

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

Minute of Meeting of the Ross and Cromarty Local Access Forum held remotely via Microsoft Teams on Wednesday 15 December 2021 at 3.00 pm.

Present:

Mr G Adams, Dr I Cockburn, Mr N Chisholm, Mr R Forrest, Mr T Forrest, Mr N Fraser and Mr H Munro.

In Attendance:

Mr P Waite, Outdoor Access Manager, Development and Infrastructure Service
Mrs A MacArthur, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Office

Mr R Forrest in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mr R Chalmers, Mr F Fotheringham and Mr J Mackenzie.

2. Confirmation of Minutes

There had been submitted for confirmation as a correct record the minute of meeting of the Ross and Cromarty Local Access Forum held on 26 February 2021 which was **APPROVED**.

3. The Highland Core Path Plan Review Update

Over the summer the work on the West Highlands and Islands Core Path Plan had been put on hold due to the covid restrictions. Input towards the Core Path Plan in relation to Glen Borrodale and Dalwhinnie had still to be undertaken for Lochaber.

The final consultation on the modifications to the plan had been distributed and would run to the 31 January 2022. Following the public consultation the modified plan with outstanding objections and written statements would be submitted to the Scottish Government for a decision.

Modifications included:

The core path at Flowerdale – the landowner had proposed an alternative route for which he would meet all the costs. This work had now been undertaken.

The Inner Moray Firth Plan was still at the first stage calling for any suggestions and amendments.

The forum **NOTED** the status of the West Highlands and Islands Core Path Plan and the Inner Moray Firth Core Path Plan.

4. Seasonal Access Rangers and Visitor Management

There had been circulated a report on the seasonal access rangers and visitor management by the Outdoor Access Manager. There would be 17 rangers from early May with most of their work covering the weekends, the weekends being the busiest time for visitors. The Rangers completed a spreadsheet covering all the issues they had dealt with, and this information was shared with Visitor Management Operation Groups on a weekly basis. These Groups included Council services and emergency services and gave the week's issues with planning for the week ahead. There were individual spreadsheets for the North area, the South area and for the Inverness and Loch Ness area.

The Outdoor Access Manager had been involved with the National Visitor Management Strategy Operations Group and had fed information from our area to that group. The cabinet secretary, Kate Forbes was keen to receive fortnightly reports on the Arisaig and Morar area which had been a particular hot spot. Ms Forbes was also keen to receive information on the NC500. Information was fed to Council services to oversee what the council provided and what further services could be provided.

Funding for the rangers of £1.5 million had been unchallenged and will be formally ratified by the Council in March 2022. Funding for future years was however less certain. Five rangers had been retained over the winter months.

The provision of Rangers was welcomed by both visitors and local people. The Rangers provided a good service, however, some problems were being moved to less accessible areas where there had still been problems with toileting and waste disposal.

The Rangers had been trained in how to approach people and to guide visitors in terms of the Access Code and in decent behaviour and the sharing of information on nearby facilities. Amenity services had been increasing the number of toilet schemes and facilities for motor homes by various means. The vast majority of people had been acting responsibly, the Rangers however had authority to give out fixed penalties in problem cases.

Collaboration between the Council Rangers and Land Managers would be beneficial going forward whereby Land Managers could also advise visitors on the Access Code and give out information on services available.

In Kinlochewe the community had got together and purchased the toilets. They had congregated some of the motor homes in a central point to avoid random parking. Unfortunately SEPA had quashed this development due to the possible flood risk.

The Outdoor Access Manager had met with senior police in the Visitor Management Operations Groups. In some areas the Rangers had good contact with the police although in some areas there was less support. Nationally the police intended to appoint two Visitor Management Specialists to provide guidance to police officers.

The Outdoor Access Manager advised that the idea of a wild camping permit had not gained momentum. Discussion had also been had on stricter definitions of the code, including distance from buildings and the road. Certain areas receiving a lot of unwelcome camping attention may temporarily be fenced off to allow these areas to have some rest.

The forum thanked the Outdoor Access Manager for an informative report.

5. Access Issues

i. Peffery Way, Dingwall – proposed development with core path diversion

The Outdoor Access Manager provided an update on the path and proposed Order at Peffery Way, the path between Strathpeffer and Dingwall. Copies of correspondence had been made available to the Forum members.

The Order was now with the DPEA (Scottish Government Department of Environment and Appeals) who were looking at the order. The target date for a report was the 28 December 2021.

If cattle are to be grazed in this area it would require to be fenced but we are unsure if this can be included under the definition of 'delineating' the path. In the letters to the owners in response to their objections, it had been outlined that a fence could be erected with their agreement.

Following discussion, the Access Forum **AGREED** to support the Council in the action for the Public Local Inquiry.

ii. Mains of Newhall

The Outdoor Access Manager provided an update on the path and access rights through the steading. The landowner had asked that there be no public access right through the farm steading. The landowner had been asked to provide an alternative route around the steading.

Where a fence had been erected on the former route, someone had removed part of the fencing to gain access. This type of behaviour was not condoned by the Access Forum.

To prove this road had been a public right of way evidence would have to be provided. At the moment it appeared from the Strava map that people were confused as to which route to take around the steading.

At the other end of the road from the steading, a gate would be acceptable allowing movement by people and deterring vehicles.

The Access Forum **AGREED** that the landowner be advised to reinstate the original route where he could allow pedestrian access but restrict vehicular access.

iii. **Lochcarron**

The Outdoor Access Manager provided a report on the path at New Kelso. The Council had provided some gate hardware to facilitate improvements to the already erected gates from the roadside to allow access to all user groups. No complaints or comments had thereafter been received.

The Access Forum **NOTED** the resolution of the issue at Lochcarron.

iv. **Knockbain, Dingwall**

The Outdoor Access Manager provided a report and presented maps and photographs of the area. The kissing gate at this location had been replaced with a self-closing gate, thereby resolving the issue.

The Access Forum **NOTED** the resolution of the issue at Knockbain.

6. Path Improvements and Access Projects

i. Wester Ross Ward

A sum of £40,000 had been allocated by the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Committee to the Wester Ross area for core path improvements.

The following paths and works to be undertaken were shown for the following:

Falls of Balgy and Loch Damph, Shieldaig	£ 3,500
Kirkton Coffin Path, Lochcarron	£ 7,500
The Plock, Kyle	£ 5,500
Glenelg Village to Galtair Path	£ 4,500
Flowerdale Waterfall Walk, Gairloch	£10,500
An Ard, Gairloch	£ 2,000
Rhechullin, Torridon	£ 2,500
Kinlochewe to Coulin	£ 5,000
Knockfarrel, Strathpeffer	£ 8,500
Rhue Lighthouse, Ullapool	£ 2,000

These works totalled £51,500 and the deficit would be met this year through either internal budgets or from Forestry and Land Scotland for work to be undertaken on their land. It was hoped that these works would be completed by Easter 2022.

The Access Forum **NOTED** the works to be undertaken.

7. National Access Forum Matters

A joint meeting of the NAF/LAF had been held remotely and the Chairman highlighted a summary of some of the issues raised:

- an outline of the contentious proposals for wild camping;
- increasing concern relating to electric bicycles which could take people further and faster into more remote areas previously not visited;
- whether e-bikes were legal under access rights;
- the problems in Highland with roadside and wild camping also apparent in other areas for example East Lothian; and
- the pressure of visitors and the resulting police involvement in issues of aggrieved access takers and landowners.

The Access Forum **AGREED** that the Outdoor Access Manager send details of the dissertation on e-bikes that he had received.

8. Access Exemption Order Applications

i. Strathpuffer 24 hour MTB Race 14 – 16 January 2022

The Access Forum **AGREED** the Exemption Order and on noting the increase in time, advised that they would not be amenable to any further extension of hours or days in the future.

ii. Snowman Rally 5 March 2022

The Access Forum **AGREED** the Exemption Order.

9. Any other business

There was no other business.

10. Date of Next Meeting

It was **AGREED** that the next meeting would be held in 2022 and would be confirmed following a doodle poll of members.

The meeting ended at 4.45 pm.