

EAST LoTHIAN COUNCIL

PARTNERSHIPS & COMMUNITY SERVICES

Minutes of the meeting of the **EAST LoTHIAN LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**
held on **28th October 2020** via Skype.

PRESENT:

Jon Swift (Chair).....AELCC	Mark James Cycling UK
Sue KempsonELC Councillor	John McMillan ELC Councillor
Constance NewbouldBHSS	Ken Reid..... Independent co-optee

ATTENDING:

Neil Clark.....ELC Countryside	Claire Grant National Trust for Scotland
Jill Mackay.....ELC Coms.	Stuart Maxwell National Trust for Scotland
Nick MorganELC Countryside	Roger Powell ELC Ranger Service

APOLOGIES:

Francis Hepburne Scott..Scottish Forestry	Eamon John ELC SCL Manager
Andrew RaltonScotways	Iain Reid ELC Roads
Thomas Stanley.....Landowners	James Wyllie NFUS

(Andrew, Thomas and James intended to join the meeting but were unable to for technical reasons.)

ACTION

1. NEWHAILES HOUSE

- 1.1 Claire Grant from the National Trust for Scotland gave a summary about recent issues at Newhailes House and the Trust's plans for the future. She has previously met with Nick to discuss issues. During the pandemic there has been no income and an increase in antisocial behaviour at Newhailes, such as littering, parties, fires and bits of walls being knocked down.
- 1.2 Earlier this year the Trust arranged to have the two fields behind the house cut and the farmer was going to take the hay as payment. However, there was so much dog fouling in the field that the hay was unusable and they had to pay to have the hay taken away. They have recently been approached by a local farmer who would like to rent the fields for crops. The Trust have had to reduce the number of staff they have and this would be a good way to look after the area.
- 1.3 The fields currently have a fence around them and if they were to rent out the land to the farmer, they would fence both sides of the path across the fields to allow people to continue to walk there. Wild flowers will be sown in the field margins.
- 1.4 Jon asked if the estate still plans to move the core path. Claire responded that the concept of creating a pay zone isn't progressing, so there are no plans to move the core path.

- 1.5 Ken thought it was a shame that people just allowed their dogs to roam out of control. He asked how wide the gap between the fences would be. Claire responded that the fences will be 18 feet apart.
- 1.6 Jon asked what the LAF or the Council can do to help and it was agreed to share the story on social media. Claire will send a picture to Nick and Ken will put a post on Facebook about the issues the National Trust have been having. At a later date information about the new fences can be posted. **KR/NM**
- 1.7 Jill suggested a joint campaign between the Council and National Trust about dog fouling during the darker evenings. Jill will contact Claire. **JM**

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING held on 29th July 2020.

The minutes were agreed as a true reflection of the meeting. Proposed by Ken and seconded by Mark.

3. MATTERS ARISING

- 3.1 Mark sent the link for the Highway Code consultation to Ken who put it onto the LAF Facebook page.
- 3.2 Nick circulated a note to members of the Forum about the meeting he had had with the Secretary of North Berwick Golf Club, inviting comments. The comments were forwarded to the Club who were very grateful for the input of the LAF.
- 3.3 Nick had also circulated a note about access to the Ormiston Yew, inviting comments. He thanked members for their responses, which he had copied to the Countryside Ranger for the area. However, it seems that after repeated vandalism to the fence the residents have given up trying to keep people from walking under the centre of the tree.

4. WILD CAMPING

- 4.1 Neil led the discussion on wild camping. He said that this had taken up an enormous amount of staff time during the lockdown. The whole Countryside Team had been out and staff were working each weekend since the start of lockdown. There had also been weekly multi-agency meetings involving Police, Emergency Planners, Roads and other Council departments. Countryside staff compiled a report each evening which was shared with the multi-agency group.
- 4.2 In line with Government guidance it was decided to close the car parks until June 20th. Prior to them reopening and afterwards there was a “tsunami” of visitors to the coast with unprecedented numbers of tents and campervans. In July and August we recorded over 1800 tents and campervans along the coast. This is more than ten times the normal numbers and the busiest the coast has been in more than 40 years.
- 4.3 It appears that very few people understand what wild camping is. People want to have a good time in the countryside, and we want them to, but they don’t always know to do the right thing, although most want to.
- 4.4 There has been much press coverage of dirty camping, but this hasn’t happened in East Lothian, with about 95% of people leaving very little mess. This was very

much thanks to good old fashioned rangering with staff talking to each group of campers they came across, asking for no fires unless on the beach, to take all litter home and giving advice regarding toileting.

- 4.5 We are now preparing for exactly the same situation next year. We are looking at Management Rules, or Byelaws, but they would need Scottish Government approval. We are considering pop-up camp sites or toilets and working with neighbouring landowners. The views of the LAF will be noted and added to the plan.
- 4.6 Jon applauded the work of East Lothian Council, the Countryside Team and others involved. It is good that people want to be out and about and great that people responded to requests from the Rangers. He wanted to extend his thanks to the team during these difficult times.
- 4.7 Councillor McMillan wanted to echo Jon's comments and felt that the press coverage last week didn't take a wide enough view. He hoped that people would be responsible and engage with the Rangers. He wants to encourage people to visit East Lothian and maybe by working with local landowners people could be persuaded to move to facilities away from the coast, which would be good for local tourism.
- 4.8 Councillor Kempson thought it was good that so many people are visiting East Lothian, but wasn't sure that many of them are spending much money in the area. She was concerned that viruses have been found in human waste and that more areas with facilities are required. She had found that places like Traprain Law and Tynninghame had been inundated with campers and other visitors. What is needed is designated areas for campers with Portaloos and sanitiser. This would give people the chance to be responsible.
- 4.9 Ken congratulated the Countryside Team on keeping control of camping. He would be interested to know if the campers we had thought they were wild camping. He was a little confused by the statement that 95% cleared up after themselves, but what about human waste. There must have been more than 5% who were leaving this. Will these campers be persuadable to go to organised sites?
- 4.10 Constance thought that it is all about education. The issue of human waste is dreadful. There are so many people who are not aware of countryside issues. Can the Rangers go into schools and educate the children how to wild camp.
- 4.11 Jon felt that there is a need for differentiation between wild camping and controlled camping. Facilities may address some of the people seeking controlled camping, but not those who want a wild experience or a party. He thought national guidelines were needed.
- 4.12 Roger agreed that education is very important, but the problem was that the majority of campers were not from East Lothian. He felt that there was need for a national campaign.
- 4.13 Constance suggested contacting the National Access Forum. Nick has already done this, but there appears to be a reluctance to define wild camping. NatureScot have produced guidance about camping, but it doesn't mention wild camping at all.
- 4.14 Councillor McMillan said that we need to do something quickly before next season. He suggested poster saying where you can and can't camp. There is a group in Haddington who are keen to open a camping area in Amisfield and Fox Lake are

considering a glamping site. East Lothian should take the lead and send the NAF a 1-page policy or plan.

- 4.15 Councillor Kempson said that Loch Lomond have stopped all wild camping and people must only use designated sites. She had been told that at Whitesands there were rows of campervans and tents, but the toilets were closed over-night.
- 4.16 Mark had read that the camping byelaws at Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park are not working well. He will send a link to Nick <http://parkswatchscotland.co.uk/>
- 4.17 Jon asked that members of the Forum send their thoughts as individuals or of the organisation they represent to Nick once they have received the minutes. This information can be used by Neil when compiling his report. **All**
- 4.18 Mark asked if the number of campers was still high. Neil responded that things have quietened down with the weather, but there are still some people camping along the coast. Last Sunday at 1.30 Tynninghame Links car park was full and there were an additional 50 cars parked along the road. He thanked the Forum for their comments and noted that we will have to be realistic about what we can achieve for next year.

5. MEMBERSHIP

- 5.1 Sadly Paul Chandler has been made redundant from the National Trust for Scotland, so can no longer represent them on the Forum. However, he has indicated that he would be keen to remain on the Forum. After some discussion it was agreed that it is important to have members who are keen to attend meetings, but a bit of concern that there may be a slight conflict of interest if discussing issues at Newhailes. It was decided that Nick should contact Paul asking if he is a member of an organisation that he could represent. **NM**
- 5.2 Councillor McMillan suggested that it would be good to have a landowner representative who has had issues with wild camping. He suggested Martin Andrews, who is the factor at Wemyss and March Estates. They have a golf course, various small businesses as well as the wider estate.
- 5.3 Councillor McMillan also suggested Sir Francis Ogilvy, who has Winton Estate and is involved in development planning. He also suggested Barry Fisher, who is the Chief Executive of Keep Scotland Beautiful and has been involved with the Duke of Edinburgh Awards.
- 5.4 Councillor Kempson suggested someone from Coast to Coast Surf School, or Fox Lake, as these businesses are both experienced with visitor numbers and could represent water sports.
- 5.5 Nick will send some information to Councillors McMillan and Kempson which they can forward to potential candidates. If there are a number of people interested in joining the LAF we can discuss applicants at the next meeting. **NM**

6. FACEBOOK

- 6.1 The Facebook page has 261 people following it.

- 6.2 Ken had put up a picture of a sign he had seen when walking in the Borders. It requested that people clean up after their dogs and horses. Horse mess can be more obvious on a path. Constance added that the British Horse Society has sent leaflets to all its members asking them to get off their horse and clear up any manure from paths.
- 6.3 Other posts that Ken has put up were the Highway Code review and a post about wild camping. He asked for any pictures and short stories to add to the page. **All**

7 ACCESS OFFICER'S UPDATE

This was circulated in advance of the meeting and Nick ran through it.

8. ACCESS ISSUES UPDATE

A summary of access issues was circulated in advance of the meeting.

- 8.1 It was noted that there had been an increase in access issues brought to the attention of the Council since the start of the lockdown. There are certainly more people out and about, so this may be causing concern for some landowners and there are more people noticing issues to report.

9. MEMBERS' UPDATES

- 9.1 Mark reported that Eves Buses and Borders Buses now have bike friendly buses with room to take bikes on board.
- 9.2 Mark said that there has been a massive increase in the uptake of e-bikes recently.
- 9.3 Mark and other cyclists have been doing some maintenance along the West Barns shared use path. The farmer appears unable to cut the lower branches of the hedge which had been growing out onto the path. A group of volunteers has now cut these back.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 10.1 Ken noted that where the John Muir Way has traditionally crossed a field diagonally near Yellowcraig, it would appear that the farmer is now encouraging people to walk around the field margins. Nick has asked the Countryside Ranger to look at this, because he has concerns for public safety for anyone walking next to the golf course there. The ranger has been in touch with the farmer, a contractor had been unaware of the arrangement, so the ranger has put temporary signs and posts up to direct people in the correct direction.
- 10.2 Ken commented that the car park at Crossgatehall was badly rutted. Nick will ask the Ranger to check this out. **NM**
- 10.3 Ken asked about the possibility for the Gilsland to Kingston road becoming a walker and cyclist friendly road. He has seen this elsewhere with a 30mph limit. Mark suggested the Hailes Castle Road. It was agreed that the Forum would support such measures and it was suggested that a list of suggested routes be developed. Anyone with any ideas should send them to Nick to collate. **All**

10.4 Jon raised his concerns about the proposed station at East Linton which will encroach onto the park and the right of way. There is a video simulation at <https://scotlandsrailway.com/projects/east-linton-station/location>

11. DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

Wednesday 27th January 2021

Wednesday 28th April 2021

Wednesday 28th July 2021

Wednesday 20th October 2021

The meetings will be from 2pm until 4.30pm. It is likely we will have to continue to use Skype for at least the next two meetings, but otherwise Nick will try to book meeting rooms for the July and October meetings.