

ANGUS LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Note of the Meeting of the Angus Local Access Forum held at Angus House, Forfar, 9th October 2023

Present: Andrew Matthews, John Hamilton, Irene McGugan, Euan Walker-Munro, Norma Lyall, Mike Strachan (Scottish Forestry)

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

Apologies: Jonathan Dymock, Nick Hamilton

1. Minute of Previous Meeting

The minute of the previous meeting was approved.

2. Matters Arising

Item 3 – PC confirmed that he had given a response to the forest manager.

3. Election of Chair

AM was appointed as Chair

4. New forestry planting and public access routes – information gathering

MS shared location maps of several potential large scale new forestry proposals in the Angus Glens, most of which were currently at very early planning stages. Scottish Forestry was aware of core paths or recorded public rights of way in these areas, but was keen to know of any other paths that should be recognised and retained when landowners and their agents were developing detailed proposals.

There was general discussion of the topic. Points discussed included:

- The merits of protecting ‘old’ paths that were shown on maps but currently not in regular use.
- The need, particularly in upland areas, to plan for area access including routes to and from hilltops and ridges. Not just paths.
- The need for unplanted ground alongside paths to prevent encroachment.
- Where informal access routes were necessary, these might be accommodated by leaving corridors of open ground, or areas of low density native species.
- PC advised that the LAF had, in its early years, developed guidance on provision of crossings over electric hill fences. This had included the types of locations where crossings would typically be required. The principles might be relevant to new forestry fencing in upland areas.
- The need for access takers to be able to find out where the accessible gates were. There was discussion of the possibility of showing these on Ordnance Survey maps, or of providing QR codes with a link to a map of gate locations.

There was agreement that it would be best for the Forum to provide comment on a site-by-site basis, as and when more detailed maps of the proposed areas were available. PC would forward details of any large-scale proposals to LAF members as and when he was consulted. If the consultation period fell between LAF meetings, individual members’ comments could be collated and noted in the Access Officer response. Where appropriate, a short-term sub-group could be set up to look at the proposals in more detail and prepare a LAF response.

5. Access Issues update

Ferry Road, Monifieth – PC advised that the owner's planning application had now been approved. He was seeking a timetable for completion of the work and re-opening of the path.

Newbigging, Tealing – The Council has sent evidence of use questionnaires to the local community council, and to people who has previously raised the matter. Very few responses has been received to date.

Westerton of Rossie – The landowner had advised PC that the 'paths' around field edges were actually field margins and water margins created under environmental schemes. PC had provided copy of a previous statement from Scottish Government Rural Payments and Services clarifying that rights of responsible access apply to such area. There had been no further correspondence but PC understood that some horse riders were now using the areas. EWM highlighted the fact that the restrictions placed on farm access to such areas were seasonal.

Craig of Balloch – PC had received a further enquiry about this location, which the LAF had previously discussed in the context of the new woodland planting in the area. The landowner had advised that the absence of signage to the available gate was an oversight, and that this was being rectified.

Nether Craig – PC had received an enquiry regarding obstructive signage at entrances to a caravan site with woodland walks. Access rights were likely to apply to communal paths and tracks within the caravan site, as well as to the woodland walks.

6. Membership and recruitment

It was agreed that PC should publicise the fact that the LAF was seeking new members through the usual Council channels, and by contacting local SLE and NFUS representatives. The previous letter from the Chair could be used again. MS also offered to speak to a contact who may be interested in representing equestrian interests.

7. A.O.C.B.

MS advised that Forest and Land Scotland were working with neighbouring landowners on developing a collaborative approach to deer fences.

NL advised that Brechin Caledonian Railway and Angus Council were working on a funding bid to develop active travel, tourism and heritage. And that Angus Rural Partnership, Angus Tourism Cooperative and Angus Council for tourism development, including a signage audit. She also mentioned a potential community fund associated with proposed new overhead power lines in Angus.

JH asked about the Council's proposed signage of core path 19. PC advised that he had experienced difficulty identifying and contacting landowners regarding other improvements including gates, which he had been seeking to carry out before installing signposts.

8. Date of next meeting

It was agreed that the date of the next meeting should be Monday 15 January 2024.