

North Ayrshire Outdoor Access Forum

Note of Statutory Forum Meeting

Tuesday 25th April at Ardrossan Civic Centre, Glasgow Street, Ardrossan

Present: Luke Borwick, Bruce Davidson, Louise Dickson, Jean Highet, Rob Loney, John MacFarlane, Norman MacGilvray, Sandy Millar, James Muir, Kate Sampson and Dick Sim

Attending: Councillor Donald Reid, Margaret Ferrier, Louise Kirk, Gordon Clark (all NAC),

Apologies: Gerrard Tattersfield, Lord Glasgow, Frank Corcoran, Duncan Winning, Geoff Atkins (SNH) and Rona Gibb (PfAP)

Welcome

The Chair welcomed the group to the first meeting of 2006 and highlighted that although there has not been a meeting since late November, a lot of activity has been taking place in relation to outdoor access. This includes undertaking projects; securing funding for and developing the toolkit and the other general day to day access activities.

The Chair reiterated to the group that it is no longer the Core Group and is now the Statutory Forum and therefore has a defined role and responsibilities. Discussion arose regarding the independent nature of the group and LB advised that recent seminars including the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association (SRPBA) and National Farmers Union for Scotland (NFUS) Networking Seminar have stressed the significance of this.

The Chair highlighted the importance of responding to the AO's correspondence, therefore allowing substitutes to prepare for meetings and to ensuring that all meetings are representative and balanced. The AO reminded the group that the frequency of meetings and balance of representation was being monitored both through the Scottish Executive (SE) monitoring process and by PfAP.

Progress update

- Projects 2002-06

An overview of all the outdoor access projects undertaken between 2002 and 2006 was provided by the AO and is provided in Appendix 1. DS provided an update on the King's Cave Path and advised the group that the NAC/Coastalway section is complete and the Forestry Commission Section should be completed in 2006/07.

The group discussed the range of projects undertaken and agreed that a significant level of external funding and funding from other Services within the Council had been obtained. The AO advised that this would be reported to the SE in the next Monitoring Report. A summary of this will be provided at the next meeting.

The Group raised the issue of Grant Aided Expenditure (GAE) and whether the full allocation was being made available for outdoor access. The AO advised that the anticipated budget for 2006/07 was £50,000. LB requested and was provided with clarification (by MF) that this funding was additional to that required for the AO post. The group was also advised that outdoor access is a corporate responsibility and a wide range of other Services contribute both staff and financial resources including Education, Roads and Grounds Maintenance.

- Access and Code issues

The AO provided a brief overview of access issues in 2005/6, which is provided in Appendix 2. The AO advised that the vast majority of issues have been simply and relatively quickly resolved and that at present there were only two outstanding rights of way issues. A database is kept of all access issues to enable the AO to report to the Forum and the SE. The group discussed the issues and it was agreed that this should be a standing issue on the Forum Agenda.

SM raised the issues of incorrect leaflets being in circulation and that there was potentially a role for the Forum to provide advice to the producers of leaflets. SM highlighted that it was essential to consult with land owners/managers when producing such literature. It was recognised that whilst this practice is undertaken by the Council not all parties do so. The group agreed that when inappropriate leaflets are identified they could make recommendations to the producers for amendments and the production of future reprints.

The group discussed the importance of highlighting access issues to the AO, SNH and NAF. The AO advised that SNH has now provided all AOs with forms to enable them to report Code related issues and encouraged the group to report all such issues.

The issue of continued use of quads and other off road bikes/vehicles was raised by LB and discussed by the group. JMacF highlighted the legislative position in relation to the Road Traffic Act, as it now covers all mechanically propelled vehicles and not just cars. It was also strongly recommended that all such incidences be reported to the Police and that the Council should also be advised.

JMacF also advised that during a recent focus on tackling this issue in partnership with the Council's Countryside Ranger Service, on the use of these, 19 individuals were charged and 57 were warned. He advised that he could be contacted directly in relation to this issue and that the issue of managing motorbike use is still under discussion through Educational Services.

The AO showed the group the new SNH signage and guidance to enable land managers to advise access users of issues and the types and extent of land management operations they are undertaking. LB highlighted issues regarding the practicality of the signs and their size and advised that NFUS and SRPBA are negotiating prices for the signs. The AO advised that templates for the signs could be downloaded and printed from the Code website, www.outdooraccess-scotland.com

Core Path Planning update

The group was advised that the Toolkits have been developed in partnership with East Ayrshire Council as South Ayrshire Council decided not to participate. £1000 funding has been secured from both PfAP and from SNH and the Toolkits are approaching completion. The AO

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demonstrated contents of the Toolkit and how it worked to the group. The AO advised that Kilwinning Rotary would be test driving the toolkit and RL would feedback on this.

The group was advised that, as previously agreed, a Training Session would be undertaken in the near future to enable organisations and users to familiarise themselves with it and that the date will be forwarded to the group in the near future. This will be a joint event with East Ayrshire at Eglinton Country Park.

The group discussed their involvement in the audit process and utilising the Toolkit. LB highlighted that it was essential for representatives to encourage the organisations/individuals they represent to take part. The AO highlighted that NAC/EAC staff sessions were being organised due to the large numbers of staff living in the area and requested volunteers to assist with this. LB and JH volunteered and the AO will co-ordinate this.

Review of the Forum

The group were provided with and considered a discussion paper on the review of the Forum, provided as Appendix 3 on the review of the Forum. The AO highlighted that the review aims to refresh the group, ensure that it is in an appropriate position to enable it to fulfil its functions and prepare it for the challenges ahead.

From the discussion paper, the group agreed that for:

- Question 1 – Option 1, to invite the substitutes who wish to be considered as representatives to fulfil that role and identify additional candidates, was the most appropriate way forward
- Question 2 – Method one to invite applications was the preferred option
- Question 3 – The questions suggested were appropriate
- Question 4 – New members should be identified during the May, June and July period
- Question 5 – The dates were appropriate but meetings should be scheduled to start at 3pm to allow Arran members sufficient time for the return ferry
- Question 6 – That it would be useful to set 2007 dates in the summer/autumn period
- Question 7 – That the diary would be helpful and could be updated at each meeting to reflect progress
- Question 8 – That it would be useful to have such visits and that they would aid deliberations

The group discussed the fact that the draft Partnership Agreement was no longer appropriate given the fact that it was now the Statutory Forum. It was agreed that the group could consider question 9, regarding draft Operating Principles until the next meeting. The AO agreed to progress the Review for the next meeting of the group.

The AO advised that the PfAP are currently producing a new good practice guide for Outdoor Access Forums in light of the legislation now being in force. This will be hopefully be available for the June meeting and the group will have an opportunity to examine it and identify ways in which the Forum can improve.

Projects for 2006/07

The group was advised of two proposals for outdoor access projects for 2006/07, namely:

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1. All ability improvements – a wide range of all ability improvements could be made to the National Cycle Network Routes 7 and 73 and the New Town Trail. These include removing barriers, replacing kerbs on path edges with dropped kerbs, improved signage and information. This would provide increased access opportunities to less able or disabled residents and visitors.
2. West Kilbride Path Network – signage and waymarking similar to that in Dalry and Largs has been requested for West Kilbride. This is to highlight the existing networks of paths to local residents and visitors and to encourage increased usage.

Discussion arose on the type and nature of projects that should be funded by the outdoor access budget. The group was requested to forward all suggestions for projects to the AO by 31st May 2006, to enable discussion and prioritisation at the next meeting.

AOCB

LB advised the group of the SE's consultation on the Rural Development Programme for Scotland and that this has significant implications for land owners/managers. This Programme covers a wide range of issues including the Land Management Contract scheme (LMC), which currently provides funding for path creation and maintenance. The group was advised that the Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme is to be incorporated into the LMC, which will have implications for the North Ayrshire Urban Woodland Project. The full extent of the implications is not yet known but the AO will advise the group accordingly.

The group was advised that there was a proposal for a volunteer drive for the Irvine area between NAC, SWT and Sustrans to encourage people to become more involved with the path networks and the wider environment. Further information on this will be provided at the next meeting. All interested parties were requested to contact the AO for further details.

Close of meeting

The meeting was closed at 5.30 p.m. by Councillor Donald Reid, who welcomed the group's continued involvement in the outdoor access agenda and look forward to its future.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be 6th June 2006 at 3.00pm in Ardrossan Civic Centre