

ANGUS LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Note of the Meeting of the Angus Local Access Forum held online on Monday 14 March 2022

Present: Nick Hamilton (Chair), Irene McGugan (Vice Chair), Euan Walker-Munro, Andrew Matthews, Kelly-Ann Dempsey

In attendance: Paul Clark, Countryside Access Officer, Angus Council

Apologies: Jonathan Dymock. John Hamilton had attempted to attend the online meeting but was unable to do so due to technical issues.

1. Minute of Previous Meeting

The date of the meeting and approval of the previous minute had not been recorded. The minute of the previous meeting was otherwise approved as a true record.

2. Matters Arising

Ferry Road, Monifieth. PC advised that the committee report seeking authority to serve a Section 14 notice had been approved. He was awaiting legal input before proceeding with serving the notice.

Mill Of Murroes. PC advised that some members of the public had disputed the landowner's assertion that there was historically a locked gate over the track. This opened up the possibility that a public right of way may exist. He would be following this up with the landowner.

3. Deer fencing

The topic was considered worth of general discussion, as the Forum was currently considering issues relating to electric fences, and it was likely to be a continuing topic of interest due to national policy encouraging both new woodland planting and peatland restoration.

PC had prepared an introductory note. This outlined previous guidance the Forum had given on electric hill fences, and guidance on the same topic from the Moorland Forum (which was also circulated). It was worth considering whether the principles for fence crossing provision were relevant to traditional deer fencing and forestry plantations. The document also outlined three examples of current fencing issues:-

- New forestry fencing at Glen Quharity (Milldewan Hill). The Forum had discussed this issue at a previous meeting, and members has since visited the site and reported their findings. PC had prepared a paper outlining the issue. Observations made by NH and IM were also circulated.
- Existing forestry fencing at Hill of Spott, Glen Prosen. The Forum had recently received an enquiry about an issue, where individuals had experienced difficulties crossing the fence. PC had prior knowledge of the location and had prepared a short paper, including a map of known crossing points.

- Proposed temporary fencing for peatland restoration at Rottal, Glen Clova. This was the subject of a recent planning prior notification. PC had offered advice to the applicant and agreed crossing locations. He had provided a short paper for discussion.

JD had sent comments in his absence, which PC read out. There was general discussion of the topic, including the need for a balance between the needs of access takers and the need to keep areas deer proof. There should be crossings on the main paths and desire lines such as ridges, but the need for crossings elsewhere was less clear cut. There was discussion over the potential use of signage to direct people to crossing points. Some access takers were opposed to use of signage in remote locations. The need to install proper infrastructure at the outset was raised, as new forestry was a long-term investment for the landowner. There was also the question of whether fences should be removed in the long term. There was agreement that, as this was a national issue, it would be best considered by the National Access Forum. NH would contact the LAF rep on the NAF.

There was discussion of the Glen Quharity fence. Both NH and IM had visited the location and made observations. It was noted that the available fence crossings, as indicated on a map provided by the landowner, were not always in logical locations. There was agreement that two new gates were necessary in the ridgeline of Milldewan Hill, at the location identified by the landowner. There was also discussion of the path through Craig of Balloch. IM had difficulty locating and accessing a gate at its eastern end. It was not visible from the main track and the route to it was not obvious due to boggy ground. The consensus was that, whilst signage may help, there should also be a crossing where a track is shown on Ordnance Survey maps. A stile would be sufficient if directions to the gate were available for those who needed it.

There was also discussion of the Hill of Spott fence. The self-closing gates that had been provided at various locations were considered appropriate. The more recently installed stile, with hinged top flap, was not considered suitable. It was difficult to use, and not suitable for people with dogs. It looked possible to provide a self-closing gate without altering the line of the fence. Signage at this location would help those such as the person who made the recent enquiry, who found themselves on the 'wrong' side of the fence when travelling southwards.

4. Membership and recruitment

IM and AM had provided comment on the selection criteria document, which had been circulated with the agenda. There was consensus that AM's suggestions better reflected the current expectation on members than the existing document, which had been drafted when the Forum was first established. The emphasis on the three groups suggested that the Forum might be more adversarial than it was in reality. PC reminded members that the Council did however have a statutory duty to appoint a balance of user and land management interests to the Forum. Members thought this could be achieved by ensuring broad area of interest were represented rather than fixed groups. There was agreement that PC should draft an amended document for the next meeting. Changing the approach to the three defined user groups may also require committee approval. He would look into this.

There was agreement that PC should contact members who had not regularly attended meetings and ask whether they still wished to be involved.

5. Access issues update

PC briefly outlined new issues that had been raised, including obstruction to a field margin near Kirriemuir, a possible obstruction to an access point onto the coastal path near Auchmithie, obstruction to a possible vehicular public right of way at Auchmithie Harbour, and ploughing of a track near Tealing. These matters were still to be fully investigated.

6. A.O.C.B.

EWM asked whether the Council could provide administrative support for the Forum, as this currently fell to the access officer. PC thought it was unlikely.

7. Date of next meeting

Monday 13 June 2022