

**Aberdeenshire Local Outdoor Access Forum
Minutes of Meeting 54**

24th November 2014 – Council Chamber, Gordon House, Inverurie

Present: Hamish Booth, Cllr Graeme Clark (*deputising for Cllr Patricia Oddie*), David Culshaw, Alison Espie (Chair), John Fyall (*part of meeting*), John Hughes, Gordon McKilligan, Judy Middleton, Robin Maitland, Adam Wallace.

Council officers present: Marsaili Aspinall, Linda Mathieson, Matthew Watt.

Observers present: Joanna Dick (River Dee Trust), Alison Mitchell (Access User Reserve).

	Apologies Mark Andrew, Andrew Robertson, Chris York.	Action
1	<p>Minutes of Meeting 53 and matters arising Approved (AW), seconded (JF). Haddo visit and meeting 29/9/14 Agreed this was a model worth repeating. ALOAF Gilets Now available for use at events. FCS Rep Ian Cowe seconded elsewhere for 6 months. Temporarily replaced as FCS Rep by David Hay available “as required” but will not be routinely attending meetings. Noting that this was better than nothing, but not satisfactory, the Chair suggested monitoring the situation and re-assessing in 6 months. <u>If IC not returning in due course, a letter of appreciation should be sent, recognising IC’s contribution to ALOAF.</u> MW to update at next meeting. NFUS Reserve Andrew Robertson organising. Access Checklist Circulated at meeting were ALOAF’s “Development Planning Access Checklist” and Council “Outdoor Access & Development” leaflet. Intended for community councils and developers, <u>LM anticipated including them in forthcoming mailing re ALOAF’s Community sector vacancy.</u> Endorsing their value re expected major developments in Aberdeenshire (by attracting input on local paths and encouraging appropriate access infrastructure), GMcK added that they would be a useful vehicle for discussion with visitors when ALOAF at Turriff Show. Congratulating GMcK for driving this project, the Chair said that ALOAF should be proud of it, and it will encourage people to come forward for the Forum.</p>	<p>MW</p> <p>MW</p>
2	<p>ALOAF administration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operating Principles update Agreement needed on proposed revisions, with view to a Special Meeting in 2015 to consider them, viz: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Quorum level Consider alteration, as “10 including at least 3 sectors”, has proved difficult to achieve in recent meetings, partly due to insufficient Agency attendance (FCS currently distanced; NHSG not attending at all and its 	

	<p>rep status may have to be dropped). Chair unhappy with SNH having backed out of LAF attendance nationwide. <u>Meeting agreed to propose reducing quorum level to “8”.</u> LM suggests “Agency” to be changed to “Agency and Organisation” – no objections made to this.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>RAFT membership</i> <u>Agreed to propose elevation from observer to full rep status.</u> ○ <i>ALOAF advice to 3rd parties</i> <u>Draft guidance, prepared by CY, circulated at meeting and approved.</u> The Chair recorded thanks to CY for preparing the guidance. Asked by RM how 3rd parties could contact ALOAF initially, the options identified were (a) via ALOAF member (as “messenger” only); (b) via Forum web pages on Council website; (c) via Access Officers. MA advised that 3rd parties should be made aware that enquiries cannot be resolved immediately, due to ALOAF meeting schedule. <p><u>Agreed to call Special Meeting for 2/2/15 immediately before ordinary Meeting.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Secretariat responsibilities</i> Having attended ALOAF meetings since its inception in 2005, LM advised that the secretariat role now rests with the two Access Officers MA and MW. Discussion followed on pros and cons of electronic vs. paper distribution of meeting papers. Paper poses logistical issues, especially photocopying time for Council admin staff; electronic speeds process, can lead to earlier delivery; and is preferred by some, not by others, but devolves printing costs onto ALOAF members. Paper version easier to read; referral to e-documents at meetings an issue unless I-pads at hand. <u>Agreed continue present paper system, but to advise “electronic copies available on request”.</u> Advance e-mailing of minutes and agenda was appreciated. Noting that it would be useful to return to the paper vs. electronic debate from time to time, the Chair welcomed MA and MW to the secretariat role. LM advised that she would not be routinely attending meetings but could respond/attend as and when required. The Chair expressed sincere thanks to LM for her service to the Forum. • <i>Community rep vacancy</i> <u>With resignation of Jenny Spratt, it will be necessary to advertise the vacancy and encourage interest among contacts. Include in forthcoming mailing to community groups. Could encourage Linda Miller to attend as Reserve during the vacancy (needs letter or e-mail). Chair to write to thank JS.</u> 	<p>MW</p> <p>MW</p> <p>MW ALL MW MW AE</p>
3	Upholding access rights cases -- update	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loch of Skene – dog issues MA reported improvement. Case transferred to Ranger Service. SNH dog advice signage has been installed by unknown party. Only complaint is deposit of poo-bags in private wheelie bins. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haddo Country Park HB noted need for all parties to work together to avoid potential future user-conflict in light of increasing visitor numbers. MW reported the concern of Mark Andrew (MkA) and Visitor Services Officer Diana Spencer (DS) that if the fee procedure was lost they'd be unable to get it back. AE clarified that the charge (1-off £5) was for a membership group (Haddo Riding Club), and explained that charging was seen as an issue in terms of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act. JF added that MkA and DS were happy with the membership charge arrangement. On being asked if ALOAF was in favour of keeping this arrangement, JF advised that CY was opposed because he feared it would set a precedent (MW advised that CY had e-mailed, setting out his argument); but JF felt it was a way forward. AE observed that there had been full discussion at Meeting 53 and had the meeting been quorate, the vote would have favoured keeping the charge. MW re-iterated the Council's legal advice that the charge was legal, but said that MkA was keen on wider support. GMcK reported that Haddo Country Park wants to maintain high standard by having means of contact with equestrian users. After further discussion, the Chair stated her regret at CY's absence from the present meeting, but she felt that ALOAF had given sufficient consideration to the issue, and it was time to reach a decision She noted that Council's legal advice favoured keeping the charge, and that the previous meeting had favoured supporting it, so <u>she proposed that ALOAF support retention of the Haddo Riding Club arrangement, subject to it being on with the aim of encouraging responsible access and not excluding any user groups, with any fees remaining at a nominal level – all for the purpose of enhancing the Country Park user experience and promoting responsible access. This was approved by consensus.</u> No disagreement with LM's suggestion that, as CY had submitted his views, <i>[extract from Minutes of Meeting 53 – "that the fee and membership requirement was not in the spirit of the access legislation" Min. Sec.]</i>, the meeting could note his reservations about the proposed course of action. 	AE
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oyne MA reported an ongoing issue re access to Bennachie, involving a boundary dispute, drainage issues, etc. Currently the boundary issue is with Lands Tribunal and MA unable to progress 	

	the matter until boundary has been established. As mediation has been refused, ALOAF involvement in this issue would not be productive.	
	<i>[Meeting went into closed session to consider access issues at Aboyne and Cornhill, before resuming in open session as follows].</i>	
4	ALOAF briefing	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Presentation by Joanna Dick, Dee Catchment Outreach Officer</i> JD employed by River Dee Trust and Dee Catchment Partnership (DCP); role is education, awareness raising and access. Focussing on access for this presentation, JD's role is to encourage responsible access. Projects include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Summer 2014 initiative targeting Deeside "hotspots" – Cluny Flats, Cambus o' May Bridge, Potarch Bridge, Banchory. These are pressure points on hot, sunny days, with issues of litter, fires, wild camping and user conflict – pressure most severe at Cambus o' May and Potarch. JD and Aberdeenshire Ranger Helen Rowe visited hotspots on appropriate, sunny days, making contact with over 250 users and handing out leaflets. Users included congregated groups of young people, and generally the response was positive, with examples of sites being left tidy. People are also encouraged to relieve pressure by visiting alternative sites with visitor facilities, e.g. Glen Tanar, Muir of Dinnet. Information boards are proposed for Potarch and Cambus o' May; Potarch board (joint Council/DCP) installation expected by spring 2015. ○ Positive results from use of blogs, social media, newspapers. ○ Paddle sports: guidance leaflets on etiquette and hand signals issued in 2014, installed in fishing huts at start of 2014 season; also a voluntary notification scheme, with paddlers phoning in details of planned route and time, which are then forwarded to angling proprietors and ghillies, enabling them to adjust for expected river traffic. Results positive, although Scottish Canoe Association (SCA) has objected to inclusion of their logo and the statement that the guidance was prepared jointly with SCA. The SCA cannot endorse the guidance unless it is fully endorsed by members of SCA. ○ In discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ LM added that the SCA has issued its own guidance, and is not comfortable with endorsing guidance issued by individual rivers. MA asked if there could be a role for the Scottish Sports Association in the angler/paddle 	

	<p>sports context. LM advised that this was a possible future approach.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Responding to a question from DC, JD confirmed wild camping issue largely confined to the Cluny Flats, although it can be a problem at Potarch and Cambus o' May. Boulder placement has helped at Cluny Flats. ➤ JD hopes that in 2015 a student can be tasked with re-assessing the hotspots. ➤ DC reported incident of cyclists being shouted at opposite Invercannie, but LM thought this was a one-off incident due to concerns about erosion. <i>[JF left meeting during the above item]</i> ➤ Responding to a question from Cllr GC, JD advised that bridge-jumping was not an issue for anglers, as the latter avoided such locations at busy times. ➤ Cllr GC asked if there had been any resolution of the long-term issue between Banchory Bridge and Laird's Cast. JD said it had not been a problem recently. LM reported an issue at Rhu na Haven, Aboyne, but provision of a litter bin by the Council (to assist litter clearance by ghillie) had alleviated this. ➤ Responding to a question from AE about Aboyne Bridge, JD that she had installed signage before the most recent post-exam party. After the party, rubbish had been cleared by person(s) unknown, and the signs are still in place. ➤ In relation to so-called wild camping, damage to trees has not been a problem, but there is a pattern of abandonment of cheap camping gear. ➤ The Chair enquired whether JD's role as Outreach Officer was leading the way in Scotland. JD agreed, because although there are Education Officers elsewhere her role extended into outdoor access as well. <p>The Chair commended JD's work, and thanked her for the presentation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topics for February briefing Options discussed were Walking-the-Talk, Police Wildlife Crime Officer (PWCO), Andy Turner's Wildlife Crime role, Council Dog Warden, JF's land arbitration work, JF farm visit, SNH commercial dog-walking consultant. <u>After discussion it was agreed to invite a Council Dog Warden, with Walking-the-Talk as a fallback option. Access Officer to arrange invitations, and to clarify PWCO situation.</u> 	<p>MW</p>
--	--	-----------

5	<p>ALOAF activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint meeting with Moray LAF MW reported that Moray were keen to go ahead with this in May 2015, in the form of an evening bus tour on the Moray/Aberdeenshire border. Themes to include Deveron access issues, cross-boundary and other mutual issues. <u>The Forum agreed to go ahead. Access Officers to discuss with Moray next week.</u> • Joint meeting with Cairngorms National Park (CNP) LAF MA reported that CNPLAF is keen on a shared meeting. <u>ALOAF Chair in favour but suggested that arrangements be left to CNPLAF, and ALOAF should invite them to proposed joint meeting with Moray.</u> JH suggested electric hill fences a relevant topic for discussion. • ALOAF Induction Pack LM circulated checklist of possible items, some of which might be held back until the appointment of a new member. A briefing note from the Loch Lomond and Trossachs LAF was also circulated. <u>Feedback is requested to LM by Christmas 2014, in order to prepare for further discussion at the 2/2/15 ALOAF meeting.</u> • [New item] Decision sheet The Chair asked if distribution of the meeting's Decision Sheet (Operating Principles s5.1 (v)) fell to Minutes Secretary or Access Officers. The Min. Sec. suggested this was Council responsibility. The Chair felt it would be helpful for this lapsed procedure to be re-introduced, but felt distribution within 7 days of the meeting was unrealistic. <u>Agreed that the Access Officers would undertake the distribution, but with timescale extended to 3 weeks.</u> • Themes and events for 2015 Following discussion of various options without result, the general feeling was that both ALOAF members and Access Officers had limited time available for coordinating and staffing event attendance. <u>A further visit to the Turriff Show emerged as the likely prospect for 2015, on the basis that it would be good to keep the Forum's growing visibility and current foothold there. The Chair cautioned that preparations should be made well ahead. LM suggested that for 2015, instead of working on a theme for the ALOAF stand, a good supply of access information leaflets would be an adequate resource for interaction with the public. LM happy to help, likewise DC.</u> 	<p>MW</p> <p>MW/ AE</p> <p>ALL</p> <p>MW</p> <p>MW</p> <p>MW</p> <p>ALL</p>
6	<p>Aberdeenshire Council update</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core Paths Plan mapping LM advised that the proposed interactive map has not yet been prepared by the Council's IT service; also that she has prepared 3xA0 size maps – covering the Plan area – which could go on the Council website but this and the 	

	interactive map are delayed due to the IT service being engaged on unrelated major IT changes. <u>LM will advise as soon as the material is “live” on the website.</u>	LM
7	Access consultations, issues etc	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>SNH Corporate Plan consultation</i> In discussion, it was felt that this document was not easy to comprehend and, as a corporate plan, not something which would justify responses on operational access matters, e.g. integration of access with greening agenda of EU rural directives. It was suggested that the integration point might better fit with a response to SRDP proposals, but GMcK cautioned that these are at an early stage and there was potential for conflict between SRDP’s ecological objectives and access use. LM felt that a relevant response to the current consultation could be expression of concern that SNH was spreading itself too thin, and should return to focus on its twin areas of environment and access and with attention to local authorities’ role. <u>Having earlier noted lack of time for a formal ALOAF response, the Chair suggested that members could comment via the SNH website.</u> • <i>Report of the Wild Fisheries Review Panel</i> This report precedes a public consultation in January 2015. The Forum’s discussion focussed on Recommendation 42 – removal of closed days (i.e. Sundays). MA and JD observed that Sunday fishing could engender conflict with other river users for whom Sunday was a popular day often with recreational events taking place on the river. However, JD added that fishing clubs tended to include people for whom Monday-Friday employment meant that they could currently only fish on Saturdays. For them, Sunday fishing would double the available fishing time. On the other hand, 7-day fishing would impact on the current employment pattern for ghillies etc. <u>LM advised that the Forum should await the forthcoming consultation and then see if Recommendation 42 has been included or not. Noted for discussion at the 2/2/15 ALOAF meeting.</u> • <i>Aberdeenshire Land Use Strategy Pilot “Land Use Changes and Opportunities” report for feedback [See Item 9]</i> 	ALL
8	Events, training, information	
	<i>(1) National Access Forum (NAF)/Local Access Forum (LAF) Joint Meeting 4/11/14 – feedback</i> Meeting attended by MA and JM. JM found it very interesting, despite a bias towards encouraging NAF responses in discussion rather than LAF. Equestrian workshop very good, with practical demonstrations by police rider on negotiation of	

	<p>narrow paths and gates. A useful point was that mounting and dismounting puts a strain on horse and girth. MA reported an example of a long-distance rider encountering locked gate at the end of a long ride. In response to a question from AE about equestrian use pressure or damage, it was noted (a) that the British Horse Society can supply work parties and also has some funding available for gates, etc., and (b) that if walkers and cyclists can use a path, then horse-riders wish to be able to do likewise if not damaging the path. JM suggested arranging a similar demonstration in ALOAF's area.</p> <p>(2) Deer Management Group (DMG) AE reported from attendance with AW at the group's most recent meeting. ALOAF had been invited as an observer in the light of the group's preparation of a new Deer Management Plan (DMP) to SNH requirements, which include taking into account the public interest. In the ALOAF context, AE therefore noted and sought discussion on items of relevance to access users, namely fences on the open hill, measures to eradicate deer in some areas, and out-of-season culling); and she asked for a view on whether ALOAF should comment on the Plan. The Forum's discussion focussed on fences on the hill, which are a barrier if no crossing points are provided. It was felt that the location of crossing points should be identified although suggested options varied between hi-tech (maps with grid refs. for GPS use) and lo-tech (directional signage to nearest crossing point), or a combination of both. DC identified the issues as fences, out-of-season culling, and the proliferation of hill tracks (while recognising that wind farm tracks sometimes assist access). <u>The Chair proposed that ALOAF might prepare a paper, indicating public interest issues which DMGs might wish to consider when drawing up DMPs. She proposed further discussion with AW on such a paper, and requested ALOAF members' comments by 12th Dec.</u></p>	<p>AE/AW ALL</p>
<p>9</p>	<p>AOB</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MW referred to the Aberdeenshire Land Use Strategy Pilot "Land Use Changes and Opportunities" report [Agenda Item 7, b/p 3]. GMcK had attended Huntly meetings, but recreation had been dropped from remit. AE noted that a multi-functional land-use structure was anticipated. 	
<p>10</p>	<p>2015 meetings</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Dates</i> <u>There being no objections, the 2015 dates are 2 February, 11 May, 22 June, 5 October, 23 November.</u>• <i>Venue</i> <u>As the Gordon House Council Chamber will no longer be available after 7pm, a new ALOAF meeting venue is required – possibly a school facility.</u>	MW
--	---	-----------