

EAST LoTHIAN COUNCIL

PARTNERSHIPS & COMMUNITY SERVICES

Minutes of the meeting of the **EAST LoTHIAN LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**
held on **26th January 2022** at Dirleton Kirk Hall.

PRESENT:

Jon Swift (Chair)..... AELCC	Martin Andrews Wemyss & March
Mark James Cycling UK	Sue Kempson ELC Councillor
Constance Newbould .. BHSS	Thomas Stanley..... Landowners

ATTENDING:

Neil Clark..... ELC Countryside	Nick Morgan ELC Countryside
---------------------------------	-----------------------------------

APOLOGIES:

Paul Armour..... Dunbar Golf Club	Claire Grant..... National Trust Scot.
Eamon John..... ELC SCL Manager	Jill Mackay..... ELC Comms.
John McMillan ELC Councillor	Andrew Ralton Scotways
Iain Reid..... ELC Roads	Ken Reid Independent co-optee
Alasdair Sangster Scottish Forestry	James Wyllie NFUS

ACTION

Jon welcomed everybody to the meeting - the first live meeting in over two years. He noted that there were only eight people attending and wondered if people were still a bit reticent about attending gatherings. As there were six Forum members there were sufficient for any decisions to be made (*The Standing Orders require a quorum of at least one third of the appointed members is necessary for any formal decisions. There are currently 14 appointed members and two vacancies.*). Jon asked if Nick would canvass members to see if they would like virtual, or live meetings in the future. NM

Jon also asked Nick if he could contact Eric Bigland to see if he is still willing to represent the Rambers, or if he can recommend a representative. NM

1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING held on 20th October 2021.

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

2. MATTERS ARISING

- 2.1 Nick had made contact with the manager at Fox Lake, who was agreeable to a pedestrian gate, but said it would need permission of the landowner. Nick had trouble getting a response from the landowner and James kindly offered to contact

him. This resulted in rather negative responses and James was about to push for a meeting when Storm Arwen caused an enormous amount of damage to the woodland. It was therefore decided to leave it for a while before contacting him again, but we will continue to work on this one. **NM**

- 2.2 Nick suggested a joint Facebook post between ELC, the Rangers and the Forum about the perils of ticks. **NM**
- 2.3 Nick is still to contact the landowner at Danskine about altering the kissing gate to allow access for horses. **NM**
- 2.4 James has sent information to Ken about the Giant Hogweed project. Ken posted this on the Facebook page.

3. CAR PARKING AND PUBLIC ACCESS

- 3.1 Neil gave a talk about rural parking, how it evolved and how it has been managed. Covid caused a few challenges, with many of the car parks becoming very busy, primarily on the coast. There was also a significant increase in demand inland, as people searched out quieter areas to walk. Neil also talked about future plans to try to better manage busy periods.
- 3.2 Jon asked about the number of visitors to the coastal car parks. Neil said that in a normal year we would expect to see about three million visits a year, but things have evolved. Since charging was introduced people tend to car share more and over the last two years since the Covid lockdowns it is estimated that more than four million visits were made to the coast.
- 3.3 Constance noted that she used to prefer riding at inland sites, but they have become so busy in the last two years that she now prefers to head for the coast where there is easier parking and more space.
- 3.4 Sue said that last weekend the car park at Traprain was full with cars and a camper van. There were also cars parked on the verge.
- 3.5 Mark hopes that the big uptake in electric bikes may mean that more people will cycle to the countryside sites. It is better to encourage this than to enlarge the car parks. The new cycle racks in the coastal car parks are much appreciated.
- 3.6 Thomas was keen to know more about the Land Management Rules. Neil explained that these will allow us to ban or limit certain activities, such as excluding dogs or fires from sensitive areas. They also include a definition for Wild Camping, which is lacking in national guidance. The Land Management Rules are being trialled before progressing to byelaws if it is felt necessary.
- 3.7 Martin is hoping that authorities will look at the wider issues caused by the big increase in public access since Covid.
- 3.8 Neil sits on a national group and he has asked for a review of the Scottish Outdoor Access code and a definition of wild camping. The agenda for the next National Access Forum meeting includes cumulative impacts of camping and disturbance to wildlife.
- 3.9 Jon had attended the joint NAF/LAF meeting in November. It was attended by 42 people and the biggest issues were car parking, camper vans and tents. It seems that it is common to every Council across Scotland.

- 3.10 Neil said that there are a number of hot spots across Scotland and some horrendous stories. Visit Scotland and Police Scotland have done a really good job and the value of having Countryside Rangers on the ground has been noted. Mark said it must have been very difficult when the Rangers' remit is to encourage visitors. He thought that East Lothian Council responded well and should be congratulated.
- 3.11 Constance thought that education was key and others agreed. Neil said that the Rangers were trying to get the message across, but had spent much of the summer directing traffic, rather than doing school work.
- 3.12 A Visitor Management Plan is being prepared which will include projects to ease the pressure on the coast. There will be a challenge to find space for camper van sites. The University of Edinburgh project to produce an app with live information about how full the coastal carparks will be soft launched in February and hopefully will go live for Easter. This will be the first such project in Scotland.
- 3.13 Neil said it would be good to spread the load and encourage more people to go to the Lammermuir Hills, but this would require private landowners to provide parking. Constance suggested that the wind turbine companies may be able to do something. Jon noted that many parking areas in the hills were closed off during the lockdown and wondered if they had all reopened. Neil said that there were a number of places that hadn't reopened and they all add up to have an impact on public access. The Council has no powers to make landowners provide parking.
- 3.14 Jon wondered if parking was sometimes a condition of forestry funding. Martin said that large planting schemes need to provide public access but there has never been a requirement for car parking.
- 3.15 Neil noted that there are some large, robust beaches in East Lothian that have little use because of limited car access. It may be possible to work with the landowners to see if they would be prepared to provide parking.
- 3.16 Ken had sent in an e-mail in which he said that he had been surprised at the weekend that the carpark at Tynninghame was full and people were parking on the verge next to the No Parking signs, particularly at this time of year. James had e-mailed saying that he hoped a balanced solution can be found that won't produce hot spots.

4. FORUM FACEBOOK

- 4.1 Ken had send in an e-mail with an update on the LAF Facebook page. He had shared a post about not feeding the ponies on Traprain and North Berwick Laws. As a share, the response was light. He also posted about the Cycling UK initiative to subsidise bike repairs, but it rather sank without trace. Similarly, a share of a Ranger post after Storm Arwen and another post about the Queen's Platinum Green Canopy got little traction. The post about the Giant Hogweed project did better. It seems that shared posts don't receive the same response as a new post.
- 4.2 Ken is keen to resume the joint posts between the Forum, ELC and the Ranger Service.
- 4.3 As always Ken has requested that members contribute ideas for posts or to react to posts, by liking, sharing or commenting. Any relevant story just requires a picture and a few words.

All

5 ACCESS OFFICER'S UPDATE

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

- 5.1 Mark had visited the new cycle path at the cement works in Dunbar and is impressed with the standard of work.
- 5.2 Nick will circulate a plan of the proposed path in Tynninghame, which will become part of the core path to Binning Wood. **NM**

6. ACCESS ISSUES UPDATE

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

- 6.1 Nick reported that it seems as though things are returning to normal as the lockdowns have been lifted and the number of access issues reported has reduced correspondingly.
- 6.2 Nick is aware that there are two outstanding access issues that have not been resolved in some time. One of them is the locked gate across the core path at Eweford. After several meetings and a letter to the landowner he has refused to unlock the gate, so this has now been passed to the Council's Legal Team. Nick will contact them to ask about progress. **NM**
- 6.3 Nick is very grateful to James for contacting the landowner at Fox Lake about providing non-motorised access. Nick had previously written to him with no success. The landowner had not been keen to enter into discussions about this and the last attempt to arrange a meeting by James had been a few days before Strom Arwen. This caused devastation to the woodland there, so we have decided to wait a while before contacting the landowner again. It won't be forgotten about, though.
- 6.4 Constance was concerned that Nick hadn't been in contact with the landowner at Danskine Lake to ask if the kissing gate could be made horse-friendly. Nick has every intention to do this, but was in the middle of working with the Carp Club, who rent and stock the lake and he didn't want to cause issues with either issue by pursuing them simultaneously. He will make contact with the landowner. **NM**

7. MEMBERS' UPDATES

- 7.1 Mark reported that the minutes of the Cycle Forum are now available on East Lothian Council's web pages. [Notes from past East Lothian Cycle Forum meetings | East Lothian Council](#)
- 7.2 Martin reported that the number of people visiting Gosford Policies has been declining recently, in line with what we have seen elsewhere since the easing of lockdown rules. The estate have enlarged the carpark at The Bothy.
- 7.3 Constance reported that she has ordered a horse-friendly latch for the gate at Winton Woods.
- 7.4 Constance has received a report of trees down over the path at Seton Hill. She will send a map of their location to Nick. Martin offered to talk to farmer about removing the trees. **CN/MA**

8. DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

Wednesday 27th April 2022

Wednesday 27th July 2022

Wednesday 26th October 2022

Nick will ask members if they would prefer to meet on Teams or have live meetings.