

INTEGRATING ACCESS CASE STUDIES

BALLIEFURTH FARM

Addressing access issues common to many livestock farms by use of simple but effective signs and creation of alternative path avoiding steading

Key facts	205ha family run commercial beef and sheep farm with B&B enterprise
Location	Grantown on Spey, Moray
Access issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Walkers coming through the farm steading – privacy, disturbance and consequent injury risk to cattle in sheds; safety risks associated with machinery- Moving livestock along the disused railway which has always served as a main farm access route can at times be difficult since development of the Speyside Way along this route- Gates left open, allowing cattle and sheep to stray into arable crops- Night-time vehicular access by fishermen disturbing B&B guests, dogs and livestock- Fishermen parking around the steading restricting farm access
Background	<p>Although several miles from the nearest village in a very rural location, Balliefurth has a surprisingly high level of public access. Walkers and cyclists following the Speyside Way pass through the middle of the farm throughout the year. Under agreement with the local fishing association, fishermen drive and walk through the farm to access the River Spey. Inclusion in a local walks leaflet also encourages local walkers and visitors staying in the area to walk through the farm on a regular, if not daily, basis.</p> <p>Conservation is an integral part of farm management and owners Alistair and Ann MacLennan are actively involved in re-establishing links between consumers and their food through open days at Balliefurth as a LEAF demonstration farm, sale of produce at the local farmers market and various other initiatives. Provision of public access is a natural extension to the harmony which Balliefurth strives to achieve between environment and farming through integrated farm management.</p>
Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ To overcome problems of access through steading and gates being left open➤ To provide public access without interfering with livestock and machinery movement or other aspects of land management➤ To minimise disturbance to livestock and wildlife➤ To improve enjoyment of members of the public on the farm➤ To raise public awareness of how lamb and beef is reared on the farm
Who wants access?	Local and visiting walkers (short and long distance) Cyclists (on Speyside Way) Fishermen accessing River Spey
Where?	Disused railway Main farm access road as link to Speyside Way Track leading down from steading to river
Key attractions/ hot spots	Disused railway (Speyside Way) River Spey (fishing)
Sensitive areas/sites	Track through steading March and internal field boundaries

Action Taken

- **New path created** as an attractive alternative to the main farm access road avoiding the farm steading. Alistair approached the local community access project to help develop the path. Funding was secured through the Highland Access Project to pay for fencing of a path parallel to but well back from the public road along the edge of farm woodland, involving negligible loss of productive land but real benefits for both the public and Balliefurth.
- **Temporary sign for use on Speyside Way** – when cattle or sheep are being moved along the disused railway, a simple but very effective notice is hooked over the gate either end asking people to wait for a few minutes until they are given the all clear to continue. The sign is removed as soon as stock are off the path.
- **Information board** erected on the Speyside Way where the disused railway passes the steading includes information on Balliefurth Farm
- **Leaflets** showing the new path are available from Exploring Abernethy
- **Car park** for fishermen is being created near the river, funded by the local fishing association with a kissing gate leading down to the river to overcome problems of gates left open. Vehicle access will be allowed between 7 a.m. and 11 p.m. to restrict night movement through the steading.
- **Extended cattle housing** shields cattle from access through the steading and restricts their movement or injury risk should they panic, at the same time reducing the amount of run-off from former open cattle yards with environmental benefits.

Benefits

- ✓ Attractive new link path
- ✓ Access opportunities clearly identified
- ✓ Increased public confidence of where they are welcome to go
- ✓ Reduced risk of cattle injury or straying

Keys to success

Education of visitors through provision of appropriate information

Lessons learned

- ❖ People appreciate concern for their safety and being told why they are asked to wait during stock movement.
- ❖ Providing information about the farm helps encourage respect.
- ❖ People will only use alternative paths if they are clearly signed and waymarked.
- ❖ Working with local projects and groups can help fund projects to improve public access.

Future plans

Development of a new path as part of a woodland management scheme, which will create a more interesting and user-friendly link between the Exploring Abernethy route and Speyside Way, and will include information on an ancient Scots Pine tree which the path has been designed to pass.