

ANGUS LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Note of the Meeting of the Angus Local Access Forum held at Angus House, Forfar on Monday 14th October 2024.

Present: Andrew Matthews (Chair), Irene McGugan, Norma Lyall, Euan Walker-Munro, Kelly Ann Dempsey, Mike Strachan (Scottish Forestry).

In attendance: Paul Clark (Countryside Access Officer, Angus Council), Nick Cole (Perth and Kinross LAF), Jennifer Herd (Perth and Kinross LAF).

Apologies: Jonathan Dymock, John Hamilton.

1. Minute of Previous Meeting

The minute of 15 July 2024 was approved as a true record.

2. Matters Arising

- National Access Forum Chair - NC's application to be Chair, which had been endorsed by ALAF, has been rejected on the basis that LAFs were not corresponding members of the Forum. An alternative candidate had been appointed. ALAF members expressed concern and unhappiness with the lack of clarity in the process and decision making, as they understood that LAFs were a full member of the NAF, with NC representing them. It was agreed that AM should write to the CEO of Nature Scot.
- Forestry and Land Scotland workshop, Glen Prosen Estate - NL, JH, and PC had attended the workshop. It was a useful day, focusing on the vision and priorities for future visitor provision.
- Ferry Road, Monifieth - PC advised that the barriers on the obstructed track had now been removed.
- Craig of Balloch, Glen Quharity - PC understood that additional signage was now in place to direct people to the unlocked gate.
- Membership – PC had contacted inactive members, and their details had now been removed from the website. A request for new applications had been put out on Council social media (with further posts scheduled), and the Council's Communities Team, NFU and SLE had also been asked to circulate it. No applications had been received. The list of current members is appended to the minute.

3. Access requirements for new woodland planting and deer fencing – joint discussion with representatives from Perth and Kinross Local Access Forum.

NH and JH from Perth and Kinross LAF had been invited to the meeting for a joint discussion, as Scottish Forestry were keen to establish a set of principles for access provision that could be applied throughout Tayside.

PC had circulated a discussion paper, listing possible topics for discussion, along with some principles that ALAF and Angus Council had previously promoted for crossings on electric deer fencing in the eastern Angus Glens.

Points raised in general discussion included:

- Principles should apply to existing as well as new forests. Forest managers should be considering access alongside other considerations.
- P&K LAF refers to the Scottish Forestry Strategy, which highlight the value of forests for recreation and wellbeing, when responding to consultations.
- The new UK Forestry Standard says nothing about access, which isn't helpful in a Scottish context.
- Scottish Parliament is working on the latest land reform bill, which proposed a requirement for land management plans. Ramblers Scotland were recommending the size threshold for the requirement to apply should be reduced from 3000Ha to 500Ha, and that plans should include management of access.
- Guidance was required for distances of planting from roads, as well as paths.

Paths:

- Core Paths - after discussion there was general consensus that an unplanted corridor of 10-15 metres was required through commercial conifer plantations, but that a reduced width would be acceptable through native species.
- The same widths were required for all paths, not just core paths.
- Historic path routes should be identified, and protected where appropriate. Some old routes will be more significant than others. The need to protect them should be considered as part of the wider access picture including the overall availability of paths.
- Path routes may be lost over time, even if an unplanted corridor left, if scrub or regeneration are allowed to grow. MS advised that open ground should in theory be maintained. Management could potentially be a condition of grant, and after 10 years specific management grants could be applied for. EWM queried whether the Good Agriculture and Environmental Condition Regulations (GAEC) required management of scrub.

Off-path access:

- There was discussion of off-path destinations such as hilltops. It was felt that important hilltops, and views from them, should be protected. However, from a landscape perspective it may not be desirable to leave all hilltops free of trees if they are surrounded by forestry. Use of native species may allow access to continue but would still restrict views.
- Further discussion required.

Deer fencing

- As of October, the UK Forest Standard includes a statement on disposal of unused materials including fencing and shelters. The presumption is that they should be removed.
- New deer fencing had potential to compound deer management issues on adjacent land including hill farms. SF generally require a compensation cull when new areas are deer fenced.
- It was agreed that good quality self-closing bridle gates should be provided on core paths and most other paths. JH mentioned gates manufactured by Ritchie, which were in use at Auchterlyth and more horse friendly than some designs.

- There was discussion of requirements for fence crossings at other locations, away from paths. No clear conclusions were reached on the location, frequency or type of crossings.
- Further discussion required.

There had been insufficient time available to conclude the discussions. It was agreed that the P&K Forum members should be invited back to the next meeting for further discussion. It was also agreed that Hugh McNish, Scottish Forestry's Access Health and Recreation Policy Adviser, should also be invited to attend, as there was a need for Scotland-wide guidance.

MS would share the discussion document with Scottish Forestry, and NC would share it with P&K LAF.

4. SOAC and the new generation of electric and self-propelled 'MTBs'

AM introduced this item, as he had observed an increase in electric powered off-road bikes at Lunan Bay recently. Many of them had powerful motors, capable of high speeds, without pedalling.

NC had been party to NAF discussions on the matter. He understood that pedal assisted e-bikes, with restricted power and speed, were classed as pedestrian controlled and were within SOAC. Anything else did not.

5. A.O.C.B

There was no other business.

6. Date of next meeting : After discussion, it was agreed that the next meeting would be on Monday 13th January 2025.

Appendix – List of current ALAF members

- **Andrew Matthews** (current Chair) - has an interest in access as an access taker and small scale landowner, currently Chair of Board of Trustees of the Lunan Bay Communities Partnership
- **John Hamilton** – a long time member of Scotways with responsibility for the Angus area
- **Irene McGugan** - member of Ramblers and actively involved in various walking groups
- **Jonathan Dymock** - a land agent with experience of upland and lowland estates, currently resident agent at Southesk Estate
- **Euan Walker-Munro** - landowner and farmer, NFUS branch chair and community council member
- **Norma Lyall** - has a primary interest in recreational access and has lived on and worked for an estate in the Angus Glens

Agencies

- **Angus Council** – Team Leader, Environment and Climate Change
- **Scottish Natural Heritage** – offer advice upon request
- **Scottish Forestry** – offer advice upon request (usually provided by Mike Strachan)