

Caithness Local Access Forum

Action Note

Meeting held on 23 October 2018 in Caithness House, Wick at 1400 hrs

Present:

Karl Rosie (KR) - Landward Member - Chair
Jan Banks (JB) - Wick Community Council
Jay Wilson (JW) – Friends of the John O’Groats Trail
Bill Mowat (BM) - Dunnet & Canisbay Community Council
Donna Mather (DM) - British Horse Society Scotland
Islay Macleod (IM) – Thrumster Estate
Ben MacGregor (BMG) – Pentland Canoe Club

In attendance:

Matt Dent (MD) - Access Officer - Chair for Apologies and Introductions
Alex Macmanus (AM) - Ward Manager, The Highland Council
Alison McDiarmid, Business Support - notes (AMD)

Item		Action
1.	Apologies Raymond Bremner, Traylan Peat and William Bruce	
2.	Introductions As the last meeting of the Forum was held on 9 February 2017, MD opened the meeting in his role as Temporary Chair. He welcomed everyone to the meeting and highlighted the point that the Forum is to advise the Highland Council (HC). Introductions were made around the table where each member gave a brief outline of their connection to the Forum: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• BMG - representative for Outdoor Water Sports, lots of interest in walking. Owns a piece of woodland. Writes for the local paper under the pseudonym of “Ralph”• IM - representative as a landowner (Thrumster Estate) and Vice-Chair of Yarrows Heritage Trust• DM - representative for improving access for Horse Riders• KR - Ward 2 Councillor with an interest in the general outdoors. Trustee for the John O’Groat Trail• BM - Representative and Vice-Chair/Trustee for John O’Groats Trail and Vice-Chair for Dunnet & Canisbay Community Council. Has background in tourism / retail / hospitality with owning the First & Last Shop and Seaview Hotel in John O’Groats (JOG). Previously 4 times elected Landward Councillor	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AM - Ward Manager for The Highland Council (HC). Previously took the notes for this Forum but is standing down as he was only meant to cover as a temporary measure several years ago. Also not part of his role remit. This Forum previously only met 2 - 3 times a year • JW - representative and Chair/Trustee for JOG Trail - Walking trail from Inverness to JOG. Feels that this Forum has a very important role to play hopefully with the members taking a proactive role • JB - representative - Chair of Wick Community Council and also Friends of Newton Hill, with involvement in several charities including Caithness Voluntary Group. Plenty of walks with the dog <p>MD stated that it is the duty of HC to have a single Access Forum which would cover the whole Highland Area. Due to the geographical area of HC this would be undeliverable. Keeping the local Forum is beneficial.</p>	
3.	<p>Appointment of Chair</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MD stated that due to the previous Chair, Chris Hobson, stepping down from the role, a new Chair required to be appointed. Discussion took place and agreed for someone to Chair this meeting, this would then allow others to have an opportunity to think about the role and if they wished to be considered. The Chair and Vice-Chair would then be formally appointed at the next meeting. For this meeting, KR was nominated by BM and seconded by JW. Forum agreed so KR took over as Chair. • Suggested that there should be a line of succession from the Chair down so all members can be stand-ins when required. States in the Constitution Forum that there should be a Chair and Vice-Chair. Unsure as how to amend the Constitution, if required upon agreement by the Forum • Agreed that communication could be carried out via email between the Forum members. MD will distribute a list of the email addresses 	<p>MD</p> <p>MD</p>
4.	<p>Notes from meeting - 9 February 2017 Copies distributed to the members, proposed by BM seconded by IM.</p> <p>Matters Arising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Halkirk to Sibster Path: (First raised: pre 09/17, Date Closed: ongoing, Ownership: KR) MD gave a brief history of this ongoing access request. Forum previously visited the site. Noted that Halkirk have both a Village Council and a Community Council (CC). The CC might come back re this. KR advised that he attends the CC, he will gauge if there is still community interest and feedback. However, it does need a separate body to take this request forward 	<p>KR</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <p>• Jessan’s Bridge / Burn of Garth: (First raised: Pre 09/17, Date Closed: ongoing, Ownership: MD/Cllr Mackie) MD gave a brief history of this ongoing access request. Discussion took place and noted that one of the landowners in question has still not come onboard. They want no liability with the bridge in question and require an organisation/individual to take on a lease. Agreed that MD would take forward, to obtain an update from Cllr Struan Mackie to see how the land lies before any further discussion takes place</p> <p>• Ormlie Moors: (First raised: Pre 09/17, Date Closed: 24/10/18, Ownership: MD) MD had previously visited the site in early February 2017. The site was previously owned by HC but ownership has now been transferred to Pentland Housing. Raymond Taylor also an owner. Concerns appear to have died down so Forum agreed to close this.</p> <p>• Scrabster to Quarry Path: (First raised: Pre 09/17, Date Closed: ongoing, Ownership: MD) Was previously an action for Cllr Wm Mackay to take forward. Issue was regarding the locked gate from Holburn Road as the bypass is very narrow. To date unsure of status. Agreed that MD would email in the first instance and if required, meet up with Steven Blackwood (owner of farm is Adrian Bruner)</p> <p>• Braemore: (First raised: Pre 09/17, Date Closed: 23/10/18, Ownership: JW) The Estate have built a new path which diverts from the Core Path - Planning Permission was not applied for to build this new path. The new path is an improvement but the Forum cannot support it without the appropriate Planning Permission. JW will speak with Anson MacAuslan to clarify the situation. Forum agreed to close this item</p> <p>• Coastal Path East of John O’Groats (First raised: Pre 09/17, Date Closed: ongoing, Ownership: BM) No progress on repairs to path. Colin Simpson (HC) attended the last Ward meeting where funding was identified for possible new path on shore – long term project with some significant challenges. Route covered in core path plan review.</p> <p>• John O’Groats Trail (JOGT) (First raised: Pre 09/17, Date Closed: ongoing, Ownership: JW) JW updated the Forum: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Website up and running - www.jogt.org.uk – Have a total of £100k funding which will be spent on hiring a full time Ranger who will cover the area. The rest of the funding will assist with the costs for contractor works, as and when required </p> 	<p>MD</p> <p>closed</p> <p>MD</p> <p>JW</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most of the Trail is now marked out - Will be the second largest marked Trail in Scotland once it is completely marked out - Long sections of the Trail are rough terrain but some of it is located nearer towns which are easier to walk - A few landowners are not coming on board, at present - working with MD and the HC plus others to resolve the issues - 6 organised Ranger Walks have taken place - Trail has already been used by walkers from far away as Australia - KR said that Cllr Nicola Sinclair had put forward a motion in support of a Trail from Cape Wrath to Caithness to the Area Committee. This could open up funding opportunities. Also to consider speaking with the Highland & Islands Enterprise at a later date re any available funding - MD said that the Trail is not currently on maps but on WalkHighlands.com since last year. Some of the JOGT is included in the Core Path Plan along with Latheron, Lybster and Keiss. Planning Permission (PP) may need to be obtained depending on the improvements but most improvements do not require PP: a new constructed trail would definitely require PP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sandside Estate (First raised: 09/02/17, Date Closed: ongoing, Ownership: MD) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MD said that he had received no response from any emails sent to the landowner only from his solicitor with no real answers provided - Rangers do a guided walk from Melvich to Sandside for Puffin watching - A locked Day gate is in place with a deer fence which is a serious concern due to the large drop into the sea/rocks on the other side of the fence - Ideal way forward would be for the lock to be removed or erect a Kissing gate - Cannot go to the Forestry Commission as beyond the 10 year limit - KR will contact the landowners to take forward with the option of unlocking the gate being the preferred option 	KR
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5.	<p>The Highland Council Core Paths Plan - Caithness & Sutherland - Amended</p> <p>MD updated the Forum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forum undertake any “Non-motorised Access” concerns / issues • Brief background into the Plan - originally published in September 2011 with the Review commencing in 2014, the same month as the HC Development Plan • MD is the only staff member working/co-ordinating the Plan • As HC are only allowed to have one Plan, it has been split into geographical areas: Caithness, Sutherland, Ross & Cromarty, Lochaber and Inverness/Nairn • Zoomable map is to be produced • Objections previously received to ongoing access concerns were discussed • MD wished the Amended Plan to go in front of the Caithness Committee in November 2018. Papers have to be submitted before 9 November. Noted that the CPP can still be amended after that date • JW and WM have grave concerns regarding the route in the CPP for the JOGT re the joining to the Ness of Duncansby. They do not wish the CPP to go forward to the Caithness Committee as is - why can the CPP not be accommodated to include the Path as was previously in situ around the Coast? • Could an alternative plan be developed - HC would not accept this as a public consultation has already taken place. It costs approximately £2k to advertise a full CPP. Felt that not all the relevant groups were consulted, however, it was advertised for anyone to air their own/groups views/concerns • HC will not accept a major hold up to the Amended Plan as have been working on it for the last 4/5 years • JW and BM to bring to the attention of the CC and the JOG Improvement Trust for possibly funding to assist any changes. Also there is the Rural Scotland Infrastructure Tourism Fund to consider for possibly funding • Following in depth discussion, it was agreed, to carry forward the core path proposals at John O’Groats to Ness of Duncansby as promoted in the amended core paths plan with the objections outstanding • Agreed that the Chair would write to Nicole Wallace, Environment Manager and Stuart Black, Director of Infrastructure and Development asking to do a new review of the core path plan in Caithness • Noted how valued MD’s work is and has been but need to get the CPP right 	<p>JW / BM</p> <p>KR</p>
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6.	<p>Access Officers Report - cases raised during previous forums still ongoing</p> <p>Mainly discussed under Matters Arising with the following inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swiney Hill - Proposed to link the Coastguard look out path at Lybster to Swiney Hill and Achcastle-shore. • Only informal consultation taken place to date and no replies received • To put routes in modified amended plan for consultation in 2019 	MD
7.	<p>Future Work of the Forum</p> <p>Due to time constraints - deferred to next meeting</p>	
8.	<p>Any Other Current Business (AOCB)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KR delighted that there will be ongoing support for the note taking of the Forum meetings from HC Business Support • Request for an ongoing Actions/Requests Spreadsheet - suggested to try the format which has been adopted for these notes - if not deemed suitable, a spreadsheet to be produced by JW for consideration 	MD/ AMD JW
9.	<p>Date of Next Meeting</p> <p>Forum agreed to meet 14th January 2019 – Caithness House, Wick</p>	

Meeting closed at 16:35 hrs

Minutes approved on 14 January 2019 at Caithness Local Access Forum meeting.