

## LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

<b>MEETING :</b>	<b>Local Access Forum - Oban</b>
<b>DATE :</b>	<b>Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> June 2014</b>
<b>PRESENT :</b>	<b>Jolyon Gritton, Douglas Grieves, John Robinson, Stuart Findlay, Jan Dunlop, Hugh Nicol, Nicholas Halls, Tony Charlesworth, Nona Thomas, Blair Fletcher, Julie Young, Fiona Russell, John Little, Freda Bos.</b>
<b>VENUE</b>	<b>Oban Community Fire Station</b>
<b>APOLOGIES :</b>	<b>Malcolm Holder, Mike McManus, Stuart Shaw, Niall MacAlister Hall, Dave Tomlinson, Duncan MacDonald, John Urquhart.</b>

<b>MEETING NOTES AND ACTION</b>	<b>OFFICER</b>
<p><b>Note:</b> As John Urquhart was away for this meeting, the proceedings were chaired by Blair Fletcher.</p> <p>1. Blair welcomed everyone to the meeting.</p> <p>2. Approval of Previous Minutes</p> <p>    2.1 The previous minute was appraised and approved.</p> <p>3. Matters Arising</p> <p>    3.1 There were no matters arising.</p> <p>4. Presentation on Argyll and the Isles Countryside Trust.</p> <p>    4.1 Julie Young outlined the underlying concepts of the Argyll and the Isles Countryside Trust.          Launched in April 2014, 89% of people asked were in favour of the new Trust and its aims and goals. As part of the launch, a feasibility study was carried out, so as to address local concerns as part of the local business plan.          Core funding for the Trust over a 3 year period will be delivered from the Forestry Commission, Scottish Natural Heritage, Argyll and Bute Council and NHS Highland.          The Trust was formed with a wide range of objectives to keep future options and directions open. They felt that although there were several groups and trusts working within a similar field, there was not really a covering strategic and cohesive link between various individual groups' efforts, e.g. geocaching, route upkeep, linked health walks etc...          The Trust aims to remain more a background force, with a focus on collaboration and facilitation for other projects and organisations, bringing together separate groups in ways that can benefit the aims of each.          The Trust intends on remaining small and not unwieldy. This will enable them to react swiftly and adaptively to issues/projects as they arrive.          Other focuses include volunteering skills and development.</p> <p>    4.2 Questions from the group.          Nick Halls mentioned the strengths of having volunteer awards and accreditation. This improves volunteer responses greatly and the social benefits to training volunteers are clear.</p>	

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It was asked whether the Core Paths network would be the sort of thing the Trust would be involved in. Julie explained that yes, it would, and a maintenance squad would be the sort of thing that could be organised through liaising with other groups e.g. Duke of Edinburgh Awards.

Jolyon Gritten explained how the Core Paths are currently being evaluated for costs of maintenance/simple repair work. This costing is then presented to community councils, broken down path by path. It would then be groups like ACT that will work together with others to see the project undertaken.

Gigha is a good example and in time, evaluation of a possible increase in turn over for the area would demonstrate it as a good example of success.

**4.3** Julie pointed out that works will always be put out to tender, and these tender requirements will include a measure of social benefit.

Nick Halls suggested it was a very good idea to audit outcomes, to evaluate how projects have happened, log those trained/employed as an outcome of the project etc. If outcomes are fulfilled, funders are keener to continue funding.

**4.4** Nona Thomas asked if the skills section of the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme can benefit from liaising with the group. Julie explained this would be a good long term project, particularly in line with the hopeful acquisition of the Coastal Communities Bid. Nona and Julie both agreed a similar framework could benefit those who have disengaged from school also.

*Nick Halls also stated that a Housing Association that he is a director of works with consultants who have to generate grant income before they are paid for certain types of work, i.e. the HA identifies a possible project and the consultants take their fee only once they have been awarded a grant for the project. If they do not make a successful application for a grant they do not get paid and cost the HA nothing. He suggested this is something ACT should consider.*

### 5. Forest Operations Signage

**5.1** Stuart Findlay from the Forestry Commission introduced himself and his role within the F.C. Stuart handed out copies of the commission leaflets on 'signage' and 'recreation and signage'.

**5.2** First comments to the issue of signage centred on the amount of notification given, and how far down a track a path/track a closure sign should be.

Stuart explained that safety is the first priority, and correct and informative signage is an important part of this. Managing signs and removing them when no longer needed on live sites is important to the commission.

**5.3** It was suggested that often signs do not get removed after works have been completed. After people have seen the signs for a long time, or signs without a date, they may walk the route anyway and then see the works are no longer continuing. Nona Thomas pointed out that if an organisation is possibly known for bad signage, people are more inclined to disregard their signs, assuming they are often obsolete.

Stuart said they put closures on the commission website and that they are also trialling reversible signs for worked and non-worked times on the same site. FCS realise that the management of signs on the National Forest Estate could be improved, however resources are stretched and there is not a person employed to specifically deal with signage.

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Stuart referred to the copies of the commission leaflets on signage and recreation. It was pointed out there was a contact number on the leaflet and website. Good practice signs should include a contact number and start/end date for the closure for greater information to the forest user.

**Note:** At this point, Jan Dunlop left the meeting.

**5.4** Stuart showed two videos from the Forestry Commission highlighting the issue from the points of view of both workers and those employed in forestry, as well as members of the public as users of the forests for walking, cycling etc...

**5.5** Fiona Russell speaking as a member of the British Horse Society noted that often the maps and notes of forested areas don't include information on stiles/gates/barrier types etc... This can make route planning and riding difficult for horse riders.

Douglas Grierson noted that the Core Paths plan is hoping to introduce notes such as these to the route analysis in the fullness of time.

**5.6** Jolyon suggested that the signs/maps at the front of Forestry Commission routes (car parks or main ingress points) could note any closures and how long they were expected to be in effect for. It was also noted that education of the public in this matter is important, but videos often get seen primarily by those within the industry, and not so much those outside of it.

**5.7** Blair Fletcher suggested the forum send a letter to the forestry commission highlighting the issues raised in this discussion. The forum agreed this would be a good idea. There was also agreement that the letter should include a section about the responsibilities of the access taker as this is not a one sided affair. It was agreed this letter should be drafted by Douglas Grierson.

Nick asked if it would be possible for access officers to be notified of future works taking place. John Little mentioned that details of closures would be included in the felling licences and that copies of felling licences are sent to the Council and that it would be worthwhile finding out who within the Council receives copies of the licences.

**Note:** At this point, Julie Young left the meeting.

### 6. Long Distance Routes

**6.1** John Muir Way- Jolyon informed the group that the John Muir Way was opened across April. Although the coast to coast route is opened sections of the Way at Goukhill near Helensburgh are not in a very good condition and works are planned to begin at the end of June to improve these sections

**6.2** The Kintyre Way- The Kintyre Way management team are looking at modifying the line of the route to include going along Westport Beach as well as extending the route in order to finish in Campbeltown rather than Southend as it currently does.

**6.3** Oban to Fort William Cycle path. There are still some difficulties with land owners to reach agreement about the line of the route but efforts continue.

### 7. Update on Killoeter Cottage and Other Ongoing Access Issues

**7.1** There has been a long exchange of emails between the relevant parties. There has been a meeting with the MacBeans and their associate providing legal advice and the local Councillor Ellen Morton. The feeling is that mediation would probably be preferred as a court option would only result in a yes or no answer, but mediation could provide group consensus.

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**7.1a** The four parties involved are The MacBeans, The Council, a Neighbouring Private Land Owner and Scottish Woodlands who should have known about the issues associated with a locked gate beforehand.

**7.1b** Alternatives discussed included moving the gate a few hundred metres along the boundary instead. Others discussions involved the land owners having a phone to ring when somebody wished to cross their land, and horse riders dismounting. Fiona Russell felt that it would be safer for horse riders to stay on their horses rather than dismount. The work is ongoing and it is hoped there will be a conclusion by the next meeting of this forum.

**7.2** Douglas explained there were around 18 other ongoing access disputes. One of note includes a dispute over access to the Pier at Melfort following the split of the original business into two parts, the holiday village, and the Pier and harbour. The club claims access to the Pier is for members only. Jolyon placed a freedom of information request with the police. There have been threats made amongst the parties involved. Jolyon to report further on the issue as more information becomes available.

**7.3** Other points of note included the potential for an issue at Clachaig farm to be resolved through the installation of a bridle gate; The lack of evidence to support the claim of a vehicular public right of way on Tiree and the lack of response from Legal Services regarding a potential Public Right of Way at Ellenabeich.

### 8. Core Paths

**8.1** Jolyon reports that a large number of the Core Paths went close to/across important habitat areas. Jolyon has produced a Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA) for these paths which has been sent to Scottish Natural Heritage for their comments. Once this has been approved he will submit a document to the Scottish Government's Strategic Environmental Assessment Gateway arguing that the Core Paths Plan does not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

**8.2** The Scottish Environmental Protections Agency and Historic Scotland have already confirmed that an SEA will not be required and providing the (HRA) can support this approach SNH should support this position. As soon as there is confirmation that an SEA is not required the report on the Core Paths Plan from the Scottish Government Reporter should be received within a couple of weeks.

### 9. Strategic Development

**9.1** Douglas and David have begun surveying the Core Paths, getting as much detail as is possible on the various states of the paths, what condition different stretches are in, what furniture is on the paths- stiles, gates etc. and the condition of the surface. This provides data that can be used to generate a 'Bill of Quantities' for the improvement of each path.

**9.2** This information will then be presented to Community Councils to quantify the costs of bring the Core Paths in their area up to a better standard. Some area are not covered by a Community Council but there may well be other community groups interested in the work.

**9.3** The focus is about working with existing groups to effect positive, cost effective change to improving the routes.

**9.4** The projects could involve consultants and mediation; say between land owners and project groups to meet half way on disputed issues.

**9.5** It was asked what the future of the Forum was with regards the Core Paths Network. Jolyon responded that if there were anything members of the

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Forum could do to assist in the positive work of the CPN, to feed back to the group and see if it can be put into place.

**9.6** Some members of the group felt that going forward on particular issues, the LAF needs to be, and needs to be seen to be, independent. Douglas responded saying that sometimes forums can fear that they need to be 'careful'. Whilst, being careful, he said it is also very important that the forum defines itself and how it works and interacts. There are various 'roles' that the group can take on.

**9.7** Nick re-iterated that he feels the group needs to be seen to be impartial, and that actions and changes can be effected, but the LAF should not be duplicating the role of other groups such as ACT but should be working alongside these groups in a strategic way.

### **10. Any Other Business**

**10.1** It was asked what sort of devices the route analysis is taking place on. Jolyon explained that currently PDA's are being used but the software developers are hoping to bring the program to an iPad or other tablets. This would greatly improve its ease of use and speed of use. There won't be any more hardware purchased until this transition has occurred.

**10.2** Regarding volunteers from the forum assessing routes, they are encouraged to do so, making note of what is happening on the tracks and paths, and report back if they observe any issues. Blair mentioned that this topic requires a greater more dedicated amount of time. Jolyon to make it a separate part of the agenda in its own time slot at the next forum meeting.

**Close:** The meeting was brought to a close and the Chair thanked everyone for their attendance. The next meeting will take place on 24<sup>th</sup> September in either Lochgilphead or Ardrishaig, venue to be confirmed shortly

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