

Minutes of Meeting of the
Sutherland Local Access
Forum held at Drumbuie,
Golspie on 12 May 2025

Present:	Cllr Jim McGillivray, Mr John Ross, CHAIR Betty Grieve Mrs Lesley Cranna Marion Milligan	JM JR BG LG MM (on teams)
----------	--	---------------------------------------

In Attendance: Mr Matt Dent, Access Officer, Highland Council MD

1. Apologies – David Hannah could enter meeting through the TEAMS link despite a number of attempts.

2. Notes from meeting of the 28 October 2024 – Acknowledged by the forum as accurate.

3. Matters Arising

The following are mentioned on the previous minutes but are not on this meetings agenda

- Clashmore – MD has been in contact with Scottish Woodlands and visited the site. There are a number of tracks within a spread out settlement. One track marked on the map is actually just a Scottish Water wayleave. JR said a previous locked gate was now open. **Action MD**
- Bighouse – MD has contacted Mr Morrison, still some machinery to be removed **Action MD**
- LAF Restructure – no longer being taken forward

4. Single Amendment to core paths plan in Sutherland

Review of core path at Kilbraur, Loch Brora

MD was aware of this at the last LAF meeting but it was during the core path modified amended plan adoption process, so matter left aside.

Forum are likely aware of the removal of the suspension bridge at Kilbraur by the estate due to poor condition of the structure. Possible previous Council work on the bridge for school transport but nothing statutory. Unsure if anyone resident at the dwelling anymore, vehicle access by ford and via windfarm track from Farlary/windfarm track.

The Council had an enquiry from a member of the public who visited the site expecting the bridge. MD had investigated if a note could be added to the online map but this was not that practical given the data was published elsewhere and no additional details can be added to this third party publication.

The 2016 amendment to the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 allows for the single amendment of the core plan path, MD read through the options as set out in the attached paper.

- **Divert the route**, limited options for this because of the size/width of the river. MD visited the ford upstream of the Blackwater side branch, this ford is not practical even in the current dry spell. Slightly further again upstream there is another bridge, again this structure is in a relatively untidy condition.

JR had visited the locality yesterday – noted confusion at Carrol Farm, a farmer had directed them to a route. Some of the loch side is overgrown but not impossible and still feasible by estate? After loch track in good condition. LC thought an information board at Carrol, would help the farm. On the bridge at Dalvaich, JR noted the steel beams were huge (no sign of failing any time soon?). issue at bridge was access on and off the bridge was the most problematic.

JR then mentioned locked gate on Farlary track, used regularly. MD commented that the Farlary track and the Kilbraur diversion are not mutually exclusive. It had been discussed for inclusion in the initial review, at the time it was felt the route was very long and not sure of usage by public. Since that time gravel and pedal assist bikes are frequently evident on remote tracks and paths.

- **Leave gap in network** Like railway crossing at Dunrobin, the core path plan could just remove the bridge and leave the access and egress as core paths. Not comparable with the level crossing as the river cannot be passed unlike the level crossing. Not a satisfactory option.
- **Remove entirely** Could just remove the entire core path from the plan, if smaller this may be a reasonable action like as done at the Jubilee East Path in Brora (lost due to river bank erosion). As the bulk of the route is still accessible and the loch and woodland are points of interest in themselves this done not seem a reasonable solution.

LC wondered if anything would change due to the SSEN power line proposal, MD said this was at Carrol and not in the vicinity of Kilbraur. New tracks associated with any power line may increase access JR commented that some through track had been roughed up, MD said it was down to owners if track needed for retention not public use potential. Different owners and developers can complicate matters.

MD summarised that the forum were supportive of a combination of diversion (to Dalvaich) and new terminus at Dunrobin Glen/Farlary. BG asked if track from Kilbraur to Dalvaich was in a good condition, JR said it was and there were in fact two tracks.

MD did raise question of if adding Farlary as a terminus was overstretching the review of the core path due to the loss of the bridge. Forum thought not.

MD explained that principal of single change would be to simplify the process, less route means less conflicting points likely to be forthcoming and other path objections will not hold up all the reviewed paths. Limited landowners and occupiers to consult but spread to wider community. Also no longer expected to publish in local paper and use website, nothing says it needs to be promoted in the press.

5. Access Rangers 2025

MD stated adverts were out for Access Ranger forthcoming season.

MD reported that the Access Rangers had worked in Sutherland with 4 staff working 3 FTE. Last day will be tomorrow. Some Access Ranger are expected to be continuing over winter.

New season start will be approx. 17 Access Rangers throughout Highland starting 28 May 2025. In Sutherland that will be 4, Easter Ross/East Sutherland, North Sutherland, North West Sutherland and Assynt/Coigach.

Although East Sutherland is sharing with Easter Ross the sites are not as busy with many visitors passing through or only staying for one day. Still some hotspots, Big Burn/Back Shore Brora. LC commented on poor behaviour at Littleferry – one incident with large fires/excessive collection of fire wood/quad bike.

No staff allocated for Sutherland yet, will be a delay in receiving phone and IT to be able to communicate with the public.

For the early season patrols to date litter had been a significant issue. West and North struggle with fortnightly collection, can be better in East Sutherland because of location of refuse depot at Brora.

West coast is busy with hotspots like Ardvreck and Achmelvich but with some space, luckily visitor dwell time is short so high turnover. Some locations can be much longer stay.

Discussion over toilets and mention of Campa web map for black waste disposal. BG mentioned request by north coast communities for MH/CVs to only stay on sites. MD

explained the role of the Access Ranger is to promote good practice not be parking wardens/full time litter pickers.

MD stated that the 2025 season funding was not being externally sourced, as in previous years, but only guaranteed for a year. Good coverage through the Highland area with applications from Fort William and Skye, North Sutherland has been less successful in attracting applicants.

There is intended to be some Access Ranger posts carried forward into the winter 2025/26 closed season.

MD explained the Access Ranger working week. Discussion over some of the paths to be worked on and improved.

6. Ongoing Access Enquiries and Work

MD apologies for not producing a table ongoing access enquiries, though this had been produced at the last meeting MD was unable to access an editable version of the document. **ACTION – MD to do again**

- **Coul Railway Line** – gate installation completed and gorse cut, MD to keep this on the list as requires some repeat visits until gorse under check.
- **Sutherland Space Port** – Remove from list as project has been mothballed.
- **Littleferry** – No progress, MD concerned about potential future use and lack of parking at the road end.
- **Dairy Park** – Been winter so unsure of current path vegetation growth/surface condition, LC says it needs no more material. Possibly vegetation cut to stop creep to shore. Issue with path is the locked gate north beyond the castle. MD has raised with Sutherland Estate and castle.
- **Carbisdale** – Map Panel has been ordered. To be delivered to Lairg. To redo signage on the road. Discussion over site. MD has produced a leaflet to distribute
- **Navidale** – BG asked about strimming Navidale (July?) MD to arrange with Access Rangers. Discussion on other paths in Helmsdale (**MD to follow up bridge path**)
- **Dornoch Airfield** – MD to leave to THC staff dealing with the lease.
- **Seaview Track/Hilton of Embo** – Core path ploughed but it was promptly reinstated.

7. AOCB

BG – asked about the Navidale Cycle path and how was it resurfaced. MD explained background to road stopping up when the road was realigned. MD to check about Allt

na Briste circuit. Better finish to path, links to underpass to coast. **Toilet signs needed?**

Discussion about camping, wild/roadside/informal in all its forms

Car parking in Strath Halladale, visitors but also fishermen in passing place.

Brief mention on the public right of way adjacent to the old British Legion Building in Golspie. MD said forms had been dropped of at the service point.

JR 1- Brora River, gate no longer working.

2- The Other Gleneagles, fishermans hall. Field gate locked but kissing gate not accessible to bikes/horses.

3 – Eiden – Torboll Farm – path inaccessible

4 – Little Rogart fence missing gate

5 – Round Rogart Path, kissing gate at curling pond

6 – Other gate of Brora Riverside down from ford

LC comment on poor behaviour with groups bring large quantities of wood to burn and ATV/buggy to access the site.

8. Date of next meetings

29 September 2025