

**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 26 February 2021 at 10.00 am.

**Present:**

Mr R Chalmers, Dr I Cockburn, Mr N Chisholm, Mr R Forrest, Mr T Forrest, Mr N Fraser and Mr F Fotheringham.

**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 G Adam 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 16 January 2020 which was **APPROVED**.

**3. The Highland Core Path Plan Review Update**

- i. West Highlands and Islands Amended Core Paths Plan - Wester Ross section approvals, objections and changes for consultation prior to submission to Scottish Government.

The West Highlands and Islands Amended Core Paths Plan had been discussed at the previous meeting of the Access Forum and the views and changes expressed by the Forum had been taken to the local Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Area Committee. The Committee approved the recommendations made by the Access Forum. However, the submission of the Plan to the Scottish Government had been delayed due to items in the Lochaber area and the Covid 19 restrictions.

Having informed the objectors of the decisions of the Area Committee and Access Forum, the only response received was from the forestry agent for a core path at Strathconon. Her response stated that she would withdraw the objection to the core path if it was accepted that on some occasions the core path would have to be closed due to the risk from felling in the area.

Thereafter it was **AGREED** that the core path could be closed for as limited a time as possible when there was felling and forestry operations and where there was no available alternative path.

There would now follow a short period of consultation on the changes to the Core Path Plan and it would then be forwarded to the Scottish Government for an enquiry on the remaining objections.

ii. Inner Moray Firth.

The Inner Moray Firth Core Path Plan had been delayed due to the Covid 19 restrictions and the inability to hold site visits.

#### 4. Access Issues

**Declaration of Interest: Dr I Cockburn declared a non-financial interest in item vi as he had helped the Peffery Way Association to clear some of the path.**

- i. **Braes, Ullapool** – proposed development with core path diversion  
The Outdoor Access Manager provided an update on the proposed core path diversion at Braes, Ullapool on the assumption that the current planning application was approved.

This walk was an asset to Ullapool and was popular for people with less mobility and disabled people who would only go as far as the viewpoint. The developer intended to divert the route from a very scenic area to a route through a forestry wood. The viewpoint was the highlight of the path and would be lost if the path was diverted. The developer had undertaken no local consultations with either councillors, community councils or local people.

It was thereafter **AGREED** to object to the proposed diversion of the core path plan.

- ii. **Findon, Culbokie** – access rights through steading  
The Outdoor Access Manager provided an update on the access rights through the steading at Findon, Culbokie. The landowner had asked that there be no public access right through the farm steading.

This was a public road used by the postman, the refuse lorry, occupants of the houses, farm traffic and other users. The Access Forum could see no reason to restrict the occasional members of the public from walking on this road. Historically this access had been an access path to the village.

1. As there is access through the steading area already by residents as well as potentially people visiting, delivering or servicing the houses, any vehicle drivers or machinery operators must already be vigilant to the fact that someone may be driving or walking on the access road, the Forum could see no reason to restrict occasional members of the public.

The Access Forum **AGREED** not to restrict access through the steading.

iii. **Aultbea** – cattle as obstruction?

The Outdoor Access Manager provided an update on the path at Aultbea. There was little sympathy for complaints about cattle on the path, access takers had to take paths as they found them, this was an open space and the cattle had been there for some time. The Access Forum could see no reason for any input.

The Access Forum **AGREED** not to pursue.

iv. **Aultgowrie, Fairburn** – obstructing parking

The Outdoor Access Manager provided an update on the obstruction to the car park at Aultgowrie, Fairburn. The problems had been caused by the obstruction to the parking area by the landowner. The parking area had been closed due to Covid restrictions to enable only those in walking distance to use the paths. However, when the restrictions had been lifted last year the car park had remained obstructed.

Few parking opportunities were available in this area and is a well-known area to walk mainly for mid Ross residents.

The Access Forum **AGREED** that although not within the Forum's remit, the Outdoor Access Manager communicate with the landowner to try and resolve this issue.

v. **Strathconon** – river obstruction

The Outdoor Access Manager provided an update on the river obstruction at Strathconon. There had been some unusual wire placed over the river causing an obstruction for canoeists.

The Access Forum **AGREED** that the Outdoor Access Manager should investigate the obstruction and talk to the landowner.

vi. **Peffery Way** – proposed path order

The Outdoor Access Manager provided an update on the path and proposed order at Peffery Way between Strathpeffer and Dingwall. The Peffery Way Association had been trying for more than three years to gain access through land at the Dingwall end of the Peffery Way. The Peffery Way Association have asked the Council to consider using its statutory powers to seek either a path agreement or path order with the owners involved. The PWA would provide much of the administration work if the Council would instigate the process. The Outdoor Access Manager had written to the landowners three times last year but had not received a response.

The path is intended to be an all abilities path and a lot of work has already been undertaken by the Peffery Way Association in constructing much of it on other ownership. The path would be considered an important active travel link between Strathpeffer and Dingwall, the road being dangerous

to walk and uncomfortable to cycle. The already constructed sections of the path had been well used and enjoyed by walkers.

If cattle are to be grazed in this field it would require to be fenced but we are unsure if this can be included as '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.

## 5. National Access Forum Matters

The Outdoor Access Manager advised that a joint meeting of the NAF/LAF would be held soon, possibly as a webinar due to covid restrictions, and asked any forum members who were interested in attending to let him know.

The Outdoor Access Manager advised that the National Access Forum following the increase in visitors to the Highlands last summer, had been looking into updating current guidance. The Council is hoping to appoint a team of 10 Seasonal Access Rangers who would patrol sites in certain areas of Highland. The existing Countryside Rangers were still on furlough and it was unknown if they would be operating this summer. The Seasonal Access Rangers would monitor visitor use and behaviour, record complaints and keep an eye on visitor areas. Many car parks would also have parking metres and the Rangers would record compliance.

The areas that would be covered had still to be finalised and were likely to include Skye, Arisaig/Morar, Wester Ross and North West Sutherland.

The position was **NOTED**.

## 6. Any other business

The Chairman stated that more people were accessing the Novar Estate and Fyrish and an email had been received from Nigel Fraser detailing the possible setting up of a Friends of Fyrish organisation to help manage and improve access. The idea was commendable and the Community Councils in Aness, Kiltearn and Ardrross were very likely to be interested.

Mr Fraser stated that the Novar Estate would be delighted to take part in dialogue and to be a passenger in any development.

## 7. Date of Next Meeting

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

The meeting ended at 12.10 pm.