

Scottish Borders Access Forum

Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 25th October 2016

1. Present:

William Davidson (Chair)
Walter Douglas (National Farmers Union)
Councillor Ron Smith (Executive Member for Planning and Environment)
Douglas Wright (Central Tweeddale Paths and Scottish Rights of Way Society)
Trevor Bryant (Cycling)
Ian Aitchison (Scottish Land & Estates)
David Langworth (Melrose Paths Group)
Beryl Masson (British Horse Society)
Rory Powell (Buccleuch Estates Bowhill Ranger)
Graeme Johnstone (SBC Lead Officer - Access and Transport)
Keith Robeson (SBC Senior Ranger)
Susan Kevan (SBC Access Ranger – West)

2. Apologies / Absent

Councillor Stuart Bell (Executive Member for Economic Development)

3. Minutes of last meeting of the Access Forum

Accepted as read.

4. Access Rangers' Area Reports

KR briefly summarised the Access Rangers' reports (as circulated) which outlined a selection of path maintenance, upgrade and flood damage works recently undertaken, as well as their involvement with the Heritage and Walking Festivals.

74 planning consultations had been undertaken by the access team over the first 9 months of the year.

KR also explained that with the loss of the Access Officer post, those duties had been divided up amongst other members of the access team.

5. Bellwin scheme – flooding report

GJ explained that after the winter floods SBC had initiated the Bellwin Scheme to claim government funding (alongside Council money) for repair works to bridges and landslips on 6 key projects as outlined in the Flooding report (circulated):

- New Mill Footbridge, near Jedburgh;
- Newstead flood damage;
- Dere Street, near Jedburgh;
- Wildcat Cleugh, near Jedburgh;
- St Cuthbert's Way near St Boswells; and
- The Gytes, Peebles.

The works were carried out successfully despite the tight timescale of having to complete the works by the end of September. DW was particularly pleased that SBC had taken on the remedial works at Peebles and had previously thanked the Access Team.

In addition to these works the Path Wardens had carried out a lot of minor remedial works to repair other winter damage to paths. There was still an issue on St Cuthbert's Way below Mertoun bridge where the river is changing its course and is continuing to undercut the riverbank.

6. Craik Forest

KR had written to Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES) on behalf of the Forum and the letter of reply was circulated. GJ and KR had met with Hugh McKay of FES to discuss further.

The mountain bike trail has been barriered off due to the presence of 21 unsafe structures, which have been left in place whilst FES continues to liaise with the local community. FES argues that few people use the resource but they are still happy to maintain and promote the car park and short waymarked paths.

BM raised concerns of woody vegetation overgrowing the path on the Dumfries & Galloway side of the Roman and Reivers route which was discouraging visitors.

TB noted that despite the loss of the promoted mountain bike route there was still very good access to the forest for cyclists which could be improved with the installation of a few culverts and that Craik should be promoted more as a cycling destination. TB agreed to contact Graeme McLean who is the Project Manager for Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland to raise awareness of the facilities at Craik.

7. Southern Upland Way, Traquair – safety concerns

Concern had been raised by Duke of Edinburgh Award leaders regarding safety of groups of children walking the road section between Traquair Kirk and Traquair village. This section of road is twisty with steep verges making it difficult for walkers to get off the road on to the verge. It has been suggested that an alternative route should be found. It is important that SUW walkers are able to get access to Traquair and on into Innerleithen for accommodation and provisions so an alternative route would need to shadow the existing line. The most obvious alternative route identified would be to move the path into the fields on the east side of the road. However, this could involve a significant amount of work as a burn would need to be bridged and several dykes would need to be knocked through and gated, landowners permission would be required. Depending on the nature of the terrain the path may also need to be surfaced. In order to determine the feasibility of realigning the route the Access Team would investigate further and report back to the Forum.

ACTION - KR

8. Walking festivals update

The 2016 SBWF in Coldstream had been deemed a great success by Coldstream Community Trust as detailed in their report to the Ranger Service (circulated). The event was progressed by a committed group of volunteers who endeavoured to make it successful. The event had attracted around 200 walkers with over 600 individual walk bookings. Local businesses have indicated that it helped their economy. There was a lot of positive feedback from walkers who attended from all over the country as well as a few from abroad.

KR and DW had recently met to progress next year's event in Peebles and it is proposed that a small committee group will be established soon and

that an events programme will be produced early in 2017. The event will run from 3rd to 9th September 2017 and there is some concern that it will clash with a major cycling event on the Sunday. SBC can assist with publicity on facebook and the access team can assist with leading walks, minor path works/ strimming etc.

KR has recently written to all the Community Councils to determine the level of interest for communities to host the event in 2018, 2019 and 2020. Three Community Councils have already expressed an interest.

9. Walking/ cycling/ equestrian interest update

Cycling-

GJ talked through the Cycling Report (circulated) which included project works at Lauder and Duns and updates on the shared access routes from Innerleithen to Walkerburn, Clovenfords to Walkerburn and Peebles to Eddleston.

Sustrans have provided funding for works in Wilton Lodge park in Hawick. There is the possibility of obtaining money for routes to the new Kelso High School.

The Walk Scottish Borders website has been completed and should be officially launched soon.

Information kiosks are now functioning in a number of Border towns but awaiting Tweedbank and Stow kiosks to start due to issues with BT/ Scottish Power.

BM asked if it would be possible to create a multi-use path between Jedburgh and Hawick. There was some scope to improve sections of the Borders Abbeys Way for multi-use but much of it is unsuitable. SBC would ideally like to link all the major settlements in this way but these schemes are expensive to initiate and there is a very limited budget available at the present time.

Equestrian-

BHS have produced posters on responsible riding aimed at riders and land managers responsibilities - these are being distributed around livery yards. Concerns were expressed again regarding cyclists not making other users aware of their presence before passing from behind.

10. Paths for Health report

The Paths to Health update (circulated) shows that it is going from strength to strength with 26 active walk groups which Denise Carmichael has set up and who is now organising walks for Dementia sufferers through doctor referrals.

Funding is through NHS and SBC on a year to year basis.

The Forum asked that congratulations be passed on the Denise once more.

11. Access issues updates

Ladhope, Galashiels – concerns were raised regarding plans for tree planting and poor deer fencing gate design and the proposed mountain bike routes which appears to have had little consultation.

SBC access team are aware that the initial plans were for a tree planting scheme funded through the Forestry Commission but this has been further expanded by Tweed Forum to develop access for cycling. SBC have

involvement as land managers of the golf course and acting as a consultee but are not actively promoting this proposal. There appears to have been poor consultation with neighbouring landowners and that proposed cycle routes are criss-crossing existing paths.

12. Rogersrigg, Carlops

GJ and KR along with Martin Wanless met the householders at Rogersrigg to discuss the ongoing access issues. This meeting was deemed to be very positive and the residents were asked to consider proposals which involved improved wording on one sign and the removal of another in the immediate area which would help alleviate the initial concerns of the Access Authority. It is hoped that final agreement with the residents will be forthcoming in the near future.

Oxcleugh Haugh, St Mary's Loch

Antisocial behaviour from overnight campers on the picnic area in front of the Glen café has resulted in 14 calls to the Police in an 18 month period. This resulted in the Police initiating a meeting with all interested parties to try and resolve the situation. It was proposed that the local angling club be approached to see if their water bailiff could be employed at weekends to 'police' the picnic area to speak to potential campers to try and prevent incidents from occurring – this would rely on some funding being sought for this purpose.

13. AOB

- DW proposed that the Forum write to Neil Mackay to thank him for his work in supporting the work of the Forum. **ACTION – KR**
- DL circulated a Lammermuir Hills Tracks leaflet produced by Scotways to promote walking and cycling in the Lammermuir Hills. Some signage has still to be done which Mike Marsh, Access Ranger is aware of.
- The Paths around Melrose booklet has been revised and reprinted.
- SK assisted the Eckford, Crailing and Nisbet CC to develop their Jubilee Path and a booklet has been produced which was distributed to members of the forum.

14. Date of next meeting:

The Chair reminded the Forum that it had agreed that the 'Open Forum' be discussed at this meeting, however it was felt that due to staff changes within the access team that this should wait until the next meeting.

Next meeting:

Tuesday 26th April 2017 at 2pm Council HQ