



WEST LOTHIAN ACCESS FORUM

“An independent statutory body set up to advise West Lothian Council on access issues under The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and on Rights of Way”

Minutes of Meeting held on 28 October 2015 at Sutherland Building, Beecraigs

Present:	Chris Alcorn	(WLC – Planning Services / Chair)
	Andy Gibbs	(Scottish Land & Estates)
	Alastair Morrison	(Scotways)
	Carl Gilbert	(SRUC)
	Gordon Allan	(Ecclesmachan & Threemiletown Community Council)
	Tracey Smith	(WLC – Countryside Services)
	Malcolm Hill	(NFUS (Livestock) - part meeting)
	Carol Campbell	(Central Scotland Green Network Trust (CSGNT) - part meeting / Minute)
	Cllr Tom Conn	(WLC - Elected member / part meeting)

Action

1.0 **Welcome and Apologies**

Apologies were received from: Annie Taylor who was stepping down from the forum to be replaced by Debbie Esslemont, Richard Toleman, Des Martin and Alan Mitchell who had now left Woodland Trust Scotland. CA welcomed Carl Gilbert of SRUC to the meeting who would take over from Niall Evans.

2.0 **Minutes of Previous Meeting (25 March 2015)**

(MA not on agenda)

Chair – CA volunteered to chair this meeting. Intention to advertise post (funding available from WLC). Various publications suggested: WL Gateway for Voluntary Services; WLC Bulletin; NFUS / SL&E magazines via electronic newsletter Scotways facebook page CA draft advert

CA

Commercial Dog Walking – Katie McDonald had sent CA e-mail update. Environmental Health cannot go ahead with registration scheme. Seemingly no evidence that there is sufficient problem for officers to spend time on scheme. Other options being considered by officers. KMcD suggested Forum responds regarding scheme not going ahead. Some Forum members believe (TS joined meeting) that incidents don't get reported as they think nothing will get done.

All

TS thought that Kennel Club are considering similar scheme. She outlined complaint recently received and investigated at Dechmont Law – dog walking company operates on Bangour and also now Dechmont Law. Complaint from member of the public. WLC officers went to site to investigate. Officers had no concerns. Suggestion that Company congregates elsewhere but good practice followed generally.

GA asked about background to scheme. TS outline successful project in East Lothian. Some banks now only loaning to dog walking businesses with council accreditation. Rogue traders getting less business and registered businesses succeeding. AG queried therefore, if WL businesses were at a disadvantage if seeking bank loans.

- 3.0 **Livestock Worrying Initiative** – no feedback from NFU / Landowners. (Cllr Tom Conn joined the meeting). Cllr Conn reported complaint from Philpstoun Community Council a number of years ago re dog using Canal towpath and leaving dirt on towpath. But no apparent action by Council.

Still unclear as to if any response from Farmers / NFU from joint Police / WLC letter in early 2014 to all WL farmers on issue. At last Forum in March 2015 Jamie Smart had asked TS for poster to distribute and she had issued. MH to provide feedback on behalf of NFU for next Forum.

MH

Bathgate Hills Quiet Roads Initiative – Council consultants had just finished gathering traffic data on volume and average speed from study area. Now being collated. Stakeholders will be invited, including landowners in Bathgate Hills, to look at new data and discuss via consultation sessions - tbc.

Will also include data collections on quiet roads around: West Calder, Kirknewton, Almondell and between Armadale / Bathgate. Deborah Paton, WLC Transportation and CA to advance project. WLC Accident Investigation Unit, separate from Transportation Unit, will look at options using existing network rather than gates etc.

National Access Forum - JS was to attend and discuss CAP reforms. CA to contact JS for update

CA/JS

4.0 **Access Officer (Verbal Update by Chris Alcorn)**

Current post hasn't been filled for a number of years. Was reduced to part-time post (but not filled). Now back to full time post but moved from Planning to Countryside Services. Post will be graded at Ranger level and need to be re-graded as part of Structure review. Draft Job description has been prepared by CA for Countryside Services. Probably advertised in Spring with appointment shortly after. Core Path Plan, strategic and legal issues will remain with Planning. New officer will deal more with day to day access issues and report to Ranger Services Manager (Beverley Stirling).

£60k/year budget confirmed until end of March 2017 but transferred to Countryside Services Manager – Eirwen Hopwood. CA to put job description extract into minutes.

CA

5.0 **Access Issues Update (March 2015 – October 15) Verbal update by CA**

Eirwen Hopwood is now being copied in on all access issues.

(Malcolm Hill joined meeting). Cllr Conn mentioned complaints about road signs being covered by vegetation. Council not sure when to react / be proactive. AM raised issue about thorns being left on routes which could cause punctures. Strimming operators need educating on how to trim properly. Council no longer walks / maintains claimed rights of way, just asserted and vindicated RoWs and CPs.

Kirknewton Airfield – certified airfield – access rights don't apply. CA to chase Martin Duncan (CEC) on update for complaint that covered CEC area.

CA

Blackridge – Matthew Crofts – gate that was erected across right of way had been changed after WLC Enforcement intervention and access now possible.

Philpstoun – Horse rider approached Hopetoun after gate fell on horse. Had been noted by Ecclesmachan & Threemiletown Community Council but repaired by member of access group (GA would challenge riders account as gate had been down for a while).

Winchburgh – Golf Council – RoW overgrown. Council investigated. Golf

Course used to strim. Horse riders now using fairway. Council discussing if golf course will strim again.

AG queried if there was an update on Bangour Fishery – fishery has changed hands, Mr Reid still interfering with fishermen and their enjoyment of site. CA not aware of any other new issues. CA stated that there is Sustrans design money to look at link from Bangour General site to Blacklaw Farm ridge road.

Graduate Work Experience Programme – 1 of their 6 projects was to have been to audit & review all WL rights of way start / end routes for signage. However due to candidates mobility issues, project to be retained till new Access Ranger post and be a priority.

Sustrans Programme 2015/16:

- Whitburn – Armadale off-road route – been designed.
- Linlithgow Union Canal: Golf course road/ Academy link – designed.
- Almondvale NCN75 upgrade – starts November 2015.
- Starlaw – Boghall: section complete.
- Blackridge South Station – land owner issue delayed scheme.

John Muir Way – CSGNT had organised a meeting for wide range of partners at Burgh Halls in September. 3 Working Groups set up. CA on Technical and Infrastructure WG to meet in November and January. Part time JMW officer post to be provided by SNH. Consultants report on users due November. To be reported to next Linlithgow LAC and Forum.

Mary Dickies Quarry – Site meeting held with new WLC Transportation Engineer / CSGNT in October. He recommend braided route: i.e. walk Balderston > A706; Cycle via B8029. CA to write brief for Transportation for them to: check speeds assess signage / linage / M9 parapet works and cost. AM raised concerns at cycling north up Fishers Brae.

Torphichen – River Avon Heritage Trail: Again, site meeting held with WLC Transportation Engineer / CSGNT. A706 safe crossing identified. However, issues with B792 long uphill / downhill straight. Meeting to be held with Wallhouse owner to route path behind entrance wall away from road.

Torphichen – Linlithgow connection: raised by Torphichen Community Council at meeting in May 2015 as they had re-established CC and access issues were a priority. They had idea for a walks booklet. Main interested was route was to Linlithgow. TC had met Kipps Farmer on possible diversion and they were agreeable in principle. BVD is an issue and wise to double fence route. Reduces gates except in 1 location. Scrub Clearance at Cockleroy and WLC pay for this cost. TC to meet Williamcraigs owner in Spring.

Lowland Crofting Policy Review – 13 croft sites audited by SNH / CSGNT and Lothian & Fife Green Network Partnership. Lot of access issues arising e.g.; at Longridge 2 croft sites with blockages. Overall list of maintenance issues and opportunities. For inclusion in new Access Ranger. Work programme. Report to be completed and review of policy to be reported by Planning to WLC committee in 2016.

Scottish Government – Land Reform Act return completed at end of October for 2014/15 period.

Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) – new access grants via SNH. CA, as Temp AO, to comment on applications for SNH. No applications to date. NB post meeting update: application received an approved for Beecraigs Country Park).

Stoneyburn & Bents Future Vision Group - main issues are lack of access at east (to Addiewell) and west (to Fauldhouse junction) end of village. Site meeting held at end of July. Transportation to prepare outline designs and costs to go back to Community Council.

"Pentlands Paths Project" – Path maintenance major infrastructure issue in Regional Park. Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust been very successful in raising funds. Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust to use COAT to undertake path audit and report by April 2016. E&LGT officer to secure funds for priority path works. WLC contributed £5k, SNH £5k and CEC £17k and WLC focus on Cauldstane Slap and update of recent CSGNT costs.

Little Vantage (A70) – Selm Muir – formal opening on 28th August as thanks to "Friends of the Pentlands" volunteers at Hilly Cow Wigwams, Leyden Farm. Cllr Toner and chair of FoP planted a tree. Some more gates and signage work to complete.

West Calder & Harburn Community Development Trust – CDT funded scoping study (£8k) for connection from West Calder to Harburn and also via West Muir Farm.

- 6.0 WLC Planning Services 2015/16 capital programme (£60k) update –
 - Fauldhouse – Longridge (£45k) 1.2km surfaced upgrade Complete missing link with Lanrigg Rd scheme Matches Sustrans £45k grant. Transportation PDSP report approved in June Legal negotiation with Ecosse regeneration.
 - Winchburgh towpath Cutting – Union Canal. WLC £10k contribution to £160k scheme for 1.2km surface upgrade core path following community request .Follows similar towpaths upgrades at Linlithgow , Broxburn
 - "Pentlands Path Project" – WLC £5k of £27k audit / report by COAT & E&LGT for future grants.
- 7.0 Local Development Plan – CA gave update as Proposed Plan (PP) included Core Paths and rights of way. Main Issue Report back in August 2014 had led to PP going out for public consultation in mid-October to end November 2015. New government neighbour notification rules had meant 7,000 letters issued to properties that abut proposals in the plan. Due back at Committee in Spring 2016. Aim for adoption of LDP in early 2017.
- 8.0 Paths Across West Lothian (PAWL) Drove Routes handout – Mr Ure, as organiser of PAWL, had asked AM if he would distribute handout to Forum on Drove Road. Mr Ure had been at Philpstoun surgery and afterwards invited to meeting with CEO and Head of Planning,
- 9.0 SNH Guidance on Public Liability handout – CA tabled recently reprinted SNH access related guidance that was a colour booklet on: "*A Brief Guide to Occupiers Legal Liabilities in Scotland in relation to Public Outdoor access*".
- 10.0 SNH Training : "Re-invigorating Local Access Forum – CA mentioned notice of Joint National Access Forum and Local Access Forums meeting on 20th November at Battleby HQ. Perth on "*Keeping your LAF vital, important, relevant and healthy*" and did any WL AF member want to attend. As none were available, CA indicated he would try and attend and report back to Forum.
- 11.0 AOCB
 - LEADER funding of £2.3M was due to be available for next 2 years in West Lothian. It covered farm diversification projects. Previously there was a 20% limit on administration. There were 5 audit systems. GA

CA

mentioned he was concerned at over auditing.

- GA raised Philpstoun South Bing - a new operator was on site and there was a planning application condition about improving the right of way / core path on the west side. CA to raise with case officer. CA
- March fence at Dessert on the River Avon Heritage Trail was raised by MH as he owns the adjacent land. CA to see Jane Begg Countryside Services who maintains the woodland. CA
- CA distributed paper from NAF on "Core Paths mapping and the Ordnance Survey" report as thought to be of interest to Forum members.
- WL Active Travel Plan - CA mentioned Deborah Paton at Transportation wished to notify the Forum on publication of the WLC Draft Active Travel Plan (ATP) that accords with Cycling Scotland requirements from its Cycling Action Plan for Scotland. The WL ATP "*Making Connections*" is about linking people to places by active travel i.e.; defined as making journeys by walking, cycling and scooting. It can also include horse riding. So while about functional access and not recreational access to the countryside, there are some overlaps.

It is not just about physical connections but creating a culture where active travel becomes the norm for suitable everyday trips. The ATP is an important starting point to guide decision making and priorities for investment by the council in the coming years. It is now open for public consultation till 16th December 2015 and the finalised ATP will be reported to the council in Spring 2016. CA to circulate consultation Web address. A WL Active Travel Forum is to be established and chaired by Transportation.

CA

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- **Wednesday 6th April 2016 3.00pm Sutherland Building, Beecraigs**
Thereafter:
- Wednesday 26th October 2016 3.00pm Sutherland Building, Beecraigs

(CA / CC 29.3.16)