

Minutes of Meeting of the Sutherland Local Access Forum held in the Chamber, Drumbuie, Golspie on 5 November 2018 at 2pm.

Present: Ms K Currie, Councillor, Highland Council
 Mr A Dawson, Sutherland Access Panel
 Mrs F Gunn, Access Taker/User
 Mr D Hannah, Access Taker/User
 Mr J McGillivray, Councillor, Highland Council
 Mr J Ross, Access Taker/User, Scottish Canoe Association

In Attendance: Mr M Dent, Access Officer, Highland Council
 Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Highland Council

1. Apology

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr A Mackay.

2. Introductions

The Access Officer welcomed new members Ms K Currie, Mr A Dawson, Mr D Hannah and Mrs F Gunn to the Forum.

3. Appointment of Chair

Following discussion, it was **AGREED** to appoint Mr J Ross as Chair for the meeting and thereafter to consider the appointment of a permanent Chair at the next meeting.

4. Minutes of meeting of 6 March 2017

There had been circulated note of the meeting of 6 March 2017, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

Arising from the Minutes, a number of matters were raised, including the following:-

- there had been no access issues arising in relation the conversion of the Carbisdale Castle and the Access Officer intended to once again promote the Forest path. If communities had any concerns regarding the need to clear paths and bike trails in the Carbisdale area, then they be encouraged to contact Forestry Commission Scotland;
- in relation to the renovation of Balblair Cottage and extension of garden ground, a minor diversion of the route of the core path had been advertised and the local community council notified;

- the Forestry Commission had purchased land in the area of Camore Wood (not the Council as recorded in the minutes), and an update was provided on progress with formalising the access on the Evelix side;
- no further update was available regarding Rosehall House. The local community council had expressed concerns about core paths which ran in close proximity to properties. The Access Officer reported that he had not received any direct comments in relation to this path which he advised was an attractive route and provided good linkage. However, there was the potential to review this route in the future; and
- the Access Officer had discussed the issue of locked gates with Melvich Common Grazings. This was to prevent fly tipping which he considered to be reasonable and alternative routes into the common grazings were available. There had been no further contact from the parties who had raised this matter.

The Forum **NOTED** the updates.

5. **The Highland Council Core Paths Plan (Caithness and Sutherland) Amended**

There had been circulated a summary of comments and overview of proposed action types, together with the relevant maps following the consultation carried out on the Highland Council Core Paths Plan (Caithness and Sutherland) Amended.

During discussion, the following key points were raised in relation to the specific issues where feedback was being sought from the Forum:-

Map SU3e - Elphin

The Access Officer advised that two objections had been received in relation to core path SU17.07(C) details of which were provided in the summary of comments set out at Appendix 1.

The Forum **AGREED** that the Blar a Chuail to Uamh an Tartair caves section of the route should be retained and the Access Officer have further discussions with Mrs M Strang, Knockan Grazings Committee in relation to the maintenance of the route going forward.

Map SU4b and SU4c – Kylestrome to Achfary

The Access Officer highlighted the comments received in relation to core path reference SU25.05(C) details of which were provided in the summary of comments set out at Appendix 1.

The Forum **AGREED** that:-

- i. the proposed core path at the Kylestrome terminus as promoted in the amended plan (Map SU4b) should be retained; and
- ii. the amended core paths plan should be modified to promote an alternative terminus at Lochmore (Map SU4c) while continuing to ensure assertion of the existing public right of way.

Map SU18c - Embo

The Access Officer advised that in respect of SU09.20(C), the Trustees for the Firm of Embo Mains Farm, the previous owners of the land, had objected to this path. The current owner/operator of the pig had been notified but had not objected.

The Forum **AGREED** to proceed on the basis the route should be retained in the Plan and in the meantime the Access Officer have further discussions with the owner/operators of the pig unit, and also investigate the transport planning issues raised in relation to the path.

Map SU21b – Ardgay and Culrain

The Forum **AGREED** that in respect of SU03.05 and in view of concerns expressed by the Council's Transport Planning section, the Access Officer and Mr D Hannah investigate possible locations for parking improvements, the preferred option being that the route be retained in the Plan.

In respect of map SU26b, Glencalvie Lodge, the Estate would essentially fund the construction of an alternative path, away from the Lodge. In discussion, reference was made to the importance of ensuring the path was constructed and the new path was fully accessible for wheelchair users.

Thereafter the Forum **AGREED** that the amended core paths plan should be modified to promote an alternative route around Glencalvie Lodge while continuing to ensure assertion of the existing public right of way.

Map SU16c - Dunrobin

The Access Officer reported that in respect of SU12.25(C) his recommendation was that the modified core path be retained in the amended Plan. In response to questions, he confirmed that if approved by the Council, the Plan would be submitted to Scottish Ministers with Network Rail's objection remaining as an outstanding objection.

Thereafter, the Forum **AGREED** the remaining proposed actions set out in Appendix 1 as follows: (i) where there were outstanding objections but no proposed change to the Amended Core Paths Plan; and (ii) to modify the amended core paths Plan in response to representations received/objections resolved.

Matt Dent presented a number of other proposals as set out in the paper and these were acknowledged and accepted by the Forum, routes included

- Aulthnamain to Admiral Farm – remove from amended plan
- Struie Hill Cairn - removed from amended plan
- Fairy Glen, Spinningdale – retain path in plan
- Fourpenny, Coul Links – modify amended plan
- Clashnessie Falls – modify amended plan
- Strathnaver Trail at Grummore and Grubeg – retain paths in plan
- Helmsdale old A9 and Navidale Farm track – retain paths in plan

Meall Mor Fire Track, Rogart – retain path diversion in plan

6. **Future work of the forum**

The Access Officer provided a summary of the role of the Forum and the type of business which he would bring forward to meetings. Forum members could also be proactive in bringing forward any items either directly to him, the Council and other bodies, or to Forum meetings. He advised there were spaces on the Forum for further appointments.

In this regard, Edderton Community Council had expressed an interest in nominating a representative. There was also a space for a land manager representative and the Access Officer would seek to contact local grazings committees and the National Farmers Union on this matter. In addition, it was suggested that the Access Officer contact Deer Management Groups in the area. Forum members were also encouraged to approach any potential suitable candidates.

Thereafter, concern was expressed at the number of walks listed on the Council's website which were not wheelchair accessible. In discussion, it was reported that one of the main barriers for wheelchair access in Sutherland was where kissing gates had been installed on paths. In this regard, it would be helpful for the Access Officer to attend a meeting of the Sutherland Access Panel to discuss the issues around accessibility.

The Forum **NOTED** this item.

7. **AOCB**

- in response to a question, it was explained that Council planners were not supportive of the pylon line tracks created during SSE's upgrading of powerlines in the Highlands being nominated as core paths on the basis most were temporary access routes and would be reinstated;
- the Aulthnamain to Strathrusdale windfarm track was now a through route, and the Access Officer confirmed he would consider the potential for this to be designated as a core path;
- confirmation was provided that copies of the agenda for meetings and Core Path plan maps would be issued to those Forum members requiring paper copies; and
- concern was expressed at a watergate which had been erected by the

Estate across the River Halladale. It could not be seen until in close proximity, and was not passable. At a national level, a new Scottish White Water guide had been published which may serve to increase the popularity of rivers in the area. Following discussion, the Access Officer undertook to investigate this issue further.

- Consider asking a deer management group to sit on the forum
- Wifi in the chamber for future meetings **ACTION** Matt Dent

8. **Date of next meeting**

The Forum **AGREED** that two meetings be held annually in the Spring and Autumn, the dates for 2019 to be confirmed in due course.

The meeting ended at 4.10pm