

Minutes of Meeting of the
Sutherland Local Access
Forum held in Council
Offices, Drummie, Golspie
on 16 September 2019.

Present:	Ms Lesley Cranna, Community Representative	LC
	Mr David Hannah, Access Taker/User	DH
	Mr Allan Mackay,	AM
	Mrs Frances Gunn, Access Taker/User	FG
	Cllr Jim McGillivray, Councillor, Highland Council	JM
	Mr John Ross, Access Taker CHAIR	JR
	Cllr Kirsteen Currie, Councillor, Highland Council (via telephone)	KC
In Attendance:	Mr Matt Dent, Access Officer, Highland Council	MD
	Mr Phil Tomalin, Highland Council	PT

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr Andy Dawson, Sutherland Access Panel.

2. Introductions

This was Mr Allan Mackays first meeting so introductions were made around the table and also for the benefit of Cllr Currie who was on the phone.

3. 4. Note of meeting of 20 May 2019 and Matters Arising were discussed together as one item

Beinn Bhraggie Forest by Rhives

JR remarked on visit made at the last meeting. MD stated the barriers had now been removed. MD had contacted the new directors in the Spring and followed this up before this meeting. The barriers had been removed to allow a disable user to access the trail, the directors had allowed this and had decided not re-install them and see how it went. Some horse mess noted but accepted and will keep path monitored. MD said horse mess can be an issue as there is no strict duty for a rider to remove it from a path/track but he suggested the number of horses using this trail here would likely be limited. JR suggested damaged to the path surface was more a concern and time of year/weather horses use a path can be an issue.

Dairy Park, Duke Street

Original line of path was cut by The Highland Council a number of times over the summer, MD suggested approx. 50% of access takers used the original and the 50% used the diversion around the planted crop. LC stated the original path was very well used but had become muddy in late summer.

JM suggested new planting would be seen as an improvement in farming grade of the land and with limited space in the field every sq. m would help the tenant.

LC said police had called on a resident of Duke Street to ask about the cutting, presumably after call by tenants, but no contact had been made by the Police to The Highland Council.

It would be expected that the park will be ploughed and planted again in Spring 2020, same management expected by MD in cutting the path as needed.

The Highland Council Modified Core Paths Plan (Caithness and Sutherland) Amended

The formal consultation for the modified plan closed on the 31 May 2019. There was a single objection which was a renewed objection to the amended plan with regards the Core path proposal at Clashnessie Falls,

FG asked what the objections generally related. MD stated one objection from Network Rail related to the railway crossing at Dunrobin. Another objection at Elphin related to disturbance to deer and a number of objection related to the proposing the route as a core path but the resposdee' s where generally very content with the route as a public right of way or other promoted route.

Access Officer Report

Aultnamain to Strathrusdale windfarm/hydro track had been investigated by desktop survey and the details forwarded to the call for paths for the Inner Moray Firth Core Path Plan review.

It was discussed that Gledfield to Strathrusdale tracks did not connect and no further investigation would be required at this time.

No works started at Balblair Cottage, no comments made to Golspie Community Council

John O'Groats Trail – DH updated the forum that the trail ranger had left the post and this had slowed the momentum of trail development in recent weeks but was getting back on track. DH raised the issue of using the old railway line from Fourpenny to the Mound, MD suggested this would a challenging proposal as whilst the old bridges were still in place the route crossing numerous holdings. Also discussed was a link between Portgower and Helmsdale, as route along the beach is very rough and JOGT goes inland by Gartymore.

Discussion took place around the paths and MTB at Carbisdale/Culrain/Balblair. MD said since the de-badging of the site by FCS (now FLS – Forestry and Land Scotland) the trail had started to become overgrown, the View Rock path was clear in 2018 but MD was unsure of the condition of the battle field section.

The Highland Council aim to promote the core path in the forest but they have less locus for working on the MTB paths. DH suggested work was on-going at the castle by the new owners but there was limited communication with the community.

JR said he had visited Balblair MTB tracks in early summer and some of the boardwalks were in poor condition. KC said she was aware that Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) had carried out works on the Balblair MTB tracks.

MD passed around an extract from the Scotways Heritage Paths website for the Invershin to Rogart drove road that was discussed at a previous meeting. The route is not defined on the ground as is common with true drove roads but it is a fascinating part of the history of the area.

John Ross proposed the minutes as accurate. This was seconded by David Hannah

5. **Wild, informal camping and overnight parking**

MD briefly introduced this item as being requested by FG to be raised at the LAF. MD pointed out that the Forums role was advising the Council on its functions relating to access rights provided by the Land Reform Act which did not include motorised access, though the ability to camp “wild” in a vehicle were being wrongly linked by the public as being a “right” linked to Scottish land reform/access rights.

FG stated the volume and behaviour of visitor in campervans or motorhomes is causing significant disquiet in the north namely;

- Large numbers of parked up vehicles in laybys, car parks and other areas
- Rubbish overflowing bins and human waste in public places
- Poor driving on single track roads (MD postscript, not a valid matter for the forum)
- Disrespect for area by parking in/across private access points/hanging washing over cemetery fences/walls etc.

FG expressed concern that the local disquiet is turning to resentment of the visitors. See would like to write to the Chief Executive of The Highland Council to start the process of their being a policy related to this subject.

ACTION - MD

AM said on land the crofters managed they had put signs to say no to overnight parking and essentially they had worked, meaning dozens of vehicles a week had been reduced to one or two,

MD suggested that in past times users groups could often be targeted/educated through a representative body such as the Mountaineering Council of Scotland or in this case Caravan and Camping Club/Caravan Club. FG acknowledges that she remembers large number of tourists in the late 1970s but the “type” of tourism has change. Visitors now seem to be much more independent and can take advice and make booking through peer to peer websites and may not be seasoned campers/hill walkers anymore.

Tongue causeway was raised as an area where though there is a commercial campsite visitors are choosing to park up off the public road with space being available in the campsite.

Other areas coming to the Councils attention were Dornoch, Achmelvich, Ardreck Castle, Bone Caves, Helmsdale harbour and Littleferry, Golpsie

KC explained that she had started a petition because she felt that it was an issue that would have to be tackled at a national level with legislation required at the national. She did not wish to stop hill walkers and “real” wild campers, **MD to circulate petition** – see link below **deadline 24 September 2019**

<https://www.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/wildcamping>

DH mentioned byelaws that could be made at a local level, PT stated this had been discussed but enforcement is a concern in that there is no resource to do this. PT said that the “No overnight parking” signs on laybys had been removed as soon as challenged.

MD would like to make the point that sleeping in a vehicle overnight is not wild and it is not camping as designed by the Land Reform Act.

JR commented that there was similar increase in use of Scotland’s bothies with associated issues of litter and damage not previously seen.

6. AOCB

Fyrish Path, Easter Ross – DH commented this path is in poor condition, MD to pass to Ross and Cromarty access officer **ACTION – MD**

Seaview, Hilton of Embo – JM asked if new boundary wall at Seaview had affected the core path. MD to investigate **ACTION - MD**

10. Dates of next meetings

30 th March 2020	MD to try and arrange this meeting for Lairg (second time lucky!)
28 th September 2020	Possibly Tongue?

DRAFT