**Scottish Borders Access Forum**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 23rd April 2019**

**Present:**

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| William Davidson (Chair)Councillor Mark Rowley (Executive Member for Community Planning).Councillor Sandy ScottBeryl Masson (British Horse Society)David Langworth (Melrose Paths Group) |

 Keith Robeson (SBC Senior Ranger)

 Erica Niven (SBC Access Ranger – West)

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

 Ian Aitchison (Scottish Land & Estates)

 Gowan Miller (Ride Scotland’s Horse Country)

**Apologies**

 Michael Paton (Buccleuch Estates Bowhill Ranger)

 Trevor Bryant (Cycling)

 Katie Jarvis (Forestry and Land Scotland)

 Graeme Johnstone (SBC Lead Officer - Access and Transport)

**Minutes of last meeting of the Access Forum**

Minutes accepted as a true reflection.

**Matters arising**

* BM has been liaising with Scottish Forestry (SF) regarding a padlocked gate near Craik. A metal gate with integral pedestrian gate has been installed but unfortunately is unsuitable for horses as it is only 70cm wide. BM has been in discussion with SF to try and ensure any future installations are suitable for multi-use.
* At Upper Kidston, Peebles BM has been in discussions with the landowner to install a gate and cut back gorse. This would allow users of the Cross Borders Drove Road to take a route avoiding more of Peebles town centre.
* Kelso to Sprouston new multi-use path – **BM** to contact SBC re appropriate wording for signage to encourage responsible behaviour by all users.
* WD circulated a document outlining a campaign on social media by NFUS to encourage dog owners to act responsibly #ControlYourDog

**Access Rangers’ Area Reports**

The Access Rangers’ report for October to March was circulated prior to meeting. KR drew attention to various examples of ongoing maintenance work to paths and countryside sites:

* Over last couple of years we have had to engage external engineers to survey our larger bridges which has identified various works being required. Work to these and other smaller structures have been carried out like those at Cockburnspath, Copeland near Ancrum, and Merrylaw near Teviothead.
* Various gates have been replaced / improved, some through funding from SNH on SCW
* SUW at Scabcleuch - repaired washed out cross drains and cleaned out ditches
* Dere Street surfacing works near Cappuck
* Continued to clear fallen trees after autumn storms
* Promotion of path network through facebook and websites continues and the sales of Paths around booklets
* Eildon Hills Path project has gone out to tender and the preferred contractor has been appointed. Funding allows for machine build and hand build works to be done to the 2 most used routes on to the hills.
* MR noted that many of the project works undertaken are good news stories and that this should be passed to SBC Communications for publicity.
* DL noted that EN had given a good talk to Greener Melrose on St Cuthbert’s Way and the role of the ranger in managing access routes.

**Walking festivals update**

* Galashiels Weekend Walking Festival - 26th to 28th April has a programme of 7 walks with the ranger service leading 2 of them. Bookings so far appear to be down on last year.
* Scottish Borders Walking Festival - Selkirk & The Valleys (Ettrick and Yarrow) 7th – 14th September. A very keen small committee meet weekly to organise this event. There is a programme of 4 walks per day + free and easy strolls which proved popular at Hawick last year. Also a good evening programme of events planned, including Cameron McNeish giving a talk on the first Saturday. Booking went live through website [www.borderswalking.com](http://www.borderswalking.com) on 1st April and already around half of all the places are booked with 2 walks sold out.
* The 2020 event will take place in Jedburgh and Ancrum.

**Paths to Health report**

A brief report was circulated prior to the meeting.

* There are currently 30 active Walk It Walks in Borders Towns.
* 3 Walk Leader Training days have been held so far this year.
* Funding awarded for a GP referral programme and working closely with NHS Borders to deliver a project engaging with adults with learning difficulties.
* There are currently 16 ‘Dementia Friendly’ WalkIt walks and it is intended that will extend to all walks in 2019.

WD asked that thanks from the Forum be passed on again to Denise for all her hard work.

**Walking update**

DL reported that Ramblers Scotland are gathering in Melrose in May where around 120 members will participate in 3 walks.

**Cycling update**

A cycling report for October to March outlining work on a number of shared access routes was circulated prior to meeting.

* The Innerleithen to Walkerburn route was officially opened in March coinciding with the opening of an e-bike hub in Innerleithen where electric bikes can be hired.
* The second phase of the Earlston to Leaderfoot shared access route from Sorrowlessfield to Drygrange was completed in March.
* Works are currently underway on the Kelso to Sprouston route being undertaken by SBContracts.
* Application approved for the Peebles to Eddleston route and funding opportunities being explored.
* Awaiting quotations from contractors for works on Lauder to Oxton route.

**Equestrian update**

* BM raised concerns regarding potential conflicts between user groups on the proposed mountain bike trails being planned at Glenderg, Galashiels which is currently at the feasibility stage. Hugh Chalmers, Tweed Forum to be invited to next meeting to provide an update - **KR**.

BM has been dealing with the Access Ranger regarding an issue on Core Path 80 near Westruther as a result of a complaint about horse damage to a track and the need to have a good route avoiding a busy main road. It had been hoped that the Community Council could apply for funding from the Fallago Rig wind farm grant scheme to upgrade the track and a meeting had been arranged between interested parties, however this has been cancelled due to ill health of key individuals.

* GM thanked SBC for the support and guidance given to Ride Scotland’s Horse Country project. Website [www.ridescottishborders.com](http://www.ridescottishborders.com) has gone live and the design is based on the SBC walking and cycling websites. A number of suggested itineraries describing where to go/ stay/ see/ do are being added.

GM is working with EN and Northumberland County Council to identify an alternative St Cuthbert’s Way riding route from Melrose to Lindisfarne and similarly trying to identify a horse riding version of the Borders Abbeys Way.

The project is also developing a ‘Big Hooses’ tour of 10-14 days which can also be done as 2 smaller loops.

The project is beginning to attract riders from abroad with planned visits of groups from USA and Australia.

Guidance is being given on where to park horse boxes, Forestry and Land Scotland have been very helpful with this.

The project is funded until December 2019, but funding is being sought to extend the project as it is being seen to be having a positive effect.

**Access issues updates**

* Cavers - Core Path 128

Since the last Forum meeting, liaison has taken place between SBC and the landowner which has resulted in a couple of obstructions being removed, but the landowner still has an issue regarding horses on his drive and track. To resolve this the landowner is proposing creating an alternative surfaced path for use by horses paralleling the Core Path, however this is dependent on the acquisition of a strip of ground from a neighbour. If this can be agreed works should commence once tree felling has been completed in the next 2-3 months. **KR** will liaise with the owner regarding the design of the path works.

* Roman Wood, Jedburgh

Currently a Core Path extends through the centre of a woodland which has been recently clear felled and for management reasons the owner would like to realign the path along the field edge parallel to the existing path. Both routes have wet sections and require surfacing in places. There are advantages and disadvantages to both alternatives. The owners have been asked to consult the Community Council for their views. Any final decision should be based on the long-term benefits to the users as well as addressing the management needs of the owner.

* Broomlee Centre, West Linton

There has been an ongoing issue between the centre staff and the public using an informal riverside path for access adjacent to the centre. The issue revolves around the safety of children resident at the centre and members of the public with dogs using the centre grounds. EN has drafted an advisory notice but the centre manager is not happy with the wording and would like to see the public kept out. The mood of the forum was that the public would appear to have a right of access and that the notice seems fair. It may be that the issue has arisen as a matter of insurance and that a reasonable solution would be to fence off the riverside path and install appropriate signage.

**Police Guidance on Farm Security**

A copy of an advisory note issued by Police Scotland after a recent theft of quad bikes was circulated which advises farmers to:

* Reduce access by removing all gates and entrances that are no longer in use and replacing them with a permanent fence or other barrier
* Secure all gates with good padlocks

It would appear that this advice is going out at a national level and goes against the Land Reform Act.

**DW** will raise our Forums concerns with the National Access Forum and Scotways.

**Date of next meeting**

Tuesday 22nd October 2019 at 2pm in Committee Room 4, Council HQ

Item to be put on the agenda to discuss frequency and format of future meetings – **KR**