

Scottish Borders Access Forum

Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 24th April 2018

Present:

William Davidson (Chair)

Councillor Sandy Scott

Douglas Wright (Central Tweeddale Paths and Scottish Rights of Way Society)

Rory Powell (Buccleuch Estates Bowhill Ranger)

Trevor Bryant (Cycling)

Ian Aitchison (Scottish Land & Estates)

Beryl Masson (British Horse Society)

David Langworth (Melrose Paths Group)

Graeme Johnstone (SBC Lead Officer - Access and Transport)

Keith Robeson (SBC Senior Ranger)

Susan Gray (SBC Access Ranger – South)

Gowan Miller (Project Officer, Ride Scotland's Horse Country)

Apologies

Pip tabor (Southern Upland Partnership), Ian Aikman (SBC Chief Planning Officer), Katie Jarvis (Forest Enterprise Scotland), Councillor Mark Rowley (Executive Member for Community Planning).

Minutes of last meeting of the Access Forum

Under Matters arising - Ladhope update, BM requested that it should be noted that the 'wooden gates' were in fact good quality metal gates. Otherwise the minutes were a true reflection.

Matters arising

BM wondered why the stile at Lee Pen had been replaced with a kissing gate, making it difficult for horse access. This was done at the insistence of the landowner.

Rachan access issue – DW asked if he could be provided with a note of what was agreed here.

Following an intervention by local residents it is believed that the access issue in Carlops has been successfully resolved.

Access Rangers' Area Reports

The report was circulated to members prior to the meeting. KR outlined some of the highlights:

- John Buchan Way had received almost £10,000 of SNH funding to replace several stiles with gates and fencing alongside the track to separate users from cattle for safety concerns.
- Denholm Dean – a bridge was installed next to a ford on a core path where none had previously existed.
- Stiles have been replaced with gates at several locations e.g. Lee Pen at Innerleithen, The Gytes at Peebles, Hundalee at Jedburgh, Eildon Village to A68 path, Auchencrow to Reston path and at Siccar Point.
- In partnership with The Abbotsford Trust an alternative route for the Borders Abbeys Way was waymarked past the house which ties in to the path improvement works funded by the Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) scheme.
- At Coldingham Sands decking was constructed to improve access for wheelchair users and a small bridge was replaced.
- The Path Wardens carried out woody vegetation clearance from paths over the winter but when the weather was severe they assisted in mapping the various locations for our records.
- The Paths around Newcastleton booklet was revised and reprinted.
- The usual round of Planning Applications, Forestry Consultations and Access Exemption Notices were dealt with.

Walking festivals update

- The Galashiels Walking Festival is taking place from 27-29 April with 9 walks planned. Bookings are up on 2017 numbers. SBC ranger service will be leading 2 walks.
- Scottish Borders Walking Festival 2018 – Hawick. This will run from 2-8 September.
Planning is well under way and the programme of walks is on their website. There will be 4 walks per day including 1 town walk each day. SBC ranger service will be leading walks on the whole of the Borders Abbeys Way over 6 days and these are already fully booked. SBC will assist the committee with further publicity to encourage the public to attend other walks.
- SBWF 2019 will be hosted by Ettrick and Yarrow CC and Selkirk CC.

Paths for Health report

GJ updated the forum on the work being done by Denise Carmichael. There are currently 28 active Walk It Walks and many are Dementia Friendly which was reported on by ITV Borders giving good coverage to the project. The project has been awarded funding for a GP referral programme which ticks lots of NHS boxes. Walk It will also be supporting the Galashiels Walking Festival. Paths for All launched a project using google maps to find local health walks which Denise has been closely involved with. Walk It are always looking for volunteers to train as walk leaders.

Walking update

- Connecting the Tweed Project
Last year's bid for Lottery funding had been unsuccessful but the feedback was that they liked the project idea and that a bid should be resubmitted in 2018. Tweed Forum is leading this process and a new bid is intended to be

submitted with more emphasis being placed on creating a Trail. which links communities, enhances the local economy. GM stated that RSHC project would like to input in to the project.

- LEADER Three Paths Project – this is still on the back burner, trying to modify the bid to make more linkages to Borders Rail if possible. There has been no confirmation regarding funding yet. **GJ** to update progress at next meeting. It was noted that Dere Street is in desperate need of repair on various sections.
- Southern Upland Way, Traquair – safety concerns update. KR is in the process of trying to arrange a meeting with one of the landowners on the Kirkhouse to Traquair section in order to seek approval. Traquair Estates have secured WIAT funding to create paths around the estate and to make a link from Traquair to the Forest Enterprise car park. They are also looking for SBC advice on creating a path from the FE car park to Tweed Bridge in order to create a safe route from Innerleithen to Traquair House. The roadside paths construction is likely to prove costly and funding still needs to be identified.

Cycling update

GJ updated the group on recent works:

- The second section of the Innerleithen to Walkerburn shared access route was recently completed, it is hoped that the final section will be completed this year with financial assistance from Sustrans.
- SBC is working with Sustrans develop a potential funding opportunity for a network of routes through the town as part of the Hawick Flood Prevention Scheme
- A funding bid has been submitted to Sustrans to look at detailed design for the Clovenfords to Walkerburn shared access route.
- SBC hope to hear soon if a bid to Sustrans has been successful for the construction of a shared access route from Kelso to Sprouston with the intention to construct this financial year. This will be a tarmac path with horse access adjacent.
- SBC is still working to try and promote the Earlston to Leaderfoot shared access route. (Update – the funding for the project has been secured and SB Contracts initiated work on the section between Earlston and Sorrowlessfield on Monday 30th April.

DW asked if the Leaderfoot viaduct was closed to public access. The National Rail Property Board have done this presumably for safety reasons. There is no access beyond the viaduct on the north side. Earlston paths Group have recently installed an information panel and shelter nearby.

Equestrian update

- Ride Scotland's Horse Country.

Gowan Miller, Project Coordinator updated the forum on this project which is managed by Southern Uplands Partnership. There are approximately 250 miles of off road horse trails in use in the Scottish Borders but they are not currently widely promoted. The aim is to encourage riders to come and ride through on longer trails or to stay in one location and use local routes. Trails are currently being surveyed with an aim of initially having a core of 4 or 5 routes which can be promoted. Many of the routes were established by Tweed Trails in 2004 and downloadable pdfs can be found on South of Scotland Countryside Trails website. RSHC is keen to work with other groups as the trails will be multi-use. She is talking to Forest Enterprise regarding safety awareness amongst cycling and horse riding. 15 accommodation providers have been identified and it is planned that suitable routes around their locations will be mapped. A BHS survey has been undertaken and has identified a lot of interest especially within a 2-3 hour drive away. DW suggested that contact should be made with the various Paths Groups throughout the Borders. **GM** to provide information on economic benefits which were submitted as part of the LEADER bid. SG mentioned that gpx files exist for some multi-use routes promoted on the walkscottishborders website which could be made available to the project and that SBC have information on access issues, fixtures etc on the path network which could also be shared. WD wished Gowan and the project every success.

Access issues updates

- **Cavers**
After the last Forum meeting contact was made with the landowner to try and arrange a meeting to take forward the issue, but the landowner did not see a need for a meeting. However, in January the landowner's solicitors wrote to SBC insisting that SBC should find an alternative route for core path 128. SBC replied explaining the status of the core path and asking if SBC could install gates next to the cattle grids at no cost to the owner. Recently their solicitors have said that they are in the process of finalising their client's instructions and are yet unable to confirm their client's position regarding the proposal to install gates. We await a response - hopefully soon. BM mentioned that Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park had won a case against a landowner over locked gates; however it had involved a costly appeals process.
SBC will continue to pursue this issue.
- **St Mary's Loch**
Ettrick and Yarrow Community Council have now appointed a part time warden, Chris Amey to patrol the site at weekends over the summer, in a bid to discourage anti-social behaviour and to try and move vehicles on.
- **Bairnkine, Jedburgh**
SG briefed the Forum about an access issue involving a Riding Stables, 2 landowners and a mobile phone company. Access has been taken by riders from a local riding school/ livery yard over neighbouring land for a number of years but more recently that has been denied in part by a padlocked gate leading to a mobile phone mast and by concerns raised by the landowner of riders causing damage to the ground. A map was circulated showing a network of paths over Bairnkine which the landowner agreed could be used under rights of responsible access. One route originally went through the farm

steading but for safety reasons the landowner agreed an alternative permissible route avoiding the steading, but this has now been blocked by a padlocked gate on ground which now forms part of another farm. An alleged incident took place where cattle escaped from the field and got out on to the road (A68), police then advised the landowner to lock the gate. Recently James Purves, SBC Safer Communities officer has mediated with the various parties and has helped to resolve some of the issues, but the issue of the locked gate remains unresolved. The Forum recommended that SBC should write to the landowner insisting that the padlock be removed and suggest that a self-closing gate be installed to allow public access. The riding stables and landowner should be encouraged to cooperate to find a financial solution to installing a new gate.

A similar situation has arisen at Westruther where horses have caused major damage to a path over the winter and the landowner is working with the access ranger and intends liaising with the stables to find a way forward.

- Hawick flood prevention scheme – this will impact on water access points within the town and will make it difficult to generally get access to the riverside through the town.
- East Lodge, Lilliesleaf. Some path surfacing works has been undertaken to make it easier to use and to help reduce the desire to walk the riverside path through the 'garden' area.
- Dryburgh Mains gate. This has been resolved with the reinstallation of a gate.
- Dryburgh footbridge will be closed for essential repairs for 6 weeks from 14th May 2018.

Date of next meeting

Tuesday 23rd October 2018 at 2pm in Committee Room 2, Council HQ