

Scottish Borders Access Forum

Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 18th April 2017

Present:

William Davidson (Chair)
Councillor Ron Smith (Executive Member for Planning and Environment)
Councillor Stuart Bell (Executive Member for Economic Development)
Douglas Wright (Central Tweeddale Paths and Scottish Rights of Way Society)
Trevor Bryant (Cycling)
Ian Aitchison (Scottish Land & Estates)
David Langworth (Melrose Paths Group)
Lesley Muirden (British Horse Society)
Graeme Johnstone (SBC Lead Officer - Access and Transport)
Keith Robeson (SBC Senior Ranger)
Erica Niven (SBC Access Ranger – West)

Apologies

Walter Douglas (National Farmers Union)
Beryl Masson (British Horse Society)
Rory Powell (Buccleuch Estates Bowhill Ranger)

Minutes of last meeting of the Access Forum

Accepted as read.

Matters arising

Ladhope update - concerns expressed that wooden gates installed are very heavy and awkward to use, Hugh Chalmers has given assurances that they will be replaced soon with more suitable structures.

The mountain bike trail plans are being revised and it is likely to be sometime before they are progressed, SBC have had no more details provided.

Craik Forest update - reports that unsafe bridges/ boardwalks are being replaced with culverts. TB will visit site and report back to next meeting.

Access Rangers' Area Reports

KR summarised the Access Rangers' report covering the past 6 months (previously circulated), outlining a selection of path maintenance/ improvement works undertaken by the Access Team. Also a number of planning applications and forestry consultations were responded to where these involved access issues. The number of requests for Access Exemption Notices has increased significantly in recent years and it is intended to take a report to SBC committee with a proposal to introduce charging for this service. SB suggested that the case needs to be well made and that event organisers should be given advanced warning. DW raised concerns regarding blanket bans especially which cover core paths and rights of way and how the public is made aware of access restrictions.

Southern Upland Way, Traquair – safety concerns update

KR summarised an update report (previously circulated). KR has been liaising with Traquair Estate and Jeremy Thomson who are submitting a Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) funding application to improve the path network around Traquair House and village. Part of the WIAT scheme is intended to provide a link from Traquair village to Innerleithen. A survey of the Traquair to Kirkhouse route (Southern Upland Way and Cross Borders Drove Road) identified a large amount of work required to ideally create a multi-use off-road path.

Further discussions are required with the Estate to agree works and funding will need to be sourced.

Walking/ Cycling/ Equestrian update

Walking

Tweed River Project - a proposal has been put forward to create a path along the Tweed from source to sea. Tweed Forum is pulling together a proposal to apply for Heritage Lottery Funding for a Tweed River Project which a Tweed Path could be part of. SBC have been tasked by Tweed Forum to assist with a business case. Once the bid has been submitted then it would be necessary to consult more widely and publicise the project. DW raised concerns regarding potential confusion between a new Tweed Trail and the earlier Tweed Trails project.

St Aidan's Trail – early discussions had taken place regarding a proposal to create a route linking sites associated with St Aidan in Scottish Borders and Northumberland and further afield potentially.

There is currently quite a lot of interest nationally regarding Pilgrimage Trails.

Cycling

GJ summarised his Cycling Report (as circulated) describing works at the following locations:

- Lauder to Oxton
- Duns School
- Innerleithen to Walkerburn
- Wilton Lodge park, Hawick
- Clovenfords to Walkerburn
- Peebles to Eddleson

DW expressed his disappointment that despite protection orders being put in place on the Leadburn-Peebles disused railway that sections of the planned cycle route will be on the roadside verge. This is mainly due to resistance from landowners, land use issues and flooding concerns.

Equestrian

LM outlined how the British Horse Society (Borders) was working with the access team to identify locations for new self-closing gates to be installed on

promoted routes which will be funded by BHS.

EN described how she had recently arranged for similar gates to be installed on St Cuthbert's Way and John Buchan Way, this had involved a lot of cooperation with and assistance from landowners.

Walking festivals update 2017

Galashiels Walking Weekend taking place 28th – 30th April.

Hawick Walking Weekend normally held in August will not take place this year, however there are plans for a walking event to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Hawick Common in October.

Tweed Valley event normally held in June not taking place as members are assisting with the organising of the Scottish Borders Walking Festival in Peebles taking place 3rd – 9th September.

A recent report to the SBC Executive committee agreed the venues of the SBWF for the next 3 years:

2018 – Hawick

2019 – Ettrick/ Yarrow and Selkirk

2020 – Jedburgh and Ancrum

DW raised concerns regarding funding of the SBWF in Peebles, as SESTRANS, who have provided a large amount of funding to previous festivals, have recently announced that they will not be providing any funding for the Peebles event. It was important that the festival should not be cancelled due to concerns regarding funding. GJ would investigate ways of assisting and to approach SESTRANS regarding their decision.

Paths for Health report

Update report previously circulated. This project goes from strength to strength despite difficulties each year regarding funding, as a proposal has to go to NHS Borders for approval. The Forum wished to pass on their thanks to Denise Carmichael for all her good work.

Access issues updates

Oxcleugh Haugh, St Mary's Loch – due to an increase in number of complaints of anti-social behaviour, the Police arranged a meeting of all interested parties to address concerns. It was suggested that a 'warden' could be employed part time to monitor/ manage the site at critical periods, however there has been difficulty in finding someone locally to take on this role.

Rogersrigg, Carllops – the owners of the courtyard have consulted with the Council's planners in order to construct a second wall parallel to the existing perimeter wall, to create a path which will be screened from the properties.

LM informed the Forum that Loch Lomond & Trossach National Park Authority have been successful in an appeal case to uphold public access rights on Drumlean Estate where access was being blocked by locked high gates and prohibitive signage. This is a relevant decision with regards to other issues which BHS have identified and may have relevance to the access issue at Cavers, Hawick

National Access Forum update

DW attended a joint meeting of the National Access Forum and Local Access Forums and provided a summary report (circulated with these minutes). The morning session dealt with taking access with dogs. DW noted that at the planning stage for new housing developments that developers should identify ways of improving access to green space. This is one of the issues that the access rangers try to address when responding to planning consultations. WD thanked DW for attending this event on behalf of our forum.

Any Other Business

LM reported that Ann Fraser is working with Southern Upland Partnership to source funding for 'Ride Scotland's Horse Country' project to provide a better network of rider accommodation and to encourage more horse riders to visit the Scottish Borders.

Date of next meeting

Open Forum – it was agreed to leave it to the Access Team to decide when/ if appropriate to arrange an Open Forum meeting and to agree a theme.

Next meeting

Tuesday 24th October 2017 at 2pm at Council HQ