

Aberdeenshire Local Outdoor Access Forum
Draft Minutes of Meeting 78
23rd June 2020 – Zoom Meeting (under lockdown conditions)

Note This meeting was convened to update the Forum following the cancellation of the 27th April meeting due to Covid19 restrictions.

Present: Mark Andrew [part meeting], Geordie Burnett-Stuart, Lynsey Craig, Jonathan Kitching [part meeting], Gordon McKilligan, Lorna Paterson [part meeting], Ruth Riddell, Adam Wallace (Chair), Henry Webb, Chris York (Zoom Host).

Council officers: Bridget Freeman, Richard Elliott.

Abbreviations: **A/O** Access Officer(s); **S/G** Sub-group; **A/C** Aberdeenshire Council **Action**

1	Apologies Larry Irwin, Steve Russell. JK and LP advised that they would need to leave early due to other meetings.	
2	Preliminaries Welcoming those attending, Adam Wallace explained that due to broadband limitations at his own home, he would hand over the hosting of this meeting to Chris York. There being no formal agenda, CY suggested that items for discussion could include the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2021 (ALDP), Aberdeenshire Council update, and ALOAF membership considerations.	
3	<p>ALDP GBS expressed concern from previous experience that input from small rural communities is not carried through into the resulting Plan. CY drew attention to ALOAF's remit under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act which meant that the Forum would be competent to respond to the ALDP consultation process. [Post-meeting note by Min. Sec.: For document and response form, see https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/plans-and-policies/pldp-2020/]. In response to a query from LC, BF confirmed that the current round of consultation had been extended to 31st July 2020. Regarding his notes on the consultation document (previously circulated), CY noted that it lacks effective commitment to active travel (despite referring to climate change) and to outdoor access. Although the ALDP process has already progressed quite far, it would be a lost opportunity if ALOAF did not submit a response. RE advised that the consultation process was very important, and not least because of the impact of Covid19. Individuals as well as ALOAF could respond. In discussion it was agreed that ALOAF should submit a response, to be formulated following a further Zoom meeting of the Forum. In further discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In s4 of the consultation document, walking and cycling are seen as having a role in an efficient transport system. However, walking and cycling need more emphasis in the Plan. • The document is unclear whether paths are in settlements. ALOAF's remit includes Core Paths, many of which are currently on roads. Response could therefore include a request to make roads safer for non-motorised users by prioritising measures to 	

	<p>protect non-motorised users and control vehicles on roads which are also core paths, e.g. signage, 40mph speed limit. There was a firm consensus in favour of this.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for longer paths and connectivity between settlements. • A response from ALOAF would help to make the case for ALOAF to be included as a consultee in future such consultations; and such responses will let people know ALOAF is an active body. <p>CY noted that if the above ideas were acted upon there would be mixed effects on the public and land managers. Discussion followed on the impact of the currently much increased use of local access opportunities. RE said there had been one or two issues. While difficulties had arisen with one or two landowners, the response of some others had been praiseworthy. GBS later reported that people accessing his farm had behaved well throughout lockdown, with only one incident. LP reported that there had been not too many incidents, but there had been a lot of work for the A/Os. Farmers welcomed people to the countryside as it helped the public understand farming. She supported the potential for ALOAF to be a significant consultee to ALDP.</p> <p>JK drew attention to the Scottish Government’s call for evidence on the impact of COVID-19 on the rural economy and connectivity in Scotland. [<i>Post-meeting note by Min. Sec.:</i> This consultation is currently open-ended (i.e. no closing date). For information, see https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/115229.aspx]. JK felt that potential negative responses from land managers needed to be balanced by input on the access benefits experienced by communities during lockdown.</p> <p>On ALDP it was agreed that the Forum should reconvene to prepare a response. Members should read the main document first, as well as CY’s previously circulated notes. People should also look at the “settlement plan” for their own locality. CY noted the document’s strategic aspirations for recreation, active travel and connectivity between settlements (e.g. in the Transport Assessment), but he highlighted a disconnect in that these are not carried through into local proposals. Actions: ALDP response -- All to exchange ideas and generate text on Knowledge Hub; likewise for Scottish Government rural economy and connectivity call for evidence, given that access has a role in the local economy; CY to set up Zoom meeting for 6th July.</p>	<p>ALL</p> <p>ALL</p> <p>ALL CY</p>

4	<p>Aberdeenshire Council update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alistair Fullwood, Environment Planner, will be retiring on 8th July. His remit for the Deeside Way will be taken on by Jim Davidson. • RE advised that Alison Espie, former Chair of ALOAF, sadly passed away in May. CY noted her huge contribution to the Forum's work. MA and AW will prepare a letter from the Forum to her family. • With the current pressures on budgets, no vacant posts will be filled and the prospect is of continuing austerity. Spending is under tight control, which impacts on access-related projects. • With Council money severely limited, properly constituted local paths groups therefore have an increased significance. Thought should be given to enhancing the representation of such groups on the Forum. In this way ALOAF could contribute to the Build Back Better mission. Local paths groups are not mentioned in ALDP, but should be. • It was agreed that discussion of any casework should be deferred to a future meeting, but could be progressed on KHub in the meantime. At present, the restrictions prevent Council officers from having external face to face meetings, resulting in strict prioritisation of tasks and some casework being put on hold. 	MA/AW
	<p>ALOAF update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the tenure of the Chair and Vice Chair due to come to an end within the next year, it was agreed that it is time to take stock. The Chair's term finishes with the February 2021 meeting, and the Vice Chair at the meeting following. This should be rationalised so that the terms of both offices are synchronised to February 2021. It would be desirable to start the conversation now, on KHub. This should be notified to the Forum, and could be extended to include review of the term dates of all members. Also, subject to vacancies and the sectoral balance, recruitment should be ongoing. • Congratulations were extended to Gordon McKilligan, who is to represent NFUS on the National Access Forum. • RE noted that the present Zoom meeting had cost nothing, and had incurred minimal bureaucracy, which suggested that thought should be given to more frequent online meetings. GMcK was concerned that rural broadband could be a problem for online activity. CY agreed that there was potential, especially for subgroups. RE thought that there might be potential for ALOAF to meet via the Council's Microsoft Teams platform. LC supported the idea of more frequent meetings online, as well as some face to face meetings. A mix of the two seems to be the way forward, bearing in mind (as pointed out later) that ALOAF meetings are open to the public. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BF suggested that some thought could be given to updating the ALOAF leaflet and/or the Newsletter, as with the reduction in ALOAF activities due to COVID19 some money has been saved. GMcK thought that perhaps this should be deferred until the changeover in Chair and Vice-Chair takes place. • MA asked whether the system of Agendas and Minutes should apply to online meetings. CY felt that online meetings were more for ongoing business, while the face to face meetings justified Agendas and Minutes. There is scope for more focussed lists of items for discussion. In discussion, it was accepted that the requirement for meetings to be public posed a problem. A/Os suggested that one avenue is the existing facility for members of the public to contact the Forum. • On how other LAFs were functioning during lockdown, BF reported that Argyll members were being given field checking tasks, while Moray is to hold a Zoom meeting next week. RE reported a fair amount of Aberdeenshire activity on KHub. 	
6	<p>Closing remarks and future meetings On casework, CY asked A/Os to consider how to this could be handled online. AW thanked CY for organising the meeting and all attendees for participating. There are alterations to the ALOAF meetings schedule, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6th July, 2020 – NEW: Zoom meeting to discuss response to ALDP21. • 20th July, 2020 – CANCELLED due to COVID19. • 26th October, 2020 – scheduled as face to face (i.e. “normal”) meeting, but may have to be altered in line with guidance at the time. • February, 2021 (date tba) -- scheduled as face to face (i.e. “normal”) meeting, but may have to be altered in line with guidance at the time. Between the above meetings, there is scope for further Zoom discussions where appropriate. 	A/Os