response had been received from the owner and the work had been completed in November. Due to a change of ownership the development plans for this area were no longer going ahead and the land was to be sold;
- Tain Links – one of the new projects to upgrade an existing old concrete path which had bad drainage and was covered in mud. New drainage was to be installed and the surface tarmacked. The contract was currently being finalised;
- Torridon Shore – a specification had been agreed with the landowner.

3) Leaflets and Panels

The Ross and Cromarty Disability Access Group booklet was printed following the last meeting and launched in December 2013 on World Disability Day. The booklet had been distributed to Service Points, Libraries, Community Centres and Health Centres. The booklet had been very well received.

The leaflet for Walks Around Strathpeffer and Contin would be in a different style due to the change of contractors. The leaflet had been sent to the designers to format.

The Community Council had requested that the Ullapool Walks Map be changed to a leaflet. Following discussion with the Community Council the extent and paths to be included had been decided

4) Community Training Day

The Community Training Day had 12 participants from 5 communities and those attending had been keen to survey and do minor maintenance on their core paths following the training.

4. Access Issues

i. Flowerdale, Gairloch Estate

Maps and photos were shown of the location.

The owners had been informed that as the new path involved engineering works, Planning Permission would be required. People in the area appeared to be content with the diversion and the planning process would give an opportunity for any public objections to be heard.

The forum **NOTED** the position and **AGREED** the diversion to the Core path RC19.01.

ii. Tallysow Path, Brahan Estate, Maryburgh

This path had been damaged by forest management. The Council had offered 50% of the cost of restoration but the Estate had not initially responded to this. A meeting had been arranged to attempt to achieve a solution to restore the path.

The forum **NOTED** the position.

iii. Ledgowan

Forum members discussed the ongoing problems with access on the Ledgowan Estate. There had been contradictory reports in the press including a Mr Brown who had publicised his point of view in the press and in blogs. The Council's solicitor had spoken at length with Mr Stephenson, the Estate representative, and Mr Stephenson had agreed a meeting on the 29 November. Mr G Duff and Mr P Waite had met with Mr Stephenson the day before a "protest march" had been held on the estate. A number of forum members were present to observe the protest. A letter received from Mr Simpson had been circulated with Mr P Waite's response stating the Forum's case. Members discussed the suggested text for signs on the estate.

Forum members then discussed enforcement action and whether to seek advice from the Council's solicitor on the next step with regard to the locked gates.

The forum **AGREED** to seek legal advice from the Council's solicitor in regard to taking enforcement action on the locked gates.

iv. Coire Church

The Access Officer informed members of a situation at Coire Church, Torridon, to which he had responded but he requested the views of the forum. A memorial for a former owner of Torridon Estate was in the grounds of the former church close to the core path. The church had now been sold and will be in the garden of a proposed house. The new owners are being reasonable and allowing access to the memorial although by a different and less convenient route.

The Community Council had applied 10-15 years ago for funding to replace the lettering on the memorial and had received this. The Community Council had not been willing to have the memorial moved.

Forum members discussed the planning application.. Planning permission was being sought to convert the church to a house and for an extension to the same. At the planning stage a condition could be added to the consent for fencing and access to the memorial as restricted access could be deemed detrimental to amenity use. The Community Council or Access Forum could request this condition.

Mr P Waite thanked members for their comments and the forum **AGREED** to write to the Planning Office and request a condition to allow continued access to the memorial.

5. National Access Forum Matters

The National Access Forum had met on 30 January 2014 and would meet again on the 7 May 2014.

A submission had been made to the Land Reform Review Group to look at the Land Reform Review Act which concentrated on land and tenancy leaving the access element to the National Access Forum.

This document requested a review of dispute resolution whether by mediation or through an arbitrator role.

The National Access Forum had submitted a letter to the Minister regarding funding for outdoor access and expressed disappointment in the proposals for the next SRDP. In the current scheme land owners could have applied for funding at a 70%. The Minister had responded to the letter and had put forward comments relating to other government funding and the LEADER element of the SRDP. A considerable spend had been allowed for transport areas and health promotion but infrastructure was still required. From experience of the Highland Core Path Improvement Programme we are aware that Leader funding would not be plain sailing and would hold a lot of bureaucracy.

Forum members then discussed a local issue at Dingwall canal level crossing. Pre-planning advice had been sought by Network Rail on a footbridge for this crossing. This crossing was presently very accessible but with steps it would be much less accessible. Members couldn't see a reason for this request as it was a slow section for trains coming into or leaving the Dingwall Train Station and the existing crossing was adequate.

The forum **AGREED** that the Access Officer should speak to Dingwall councillors about the Dingwall canal level crossing proposals.

5. Any Other Business

During discussion the following items were raised:-

- The Fyrish walk was a popular route but the car park was overflowing. Motorcyclists had been seen using this route.
- In relation to Udale there had been no specific communication;

Ms Marj Donaldson informed the forum that she was resigning from the Disability Access Group and this would be her last meeting. A new member of the Disability Access Group would attend future Access Forum meetings.

The Chairman thanked Ms Marj Donaldson for her exemplary work on the forum.

6. Date of Future Meeting

The next meeting was to be held on Thursday 2 October 2014 at 2.00 pm.

The meeting ended at 3.55 pm.