

Caithness Local Access Forum

held on Monday 9 March 2020 in Caithness House, Wick

Present: Councillor Karl Rosie – Chair (KR)
William Bruce - Caithness Kayak (WB)
Ben MacGregor – Pentland Canoe Club (BM)
Donna Mather – British Horse Society Standard (DM)
Bill Mowat – Dunnet & Canisbay Community Council (BM)

Apologies: Councillor Raymond Bremner

In attendance: Nick Sage - ???? (NS)
Ken Hardy - ???? (KH)
Matt Dent, Access Officer (MD)
Ali McDiarmid, Business Support – Notes

		Action
1.	Apologies Noted, as above	
2.	Welcome and Introductions Cllr Rosie welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made around the table	
3.	Notes from meeting - 26 August 2019 Agreed – Proposed by BM, seconded by WB Apologies from MD, the action table for Agenda Item 5 today was not previously circulated but is attached with the hard copies of the notes today. Could also be viewed on the Website, if required.	
4.	Limekilns Wind Farm Section 11 Access Exemption Report was previously distributed – the Forum was asked to consider Points 5.1 to 5.3. Discussion took place around the table and the following was noted: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• NS said that they had applied last year under Section 11, also been talking with MD• Further information was submitted in January 2020, changing the application – close the Core Path for 2 years• Close the Core Path for Health & Safety Issues which will allow the Windfarm to be constructed• Forest is scheduled to be cut down later this year by Forestry Scotland• Commissioning will take 2 years• Path only recently designated a Core Path – since initial planning application was submitted• Will improve access to the Core Path• Core Path is 7km – cannot provide another complete loop whilst construction is ongoing	

- If were to provide an alternative route / loop, new planning application etc would be needed – must take into consideration the wildlife, plants etc – time consuming and expensive
- Path must be completely rebuilt – 17 turbines to be installed along with 300 tonnes of material will be distributed. Lot of heavy plant (40 tonne dumpers, excavators etc) movement
- Felt that 2 years is a long time for it to close
- Very suitable Path, at present, for Equestrian use
- Current Path has only been open for approximately one year – feels like it would be back to square one
- Could the Path be available for weekends and holidays?
- Consider Saturday afternoon to Monday morning – would need additional controls put in place to manage the public
- Sunday work may need to take place, turbine work is very wind dependent
- Rationale is for not opening the path but if necessary, company would work with it
- Gate in situ, at present, is proving difficult to open due to having a post behind it – Company will speak with landowner and gamekeeper to rectify
- Scottish Government do not have clear guidelines available for Windfarms
- New Path must be up to the standard of the current Path, or better
- Possibly there might be a mountain bike trail made, depending on advice received – might be deemed too flat for a trail
- Mountain bike trail may cause problems for the equestrian users, spook the horses etc
- Mountain Bike guidance to be sent to KH by DM
- Installation of Turbines - they must be able to drive straight into the installation site
- Could parking at the Harbour be used as a safe alternative
- Could it take longer than the 2 years –investors want an immediate return, every day from installation and not being operational can cost thousands of pounds, so not an option
- No Section 11 Exemption has ever been granted for more than 5 days since the Act came into force – not what the Scottish Government had in mind
- Our decision will be going to the Area Committee in May, Scottish Minister will be the overall decision maker
- Landowner/ gamekeeper are very worried about the deer movement

2 options were voted on:

- ❖ Do not support it as it stands with the 2 year closure or
- ❖ Do support but seek clear guidance from the Scottish Government taking onboard DM's points

Vote was 2 for, 2 against, KM used his deciding vote and went with the "For" – second option

NS and KH thanked everyone for their time and left the meeting at 15:10 hrs

5.	Matters Arising:	
a.	Update Halkirk to Sibster Path <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ KR said that there had been little or no progress ▪ Any funding available from Sustran or the Windfarms? ▪ If a bridge were to be build, Forestry would possibly have to take on ownership of half or hopefully, all of it ▪ Agreed: to have a visit to the area before the September meeting and invite the landowners ▪ Agreed: MD will arrange a meeting with the Halkirk Community Council and attend along with KR 	 KR / MD KR / MD
b.	Scrabster Quarries Gate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Order now been given to Steven Blackwood to install a gate ▪ Noted that there is still very little feedback of any sort from the public 	
c.	Coastal Path East of John O’Groats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ WM said that the local Development Company are keen to have it along the coast line ▪ Have raised £25k, Crown Estate are reapplying for the Rural Tourism Grant, hopefully £35k ▪ Pathways to the Shell Beach and Robbie’s Haven should be improved ▪ Andrew Mowat has applied for planning permission for renovating the Star Path which leads to the Foghorn - memorial to the lost souls of the Pentland Firth ▪ Covid 19 – this will have a serious impact on tourism 	
d.	John O’Groats Trail – deferred to next meeting but KR will ask JW for an update before the September meeting	KR
e.	Sandside Estate Cliff Top Gate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The gate is openable ▪ MD said that has he had no reply from the land agent, now going straight to the 2 land owners 	
f.	Yarrows – deferred to September meeting – will be useful to have Cllr Bremner attending	
6.	Active Travel in Caithness - To travel without using your own personal vehicle. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Halcro did the previous Plans. • Transco will be reviewing the Plan later this year which will hopefully have local input • East Caithness Campus – should be able to cycle or walk to but the school run traffic has significantly increased making it unsafe to travel by any other way than car / bus. • Meant to be a tree lined avenue from West Banks Avenue to the High School, which never happened. Also, no provision for foot travel from Cairndhuna side. • At the next meeting, to discuss what we would like eg cycle provision to Dounreay, some parts of the A9 to take the traffic off the road • Thurso Community Development Trust – Hitrans are at an advanced stage of linking the Thurso High School to Victoria Walk. Are Hitrans 	

	<p>looking for partners? MD to investigate and invite a representative(s) to the next meeting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hopefully with the increase in Council Tax there will be a huge investment in roads / pathways and transport. 	MD
7.	<p>Access Officer and Members Report – new cases not previously reported to Forum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keiss – Shore sign, tape has been pulled off. Holiday pods have been applied for – MD to follow up 	MD
8.	<p>AOCB</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advertise for land owners to join the forum Dunbeath – John O’Groats trail has been sorted out Private No Entry sign on the old A9 – MD will write to owner but noted that he is not in situ often Similar at Broupster Windfarm Path changes at Peedie Sands, the new owner, Mr Dunnett has built a new path around the loch. This has been carried out without Planning permission but does appear to have the public’s support Berriedale path change has been well used and appears to have had no negative impact New car park consultation – only thing that appears to be a problem is the part about horse boxes. Advice is to speak to your local councillors for them to take forward. Car parking charges – out for consultation at present. This could have a severe impact on tourism. Noted that car parks must have 15 bays or over before charges are to be put in place – again speak with our local councillors 	<p>KR / MD?</p> <p>MD</p>
9.	<p>Date of Next Meeting 7 September 2020 – Venue and Times to be confirmed</p>	