

Scottish Borders Access Forum

Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 19th January 2021

Present:

William Davidson (Chair)
Beryl Masson from Equestrian item onwards (British Horse Society)
David Langworth (Melrose Paths Group)
Councillor Mark Rowley (Executive Member for Community Planning).
Walter Douglas (NFU Scotland)
Douglas Wright (Central Tweeddale Paths and Scottish Rights of Way Society)
Keith Robeson (SBC Senior Ranger)
Susan Gray (SBC Access Ranger – South)
Denise Brydon (SBC Access and Transport Assistant)

Apologies

PC Nick Walker (Police Scotland)
Katie Jarvis (Forestry and Land Scotland)

Introduction

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first online meeting of the Forum and checked that all were happy with the format and settings. It was noted that some members appeared to be furloughed so would not have been able to accept the meeting.

Minutes of last meeting of the Access Forum

The minutes of 21st January 2020 were accepted as a true reflection and will now be posted to the SBC website.

https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/downloads/download/378/minutes_of_local_access_forum

Matters arising

Will be dealt with as agenda items.

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SBC Access Rangers Update

KR presented a summary of the Access Rangers update – a copy will be circulated with these minutes. In summary, the past year has been an interesting and challenging period for the Access Team due to Covid-19 restrictions and a reduction in staff resource. The Team is now working from home and during the first lockdown and in the current situation is only able to make site visits for urgent health and safety reasons. There have been a significant number of access issues for the Access Team to address due to Covid-19 restrictions together with the large

increase in people taking outdoor access. KR provided details of the volume and types of access enquiries and issues covered by the Team including wild camping, wild toileting, livestock and dogs and inappropriate signage. It is important to note that the Team has been able to successfully resolve many of these issues. Over the summer when restrictions were eased, the path wardens and contractors were able to complete maintenance and path vegetation clearance works. The external bridge survey process is now in the third year and work has been completed on a number of bridges. KR also advised on work done with the RNLI to provide lifeguard cover at Coldingham Bay.

W Davidson asked for information regarding the RNLI and KR confirmed that the Outdoor Access Team manage Coldingham Bay and contract the lifeguard services to the RNLI. It did appear that this provision might not be possible in 2020 for Coldingham but a solution was found taking account of all Covid-19 guidance. Councillor Rowley asked if KR expected similar issues for 2021 with the increase in staycations. Councillor Rowley noted that plans to improve provision for motorhomes would be useful for the Scottish Borders area and local initiatives are ongoing. Douglas Wright reported concern of an increase in the current lockdown of people driving to take access against the guidance. KR advised that the current guidance remains to stay local for exercise and agreed to liaise with the Police Scotland representative.

W Davidson suggested that the Forum should emphasise that any urgent repairs or maintenance works should be reported to the Outdoor Access Team via the SBC website or by emailing outdooraccess@scotborders.gov.uk

Other Interest Updates

Cycling

DB presented a summary of the cycling update – a copy will be circulated with these minutes. Current projects were detailed and it was noted that Roads Network Team had received Sustrans places for people funding to implement the 20mph changes.

Equestrian

KR advised on an issue at The Hirsell which BM had been involved with. SG reported on the work done with BM in Robertson and Cavers. BM joined the meeting at this point and provided a full report on equestrian issues including The Street. BM subsequently requested that the Forum record appreciation of the work done by SG to improve the access at Robertson and noted that the BHS had provided the bridle gate for this.

It was agreed to add the link to Ride Scottish Borders website - <http://ridescottishborders.com/>

Walking Festival update

Galashiels Weekend Walking Festival – KR advised that the Access Team were not involved in the December 2020 walks but had been approached to lead walks and provide walk leader training for their event in April 2021. This will be kept under review for Covid-19 guidance.

Scottish Borders Walking Festival – Jedburgh & Ancrum was cancelled for 2020. 2021 is under review for Covid-19 guidance.

Scottish Borders Walking Festival 2021 to 2023 - KR advised that location planning has been completed but remains under review for Covid-19 guidance and a decision on the 2021 plan.

Paths to Health report

KR presented a summary of the Walk It update provided by Denise Carmichael – a copy will be circulated with these minutes. The Forum noted the move to online training and agreed that Walk It is a tremendous asset to the Borders and to the Health Services.

W Davidson recorded appreciation of the Walk It programme ongoing.

Access issues updates

KR provided an overview of current issues and the Forum was pleased to note positive resolution for many of the issues.
SG and BM provided an update on an ongoing issue in Newcastleton area. The Forum supported the proposal to improve signage.

Any Other Business

W Douglas raised the Hawick Town of 1000 Trails – the Access Team are aware of the project but have not been directly involved.

W Douglas raised the issue of deer fencing for Forestry and SG provided an update on the planning and forestry consultation process.

It was agreed to share the link to the public portal on Forestry website

<https://forestry.gov.scot/support-regulations/public-registers>

KR was asked to raise this with Planners on behalf of the Forum.

Date of next meeting

It was agreed that the online meeting format had been successful and the next meeting date was agreed as Tuesday 25th May 2021 at 2pm.