

Caithness Local Access Forum – Minutes and Action Sheet

Room 1, Caithness House, Wick

Monday, 11 May 2026 at 1.30pm

Present:

Willie Bruce
Ben MacGregor
Donna Mather
Karl Rosie
Jay Wilson (JW)

Cllr K Rosie in the Chair.

In attendance:

Matt Dent (MD) Access Officer
Gill MacPherson, Senior Committee Officer (Minutes)

Item 3: Sharon, Association of Northern Trails Scotland

Item		Action
1.	Apologies There were apologies from Ben MacGregor and Eilidh Willoughby. The Forum welcomed Sharon, who had recently joined the Association of Northern Trails Scotland (ANTS) and John O’Groats Trail, and would be working with the Halkirk Paths Group.	
2.	Notes from previous meeting AGREED minutes of the meeting held on 28 April 2025 to be a right and proper account of meeting. The meeting proposed for the 27 October 2025 did not proceed due to the late apologies and no quorum, one member turned up.	
3.	Matters Arising During discussion, the following points were raised:- Halkirk-Sibster Link	MD

The Halkirk-Sibster Link was a multi-use path used for both active travel and recreation. The Access Officer was keen for the path to be included within the Council's Active Travel Plan and information was sought, and provided, in this regard.

It was confirmed that ANTS, with the support of Sharon, would co-ordinate this, including the possibility of funding, and the long-term sustainability of the path. It was suggested that ANTS contact David Swanson, Active Travel Project Officer to take this forward.

The Access Officer would meet with Sharon at a mutually convenient time to discuss this further.

Glutt Access

Since the last meeting, the Access Officer had undertaken a site visit. New fencing had been erected, and the ownership of Dunbeath Estate had changed. No further action was required at this time.

Dunnet Beach Access

- the Disability Access Panel had recently advertised for new members due to very low membership;
- sections of the John O'Groats Trail had recently been improved which included the removal of kissing gates;
- waymarkers could be installed but these were not essential;
- it was asked if a broken bench at Ness of Duncansby could be repaired; and
- information was sought, and provided, in terms of funding opportunities and the Access Officer would continue to liaise with the John O'Groats Development Trust in this regard.

The Forum was also provided with the following updates:-

- there had been no further developments in relation to the core path diversion at Halkirk Riverside, and the homeowner had not come forward. No further action was to be taken at this time;
- the Blingery gate was now in place. There remained one cattle grid which had a locked gate and the Access Officer was to follow this up, however there were other points of access to the forest track;
- since the Altnabreac Station had re-opened it had been well used; and
- recent complaints in relation to Geise Walk had been regarding the price of the attraction rather than the walk itself. This matter remained ongoing.

	The Forum NOTED the update.	
4.	Access Rangers The Access Officer provided an update in terms of the Access Rangers Annual Report 2025, which included data on visitor numbers and vehicle observations. Caithness recorded positive results, with only eight negative engagements reported. While recreational vehicle use had increased, roadside and informal camping had reduced. An update was provided on the Highland Campervan and Motorhome Scheme, and the Access Officer would provide links to the Scheme and Camper website after the meeting. There was discussion regarding visitor counting on the John O'Groats Trail. Electronic counter data was used to support funding applications, and the value of third-party data informing future projects was recognised. Long-distance walker numbers continued to increase annually on the trail. The Caithness Access Ranger, now in his third year, had established strong local links and this was welcomed. It was suggested that he might be able to assist with minor trail inspections and maintenance. The Forum welcomed confirmation that Access Ranger funding was now included in budget lines, securing the continuation of the service. Opportunities for greater collaboration between ranger services and partner organisations in the future were discussed. The Forum NOTED the update.	MD
5.	Suggested Updates to Core Path Plans The Access Officer presented an image showing a proposed reroute of the core path at Braemore, where the existing route passed Keepers Cottage. The proposed alternative route to the south of the current path was already in use and was reported to be a highly usable and popular walking route. The route was accessible to horses, although gates were present at both ends of the straight section. The Forum discussed whether the proposal constituted a material change requiring formal procedures or a de minimis change. Consideration was given to the signage currently in place and a comparison was drawn with the Peffery Way in	MD/JW

	Ross and Cromarty, where an alternative route option worked effectively. Thereafter, the Forum discussed the process for amending other core paths. The Access Officer advised that single minor changes could be progressed more flexibly, whereas multiple changes would require the full statutory process, including consultation, committee approval and notification of landowners. Potential amendments should relate to routes that were already in use, well established and unlikely to be controversial. The focus would be on extending or improving existing core paths rather than creating new routes. It was asked if the northbound path near Keiss Harbour could be considered for future review. The Access Officer would arrange a meeting to discuss core path plans in Caithness and prepare a wish list for presentation to a future Forum. The Forum AGREED that the proposed reroute at Braemore should be treated as a de minimis change. It was further agreed that the proposal would be discussed with the relevant Community Council and local Members before progressing.	
6.	Access Issue List The Access Officer updated the Forum on several ongoing and completed minor works undertaken since the previous meeting, which included Mireland Access Gates. There was discussion regarding signage on the John O'Groats Trail, and the Access Officer would circulate photographs in relation to this after the meeting. Further improvements were being made to the trail to reduce the use of styles. Yarrows Informal waymarking had been installed and gate repairs had been carried out over the winter. Further gate repairs and signposting were due to be carried out over the summer. The ground was extremely hard, and contractors had been required in the past. The Forum NOTED the information provided.	MD
7.	AOCB The Forum:-	All

	i. NOTED that a press release would be circulated to encourage greater representation from landowners on the Forum. The representatives did not need to be landowners themselves and could, for example, be chartered surveyors; and ii. NOTED a presentation by the Access Officer on the proposed Lythmore Solar Windfarm. The Forum considered recreational access within the development area and were shown the location of the core path. Any further comments or queries were to be submitted directly to the Access Officer following the meeting.	
8.	Date of next meeting The next meeting would be held on 5 October 2026. Meeting ended at 3.15pm	