

EAST LoTHIAN COUNCIL

PARTNERSHIPS & COMMUNITY SERVICES

Minutes of the meeting of the **EAST LoTHIAN LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**
held on **28th July 2021** via Skype.

PRESENT:

Jon Swift (Chair).....AELCC	Sue Kempson..... ELC Councillor
John McMillan.....ELC Councillor	Andrew Ralton Scotways
Ken ReidIndependent co-optee	Thomas Stanley Landowners
James Wyllie.....NFUS	

ATTENDING:

Neil Clark.....ELC Countryside	Nick Morgan ELC Countryside
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APOLOGIES:

Martin AndrewsWemyss & March	Claire Grant National Trust Scot.
Mark JamesCycling UK	Eamon John ELC SCL Manager
Constance NewbouldBHSS	Iain Reid ELC Roads

ACTION

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

- 1.1 The standing orders of the Forum require one third of members to be present for any formal decisions. There are 18 posts on the Forum and there were seven members present, so the elections of Chair and Vice-chair could go ahead.
- 1.2 There had been two nominations for Jon to be elected as Chair for a second term. There were no other nominations. Jon was willing to serve a second term and was therefore duly elected. Nominated by James and Constance.
- 1.3 Constance had said she did not want to serve as Vice-Chair for a second term. James nominated Thomas, who was willing to stand. He was seconded by John McMillan and was duly elected. Jon thanked Constance for her time as Vice-Chair.
- 1.4 Nick will circulate the “Ways of Working” document with the minutes. **NM**

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING held on 28th April 2021.

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

3. MATTERS ARISING

- 3.1 Since the April meeting Francis Hepburne Scott has left Scottish Forestry. Also Chris McDonald has retired from SRUC. Nick will contact both organisations to ask if someone can attend future meetings. **NM**
- 3.2 Nick will follow up the provision of access at Fox Lake with the manager of the venue and landowner. **NM**
- 3.3 Nick would be interested to hear from any members of the Forum about any access hotspots they encounter in the Lammermuir Hills or elsewhere inland in East Lothian. The Countryside Rangers only have time to concentrate on the busier coastal sites, but we are keen to hear if there are issues elsewhere. **All**

4. FORUM FACEBOOK

- 4.1 Ken reported that he, Nick, Jill and Countryside Ranger Laura Douglas have continued to produce posts for the LAF, East Lothian Council and the Countryside Rangers' Facebook pages. These have been educational, trying to inform and encourage responsible behaviour. These are reaching a lot of people and have heightened awareness of the Local Access Forum.
- 4.2 Subjects have included water safety, at the start of the warm weather. Another post in the spring highlighted the difference between grass and young cereal crops, which was seen by over 4,000 people. Another post about privacy and curtilage was seen by over 7,500 people. There have also been posts about dogs, lambs, shared use of paths and wild camping.
- 4.3 Neil said that the three main messages the Countryside Rangers are trying to get across to campers is a zero tolerance of litter, responsible toileting and only having fires on the beach. Of the 62 sets of campers encountered at Tynninghame last weekend 95% wanted to do the right thing and were listening to the Rangers. The team are now trying to move towards educating people what wild camping is.
- 4.4 The Council has approved new Land Management Rules for countryside sites. These permit only wild camping and this is defined as being part of a pedestrian or cycled journey, all equipment carried as part of that journey, a maximum of four campers and for up to two nights. The Rangers hand out cards with this advice on. The real difficulty has been a lack of a national definition of wild camping.
- 4.5 Andrew mentioned a Facebook post he had seen by someone who had been camping in Dumfries and Galloway and who had been given a goody pack by a Countryside Ranger, which included a trowel, bin bag and ashtray.
- 4.6 James asked if there was a risk of more campers coming to East Lothian if they were made to feel welcome and if this was sustainable. Neil admitted that even if done correctly a large number of tents will have an impact on sites. It is hoped that a consultant will be able to undertake a visitor management plan for next summer. This will consider overflow carparks, areas for camper vans and areas for camping.
- 4.7 It was agreed that a review of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code is needed. A motion has been lodged in Scottish Parliament, but it will need cross-party approval.
- 4.8 Jon thanked Ken for all his hard work looking after the LAF Facebook page.

5 ACCESS OFFICER'S UPDATE

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

- 5.1 James asked to clarify that the proposed path from Papple to Garvald will end at Stoneypath Tower and not Stoneypath Farm.
- 5.2 Nick will send a draft plan showing the proposed route of the Tynningame to Binning Wood path to members of the Forum. **NM**
- 5.3 Thomas was pleased to hear that planners contact Nick about public access at some developments. He said that there is a good example of a recreational area at Dunbar that has been well designed, rather than retro-fitted.

6. ACCESS ISSUES UPDATE

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

- 6.1 Andrew said that he had recently been walking at Saltcoates and had no concerns about what he had seen there. There were no obstructions on any of the paths.
- 6.2 Jon thanked Nick for the work he puts in dealing with access issues, which he knows is very time consuming.

7. MEMBERS' UPDATES

- 7.1 Councillor McMillan said that he and Councillor Kempson have received complaints about cyclists urinating indiscreetly. They wondered if a message about this could be circulated through local cycling contacts.
- 7.2 Councillor McMillan said that he had been saddened to hear from the owner of Castle Park Golf Club about aggressive behaviour from members of the public who had been walking over the course.
- 7.3 Jon said that at a recent meeting of the Association of East Lothian Community Councils concerns had been raised about the number of rural toilets that were closed. Councillor McMillan said that this was because of staff shortages due to illness and isolating staff. This has also been brought up in the Rural Economic Recovery Group.
- 7.4 Thomas was pleased about the Council's positive collaboration with landowners, He is keen to disseminate the Council's definition of wild camping.
- 7.5 Andrew said that Scotways and the Mountaineering Council of Scotland have put out a joint message about the dangers of lightening when out walking.
- 7.6 Andrew also wanted to warn members about the perils of tick bites when out walking having recently had a nasty bite. It is wise to wear long trousers and use insect repellent. He also recommended having any bite that causes a rash checked out by a medical professional. He will send information to Ken. **AR**
- 7.7 Councillor Kempson has heard from a number of local residents who are avoiding the coast because of the enormous number of visitors and campers. She is keen to see more areas made available for camper vans.

7.8 James said that the new guidebook for the Forth to Farne Way is now available and much of the route has been waymarked. A group of pilgrims will be walking to COP26 in Glasgow from Poland. They will be going through Dunbar and it is hoped to meet up with them and walk a section of the route. There is no fixed date for this yet.

7.9 James also reported on the Giant Hogweed projects he has been involved with. He has coordinated one on the Biel Water for the last 27 years. Despite this the odd plant does still pop up. The River Tyne project is now in its third year and all known plants have been dealt with, although there could be some small seedlings that have gone unnoticed. James' daughter is now coordinating a similar project on the River Esk from Dalkeith Country Park to the sea. It is difficult to know who all the landowners are on this section of the river. James will make a plea through the NFUS for all farmers to work together to get rid of this plant.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

8.1 Nick and Neil have been working with Edinburgh University to try to develop an app that will give live information about how full the coastal car parks are. This requires quite sophisticated car counters that beam information to the University where the data is updated on the app every few minutes.

9. DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

Wednesday 20th October 2021

The Forum are keen to meet in person for the next meeting if possible. This could be combined with a site visit, preferably somewhere with a large shed or indoor facility. Otherwise the next meeting will be on Teams, rather than Skype.