

UNCONFIRMED MINUTES

National Access Forum – 53 rd meeting

Virtual meeting: 27 January 2021

Present:

	Representatives	Organisation
1	Don Milton	Convenor - National Access Forum (NAF)
2	Janice Winning	Secretary - National Access Forum (NAF)
3	Bridget Freeman*	Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service
4	Frank Spencer-Nairn	Association of Deer Management Groups (ADMG)
5	Helene Mauchlen	British Horse Society Scotland (BHSS)
6	Colin Shedden	British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC)
7	Paul Timms	Cycling UK Scotland
8	Lois Bayne-Jardine	Historic Houses
9	Stephen Jenkinson	Kennel Club / Scottish Kennel Club
10	Martin Duncan	Local Authorities
11	Nick Cole	Local Access Forum (LAFs)
12	Davie Black	Mountaineering Scotland (MS)
13	Kenny Auld	National Park Authorities (LLTNP)
14	Adam Streeter Smith	National Park Authorities (CNP)
15	Rona Gibb	Paths for All Partnership (PfA)
16	Insp. Alan Dron	Police Scotland
17	Helen Todd	Ramblers Scotland (RS)
18	Jonathan Kitching	(SAPOE)
19	Grant Dollier	Scottish Canoe Association (SCA)
20	Kevin Lafferty	Scottish Forestry (SF)
21	Emma Steel	Scottish Land & Estates (SLE)
22	Grace Reid *	Scottish Sheep Association
23	Eileen Stuart	NatureScot**
24	Alan Macpherson	NatureScot
25	Mark Wrightham*	NatureScot
26	Stephan Hennig	Scotways
27	Roger Scrutton	The Scottish Sports Association (SSA)
28	Roy Barlow	Woodland Trust Scotland

*in attendance as additional representatives or guests, ** NatureScot is the new operating name for Scottish Natural Heritage

Item 1 – Welcome & Introductions – The Convenor opened the virtual meeting welcoming everyone to the Forum. He thanked David Henderson Howat again for his four year term as Convenor and for his valuable assistance during the transition. He introduced Stephan Hennig the new representative for Scotways and thanked Douglas Wright (Scotways) for his welcome contributions to the Forum over the past few years. He also welcomed Grant Dollier representing (SCA), as well as Grace Reid representing the Scottish Sheep Association, a new Corresponding Member, and Bridget Freeman attending as observers. He informed the Forum that Paul Timms had been appointed as the new Chair of the Stirling Local Access Forum.

Apologies: David Clyne (CNPA), Stephen Dora & Malcolm Duce, Alasdair Thomson (SG), Andrew Hopetoun, (HHA), Eddie Palmer (SCA), Angus Duncan (Local Authorities), Gordon McKilligen (NFUS).

Item 2 – Minutes, Action points and matters arising from previous meeting

1. Minutes: - the unconfirmed minutes of the 16 September 2020 previously circulated were approved with no further amendments.
2. Action points & matters arising –

AP 49/7: Discharged - IPA final report prepared by SNH for consideration by Ministers. Once published a link will be circulated to the Forum. Update- this report was not published and hence was not circulated to the Forum.

Alan Macpherson provided an update on Improving Public Access (IPA) confirming that the recently announced Agri-Environment Climate Change Scheme would include an IPA component. Applications were being invited between 1 March 2021 and 30th June 2021. He explained that the IPA's menu of capital items was largely the same, eg path construction, signage, gates, benches etc, but with improvements to the specifications and supporting guidance based on the review undertaken in 2019/20. Fixed payment rates per item will remain the same, with NatureScot and RPID running the scheme similar to previous years. Decisions on applications are expected to be made at the end of the year, with successful projects being delivered in 2022. NatureScot will be considering options for funding post 2024, which will be discussed with the National Access Forum and others in due course along with progress on the IPA 2021 round. For further information on IPA see: www.ruralpayments.org.

AP 51/2: Mediation Guidance to be published by SNH on the SOAC website with a link sent to NAF members for further promotion. Discharged 12/11/2020.

The NAF Mediation Guidance Note is now published on the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC) website and was circulated to members for further dissemination. The offer of a virtual 'building skills in mediation' session presented by Scottish Mediation under the auspices of the Scottish Outdoor Access Network (SOAN) for access staff was confirmed by Helen Todd. A short briefing will also be given at the NAF/LAF meeting in March 2021 with the intention still to run a face to face event for LAFs as soon as restrictions ease potentially in the autumn.

AP 52/1: Convenor to write to VisitScotland offering continued National Access Forum engagement in the visitor management task force. Discharged 18/09/2020.

AP 52/2: Forum members wishing to be part a small working group on 'outdoor access with e-bikes' to contact the Secretary. Discharged: group met 20/11/2020 see agenda item 3.

AP 52/3: NAF Secretary to convene a small working group in November to draft the NAF/LAF Joint meeting programme for 2021. Discharged: group met 4 /12/2020 see agenda item 8a.

Item 3 – Outdoor Access with E bikes

3. The Convenor provided feedback from the recent NAF sub group meeting held on 20 November 2020, referring to the note of the meeting and recommendations for the Forum to:
 - Maintain its current pragmatic position based on existing legal advice that e-bikes are within access rights until any further substantive advice is received.
 - Await the findings from the research before developing any further guidance.
 - Develop short NAF guidance in due course to support existing SOAC guidance.
4. Alan Macpherson provided an update on the research and the timetable. The £36k research project managed by British Cycling and funded by Forestry England, Natural Resources

Wales, NatureScot, Scottish Forestry and British Cycling is now out to tender. The project will report by the end of October will help all partners plan for a future of off-road cycling using e-bikes. The study will involve an investigation of current and likely future trends in e-biking; and site-based surveying of users of off-road bikes. A Scottish sub-group, organised by Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland (DMBinS), will feed into the GB Stakeholder group.

5. In discussion, Stephan Hennig welcomed the progress with the research and agreed that a watching brief should be kept on the legal position. Eileen Stuart asked about gathering experience from the other countries such as the Netherlands. Roger Scrutton said that a lot of research had already been done in other countries and that he had forwarded examples to FLS about this. However, much of the European e-bike research focused on cycle ways and active travel rather than off road use.
6. Helene Mauchlen welcomed the research adding that e-bikes had brought new audiences and people who are unaware of existing guidance such as 'Do the Ride Thing'. There was also a lack of understanding of e-bike interaction with other users which was an issue especially for horse riders. She also asked whether or not the research would include e-scooters. Eileen Stuart asked about the possibility of re-issuing existing guidance on access with bikes to help improve understanding on shared use. This was relevant especially as the coronavirus emergency has perhaps accelerated the growth in e-bike sales.
7. A question was raised about whether or not repowering of e-bikes was still an issue. Alan Dron said that the legislation was still lagging behind the technology, however bike manufactures were aware of up powering issues and had made design changes to make this more difficult. He also reiterated the requirement for overpowered bikes on roads to have insurance and mentioned some recent case examples of police action on overpowered bikes. The Forum agreed with the recommendation from the sub group to await the findings of the research before taking any further action.

Item 4: Mapping Scotland's Paths

8. Helen Todd gave a presentation to the Forum on the 'Mapping Scotland's Paths' project explaining how the project came about and progress with the initial phase. The project is part of a wider Ramblers Scotland 'Out there' campaign which aims to get more paths on the ground, more paths on maps and break down barriers to accessing the outdoors close to the communities where people live. Helen explained that currently there is no definitive map to help people plan where to go. The project therefore will bring together exiting path datasets and map these to provide that single resource. She emphasised that paths are only being mapped if they are on land for which public rights apply and fit with an agreed set of path criteria.
9. The initial trial area in West Dunbartonshire has shown that there are twice as many paths in the dataset compared to those on an OS map of the same area. Helen outlined some of the other benefits from the digital dataset such as the inclusion of information on path gradient, surface, gates etc all of which would help people plan their walks. The next phase is to extend the dataset nationally and further test a variety of technical solutions 'apps' to survey and monitor the data on the ground.
10. In discussion, Grace Reid asked about the consultation process with farmers and the need to keep them informed of the project, adding that many of their members were keen to be more involved. Helen confirmed that there had already been consultation with the NFUS and further consultation would indeed take place with landowners. Helen also noted the advantages to land managers in knowing where people are on their land given that people tend to follow paths.

11. Adam Streeter Smith, explained that volunteers within the national park are already involved in the path mapping, although this had been put on hold because of coronavirus but would resume in the autumn. Adam also asked about the ability to 'switch on/switch off' paths in the data set so that they are not promoted, giving an example of a Cairngorms National Park capercaillie project which already tries to manage use of paths (spatially and temporally) to reduce impacts on capercaillie. Helen said this was being considered along with other feedback and monitoring tools.
12. The project is currently funded until November 2021, with additional funding being sought to extend the project thereafter. An update will be presented to the Forum in the autumn. For details see: <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/mappingscotlandspaths>
or email: mappingscotlandspaths@ramblers.org.uk.

Item 5 - Visitor Management Strategy

13. Mark Wrihtham provided an update on progress with multi agency partnership work led by Visit Scotland to address national visitor management issues for spring 2021. NatureScot along with other Forum members are represented in the thematic sub-groups; Education & Marketing (chaired by VS), Investment & Infrastructure (chaired by CNPA) and Prevention, Regulation & Reassurance (chaired by Police Scotland), as well as the Operational Co-ordination Group.
14. Current priorities being actioned are; co-ordinated messaging including a high profile welcome campaign for visitors emphasising the importance of enjoying Scotland's outdoors responsibly, and joint promotion of more specific messages from SOAC on key issues such as dogs, fires, camping and litter. This would be discussed under item 6. Other key VMS work is underway including; the recruitment of additional staffing especially seasonal staff and collaborative management at key hot spots which will test new approaches to visitor management. An overview of visitor infrastructure (car parks, toilets, campsites and waste disposal facilities), is being mapped against visitor management pressures to identify new requirements as a key to effective visitor management. Mark pointed out that not all of the improvements will be in place for this year as some require longer lead times, eg development management or depend on consultation with stakeholders, strategic planning, guidance or funding.
15. Kenny Auld reminded the Forum that staff are currently still working under various restrictions so there is a limit to what can be achieved prior to this season's visitors arriving. Adam Streeter Smith highlighted the importance of clear and consistent messaging and the risk of divergence from 'Know the Code before you go' to other straplines such as 'Leave no trace'. He added that the public are already confused from those promoting local businesses who want to attract people to those who don't, it is about striking the right balance to welcome visitors within the resource constraints currently being faced.
16. Alan Dron, who chairs the 'Prevention, Regulation & Reassurance sub group outlined the five priority areas: NC500, Highland Perthshire, LLTNPA, CNPA and East Lothian where new practical approaches are being developed and tested to address visitor management in these hot spots. This includes collaboration between, access authorities, land managers, roads authorities, the police and others. The idea is to roll these approaches out to other areas.
17. Steve Jenkinson raised the importance of providing good infrastructure, service provision and visitor management as a tool in encouraging responsible behaviour. He cited examples about closed toilets, and closed car parks leading to inappropriate toileting and irresponsible parking, arguing that it is difficult to criticise people in these circumstances. He also raised the issue of poorly managed path closures with no alternatives provided and inappropriate

signage. Other members agreed that matching infrastructure to demand was the key to good visitor management. Mark said that VisitScotland's [Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund](#) (RTIF) was being increased to help fund new infrastructure, and short-term measures such as new temporary toilets and overnight provision for motorhomes would also be put in place where possible for spring 2021.

18. Comments from the Royal Yachting Association Scotland (by correspondence) highlighted the need for adequate provision for launching and recovery sites at inland waters and parking facilities for trailers. The RYAS represents 76,000 actively engaged in boating activity in Scotland, with recreational boating and marine tourism contributing £130M per annum to the leisure economy. Greater consideration within the VMS for waterside facilities was being sought for this growing sector.
19. Helen Todd welcomed the work being undertaken to look at resource provision especially staff resources. She highlighted the serious reduction of resources on the ground for visitor management, with only 30.5 access officers covering 32 local authorities, plus 6 in the NPs and further reductions in the numbers of rangers. Mark said that 2020 had highlighted the importance of having adequate staffing on the ground and that the additional seasonal rangers for this year currently being recruited will make a difference but he agreed that longer term resourcing would need to be addressed.
20. Mark Wrightham thanked the Forum for the points raised which he and other members on the relevant groups would feed into the Visitor Strategy Management work. He also emphasised that VisitScotland were leading on this work which would allow a much broader delivery of actions beyond that of the access authorities and this was to be welcomed. Further short updates on this rapidly progressing area of work would be provided at future meetings.

Informal camping guidance -

21. A small working group has been reviewing the Forum's guidance on managing camping with tents with the aim of a refreshed version being made available for this season. Members were asked to decide on the process for finalising the review of the Forum's guidance. As a quick turnaround was sought the Convenor suggested that a final draft should be circulated round the Forum and for any remaining comments to be copied to all members, before being finalised and signed off by the Convenor. Members agreed with this suggestion.

AP 53/1: Final draft of the guidance 'Managing camping with tents' to be circulated to full members for immediate comments or changes. Provided there were no substantive comments the Convenor would sign off any changes.

Item 6 - SOAC plans for the coming year

22. Mark Wrightham outlined potential priorities for SOAC promotion in 2021. He added that plans include items raised previously by the Forum eg. responsible camping, access with dogs, litter, fires and human waste as well as a focus on "entry level" messages about responsible behaviour and the existence of the Code. The promotion is also very much in alignment with the priorities arising from the national Visitor Management Strategy's 'Education and Communication' sub group which is addressing the pressures resulting from COVID-19. Therefore, it will be a co-ordinated effort across a range of public bodies using traditional methods and social media to reach the broadest audience as well as target groups.
23. The Convenor opened the discussion asking about how to reach audiences from the rest of the UK and also from Europe who were perhaps unaware of SOAC. Mark said that the plans for communication and education were also being shared widely by VisitScotland and others so it was likely that they would have a greater chance of reaching these audiences.

24. Nick Cole stressed the importance of having a high profile media campaign aimed at all campers, which he thought was more important than providing guidance for land managers to manage camping provision. We need to get messages out soon into main stream media as well as social media. He was concerned that social media was limited to bite size messages which limits what can be delivered. He also questioned if social media only reached certain audiences ie those already signed up to receive information rather than harder to reach groups. However, he supported recent efforts to develop different message formats, (ie videos) for social media.
25. Mark confirmed that there would be a comprehensive campaign across traditional and social media and that the co-ordinated effort across sectors would reach a broad audience. He also outlined NatureScot's work to target specific target groups such as party campers. Members also discussed another target group the 'social camper', who tended to be groups of young people camping with tents, some new to camping. It was recognised that not all social campers are irresponsible. Other members supported the recent work to review the 'managing camping with tents guidance' and noted the importance of managing problems arising from cumulative impacts even where individuals were being responsible. Nick Cole said that too much is left to local access Fora and access officers to deal with on the ground rather than reaching people before they arrived. Stephen Jenkinson highlighted the importance of the local applicability of messages saying that these delivered better outcomes.
26. Eileen Stuart noted the proposal to review the 'Know the Code before you Go' branding strip and the potential change to 'Scottish Outdoor Access Code', highlighting the need for supporting messages to directly encourage responsible behaviour and care for the countryside. Other members agreed saying that the vast majority of the public respected and wanted to care for the environment therefore by highlighting local environmental sensitivities and explaining why, behavioural change was more likely to succeed. Jonathan Kitching asked if there were opportunities to connect with schools tapping into the current online schooling and deliver messages online.
27. Other organisations highlighted their campaigns to improve visitor management. The Royal Yachting Association Scotland (by correspondence) said that they were planning to launch their own campaign '#RespectTheDestination' which encouraged their members to be aware of impacts on local and remote communities and to plan ahead to avoid adverse impacts. The RYAS is keen to work in partnership with others to promote responsible access. Mark thanked the Forum for their comments and agreed to provide a short update at the next NAF meeting.

Item 7: National Access Forum Work Programme

28. The Convenor introduced the proposed work programme for the Forum suggesting that it should be a SMART work plan for action rather than just a list of topics for discussion. A draft spreadsheet which could be regularly reviewed to see how actions were progressing was also tabled and comments invited from the members.
29. Forum members supported the current work programme and topics identified. Helen Todd identified IPA as an additional item suggesting a sub group with land manager input could look at this and links to the wider Visitor Management Strategy agenda. She also highlighted the need for funding for upland paths.
30. Stephen Jenkinson highlighted the lack of awareness of the existing NAF guidance notes, adding that some are too long and there is a need to pull out the key messages. NAF messages need to be consistent, credible and clear and the Forum has an important role in co-ordinating communication across a number of fronts. He also raised the issue of poor signage and the need to educate and promote better signage amongst land managers.

31. Eileen Stuart, suggested that the Forum as whole should look at the wider picture emerging from the Covid-19 crisis such as the focus on health and well-being, equality and access to the countryside. Feedback could be sought from the LAFs at the forthcoming meeting with further discussion at the NAF meeting in June. Kenny Auld agreed with this wider visioning outlining opportunities to tie into climate change agendas and the COP 26 meeting, especially to promote Scotland's valuable access rights and our work on promoting responsible behaviour. He added that staying local and reducing travel would also become increasingly important in relation to outdoor access.
32. Kevin Lafferty recommended that the Forum should discuss the connection between health, nature and access, perhaps developing a SOAC strapline such as Australia's 'Love nature love lives'. This could be part of the key messaging for this year. He agreed that the Forum should discuss longer term investment for access including the replacement grants for access within land and forestry.
33. In conclusion the Convenor asked members to email the NAF secretary with their suggestions for any additional topics. For any proposed subgroup or working groups, an indication of the action and tasks required plus potential group volunteers would be helpful. The work plan and action spreadsheet would be refined prior to the June NAF meeting.

AP53/2: Members to send the NAF Secretary any further topics for the annual work plan.

AP 53/3: Convenor to populate the work programme with current tasks from the Forum and sub groups.

Item 8 Forthcoming meetings

a) NAF/ LAF Joint Meeting 26 March

34. The Convenor explained that a small working group had met on the 4 December to revise the programme for the NAF /LAF joint meeting. It was now the intention to hold a virtual meeting in March and use that occasion to plan for a possible face to face meeting in the autumn. He invited comments from members on the provisional programme for the March meeting.
35. In discussion, a number of members voiced concerns about the current programme. Paul Timms said there was a great risk that we overload the agenda, recommending no more than 1:30 hours per session and saying the current programme of a whole day was too ambitious. Lessons from a few different perspectives would be valuable but he questioned the lengthy feedback session. Nick Cole agreed, however he thought that the topics could be retained but the sessions made shorter. He added that the agenda currently lacked opportunity for the LAF to discuss issues important to them such as funding for access officers etc. He recommended a 5 min report from each LAF about issues important to them to allow for better LAF engagement.
36. Rona Gibb questioned if the agenda was sufficiently forward looking, suggesting that we should be thinking about dealing with new audiences and new emerging issues. She thought the main meeting should be postponed until the autumn when the possibility of a face to face meeting was more likely allowing for greater interaction with the LAFs. In the meantime she thought we should reconsider what could be achieved virtually so some level of continuity could be achieved. Stephen Jenkinson, suggested a morning meeting focusing on 'updating the LAFs' and should be more Covid focused. He thought that the 'Mediation session' was sufficiently important and should be dealt with separately. Kenny Auld agreed with these views supporting a shorter and more focused agenda and smaller virtual meetings for the LAFs. The Convenor agreed that the meeting would be broken down into more bite sized sections and that the subgroup would look at how a more acceptable agenda could be delivered virtually.

AP 53/4: Sub group to redraft the NAF/LAF programme based on members comments that it should be more forward thinking and more interactive.

AP 53/ 5: Convenor to discuss with Eddie Palmer running the mediation session as a separate event for LAFs.

b) NAF Meeting 2 June 2021: any further agenda items other than those already identified on the NAF work programme should be sent to the NAF Secretary.

c) NAF meeting 15 or 22nd September 2021: The Convenor asked if there were any preferences for the dates in September, however no potential clashes were identified, therefore the September date would be confirmed in due course.

AOB:

- Martin Duncan informed the Forum on behalf of Angus Duncan who had attended a meeting in the Pentland Hills Regional Park to discuss issues with illegal motorised access, essentially problems with 4x4's and motorbikes. Helene Mauchlen said that the solution to lock gates to prevent unauthorised motorised access had a knock on impact on access for horse riders. She said that there was a need to look at other technical solutions (vehicle inhibitors) to solve the problem.
- Rona Gibb mentioned two items; the recently launched 'Walking Manifesto'. Paths for All have joined with Living Streets Scotland and Ramblers Scotland calling for increased support for walking in Scotland. See details: <https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/news/news-post/scottish-walking-charities-urge-government-to-invest-in-walking>. and the Scottish Walking Awards which celebrate the people, places and projects who are transforming Scotland into an active nation. For more information about the awards, the categories and how to nominate: <https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/news/news-post/Scottish-Walking-Awards-celebrate-the-people,-places-and-projects-who-are-transforming-Scotland-into-an-active-nation>

Close

Date of Next Meetings -

- **NAF/LAF - Friday 26th March 2021, virtual meeting.**
- **NAF - Wednesday 2 June 2021, virtual meeting.**
- **NAF – Wednesday 15 or 22nd September 2021,**

Summary Action Points

AP 53/1: Final draft of the guidance 'Managing camping with tents' to be circulated to full members for immediate comments or changes. Provided there were no substantive comments the Convenor would sign off any changes.

AP53/2: Members to send the NAF Secretary any further topics for the annual work plan.

AP 53/3: Convenor to populate the work programme with current tasks from the Forum and sub groups

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AP 53/5: Convenor to discuss with Eddie Palmer running the mediation session as a separate event for LAFs.