

Minutes of Meeting of the  
Sutherland Local Access  
Forum held on Microsoft  
Teams on 21 March 2022

<b>Present:</b>	Ms Lesley Cranna, Community Representative	LC
	Mr David Hannah, Access Taker/User	DH
	Cllr Jim McGillivray, Councillor, Highland Council	JM
	Mr John Ross, Access Taker CHAIR	JR
<b>In Attendance:</b>	Mr Matt Dent, Access Officer, Highland Council	MD

### 1. Apologies

Andy Dawson, Frances Gunn and Paul Castle

### 2. Notes from meeting of the 6 December 2021

Matt Dent went over the notes but pointed out Access Rangers had been interviewed for 2022 season. Areas as 2021 (Caithness, North Sutherland, Assynt (with NW Ross), East Sutherland (with Easter Ross), North West Sutherland) but also a post just

### 3. Matters Arising

Matt Dent visited Dairy Park – noticed the path is softer than he would like and tussocky. Due to type of grass, oat crop, not taken well to being managed/garden grass and is growing in tight lines/tussocks. He has no concerns over line of path and has discussed with Alexander Cormack. MD will work to add gravel to softest sections and possible new grass seed as it did not take in the sandy soil. MD asked Lesley if the grassed started to grow yet, yes it has. MD asked if John used it at all, he has but his group are doing no work on the seaward side of the railway. JR suggested grass will settle if path used.

Lady's Walk – forest operations affecting path and track. Bruce has moved on from Scottish Woodland and no reply to new email. Extraction of timber has created ruts and caused liquid mud. MD suggested Dunrobin Castle visitor will use this area and if no reinstatement they will get negative feedback and this would help. LC says castle gardeners have been trying to repair

Shooting parties in Beinn Bhraggie, Balbair Forest, Dunrobin and Skelbo. JM had not heard anything about Skelbo but pointed out estate had changed hands and likely to be different management. Although not managed by Charlotte Gilfillan MD had spoke to her and she suggested there were better suited locations to shoot. MD was concerned if the GPS collars were being used for pointing of the woodcock and snipe as this implied handlers were not in visual sight of the dogs. Collars are just for retrieving any dog who fled.

#### 4. Access Matter raised by Forum Members

##### a. Reidchalmi core path Rogart

JR received a complaint as found path fenced off. JR know the person who lived there and could approach but maybe MD visit first. MD said the Milnafua Bridge end of the path is well used but the middle section is ill-defined.

MD to investigate

##### b. Railways Crossings

DH asked about Network Rail plan to close/lock up railway level crossing and if the Council was aware or were involved with Network Rail. MD said it fell into two issues, firstly is the locking of gates which has been taking place at Dalwhinnie and other locations. Secondly is the closure and removal of crossings, authorised users usually compensated – been happening for about 10years and is Network Rail policy.

Cases for public crossing – like Strath Steven where crossing has been reclassified. At Portgower they have removed the stile but the gate remains unlocked.

MD is concerned over Dunrobin Station crossing – no blue sign?

DH mentioned several crossings between Brora and Helmsdale and also ack of bridges affecting the John O'Groats Trail. MD said THC needed to rely on right of way type use as access rights do not apply.

**MD to provide DH with Network Rail planning contact email.**

##### c. Badvoon, Ardgay

“ the White dog bites” sign at Badvoon. MD explained that keeping dogs under control is very difficult for the Council to manage outside of playparks and roads.

**MD to follow up with DH regards replacement bridge/ford on route from Oldtown**

##### d. Carbisdale Forest

Cycle trails overgrown. MD explained local community has signed up agreement to take on the path.

Discuss with JM about Camore Wood

## 5. Access Rangers 2022 – No Fire Signs

MD displayed the “Please No Open Fires” sign. Written up in 2021 so use when High Fire risk, repeated fire locations or vegetation damage. MD asked about comments

JM asked if they would be installed at Dornoch beach car parks. MD said yes.

Used to discourage fires in car park area and close by roads, picnic sites. JR had not seen the signs in 2021, DH had seen them but said were not been adhered to.

LC mentioned Littleferry is sensitive to grass fires and noted some supermarkets stopping sale of disposable BBQ’s. LC asked about education and liaising with supermarkets stopping stock of disposable BBQs.

MD said FLS and NatureScot had own versions for their own sites.

No negative comment from LAF members to continued use.

## 6. AOCB

DH mentioned fires in Gearachaille wood – **MD to add to patrol route for Access Ranger**

## 7. Date of next meeting - proposed

26 September 2022