

**Countryside Access Forum**  
**Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2009**  
**10am Grantfield Conference Room – Lerwick**

**Minutes**

**Present:**

Sheila Johnson	SIC, Planning
Abigail Robertson	Equestrian Association
Jill Blackadder	Shetland Field Studies Group
Austin Taylor	Heritage Manager
Deborah Kerr	Visit Shetland
Ian Walterson	A.S.C.C (Chair)
Claire Linton	SIC, Administration (Minutes)
David Adamson	NFU
Malcolm Johnson	Disability Shetland
Alec Miller	Shetland Anglers Association (Vice Chair)
Diane Adams	Planning Office, Development Plans
Paul Harvey	Shetland Amenity Trust

**Apologies**

Pete Ellis	RSPB
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**1. Welcome, Introduction and Apologies**

Ian Welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions was made around the table.

**2. Apologies**

There was only one apology given and it was noted above.

**3. Minutes from previous Meeting**

Austin approved the minutes and Sheila seconded them.

**4. Shetland Draft Core Paths Plan (CPP) Update**

Sheila did a presentation to the Planning Board on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February 2009 where there was a lot of positive feedback from the Councillors who approved it with no problems. It will now go to full Council on the 25<sup>th</sup> March. The CPP will be made available on CD. The CPP routes will need to be completed and signposted within two years of the plan being adopted. After this we shall look to promoting it by way of posters and leaflets etc. No other Local Authority has gotten that far yet so Sheila will welcome any ideas regarding promotion.

Jill asked what the process is for anyone making suggestions or reporting problems with paths? Anyone can get in touch with Sheila about a potential route. If it meets CP criteria, the budget is available and the land manager is in agreement then it can be added to the aspirational list of routes that can be added to the CPP at a later review which will happen every two or three years. If the Land Manager is not keen then the infrastructure will not be put in.

Austin mentioned that it would be a matter of courtesy to let Land Managers know that their land is being suggested as a potential CPP. Jill said it should be made clear to the Land Managers that it is a positive thing for their routes to be added to the CPP. When a route is suggested, Sheila surveys it and checks it against the Core Path criteria. She phones the Land Manager in the first instance to see if he is keen for access improvements to happen then sends a letter and map with all the details.

Problems with routes can be reported to Sheila to sort out and the Shetland Amenity Trust Rangers are already surveying all the access routes that have been improved by the SIC which should highlight any problems.

Jill suggested that the funding needs to be better planned out for use in case of any cuts in the budget. Austin explained that this year's budget is about £50,000 and is unlikely to be cut in the near future. There is secure funding for the Rangers for this year and the next and Sheila is in a full time permanent position. Jill pointed out that in years to come more money will be required for maintenance as the infrastructure that was installed in the early years is now aging.

## **5. AOCB**

Assessors from the European Geoparks Network are due in Shetland on the 21<sup>st</sup> May for a three-day visit to assess Shetland's Geopark application. The outcome will be revealed at a conference in Portugal in September. Alec asked if CPP is part of Geoparks and Paul explained that there is an important access issue for all of the Geopark routes. Sheila is in close contact with Robina Barton who is the Geology Project Officer at the Shetland Amenity Trust and attends the Geopark Working Group meetings. Access to most of the Geopark routes is already in place.

Jill informed everyone of Jonathan Swale's (SNH) lecture in the Museum tonight about Shetland's geology which will be followed by the Shetland Field Studies AGM. A copy of the CPP will be displayed there for information.

Malcolm mentioned a phone call he had from someone in East Dunbartonshire, enquiring about the materials we'd used on our CPP route at Trondra Farm. This gentleman was so impressed with the matting system that he would like to use it for his disabled son to access their house. This is very encouraging that our work is being recognised by people out with Shetland and that we are able to help.

Sheila showed the group temporary laminated signs she had made for crofters who had been having trouble with dogs at lambing time. The sign reads 'LAMBING TIME - Please no dogs during April and May' and they are just 'requesting' signs not 'demanding' signs. If anyone needs signs then ask Sheila and she will have more made up and if they are a success this summer will look to getting permanent ones made.

Sheila explained that we have an extensive database detailing access routes and core paths that have been improved the past few years. Often she has to work out statistics, for example she recently got asked how many CPs are cycleable and passable by mountainbike.

Each route needs to be graded in more detail than in the draft version when it comes to promoting the CPP. This is hard given Shetland's geography because each route can vary so much in terrain, both surface type and difficulty and often parts of a route are accessible for bikes or people with disabilities but not all of it. This is all going to have to be taken into account and she would welcome any suggestions on how to categorize.

Malcolm and Sheila will meet up to discuss this in more detail. Abigail and Sheila will also meet up to discuss what routes are suitable for horses as a lot of routes have stiles and perhaps there's more that can be done.

Diane Adams Planning Officer for Development Plans came into the meeting to explain about a meeting her and Sheila had with David Thomson from Viking Energy. One of the things they looked at was managing access rights during and after the possible windmill construction. The second thing they looked at was recreational gain. Alec said that he did not want to lose access to Lochs while the construction was taking place. There will be lots of tracks made during the construction period and will be kept for maintenance to the wind turbines. These could be utilised to include mountain bike trails and walking routes could also be incorporated. Jill expressed concern that people visiting Shetland don't want to come and just walk along tracks. Diane said that in some cases it would be easier having tracks for example it would be easier for people with fishing equipment. If the tracks are going to be kept then it is best using them in a positive way.

Paul explained about there being many Health & Safety issues and this is a very controversial subject. It was agreed that Sheila forward the Whitelees Wind farm Access document for everyone to read and have a think about before the next Forum meeting when it shall be put on the agenda. Sheila and Diane are waiting for a further meeting with Viking Energy to try to put some access issues in place before the Environmental Statement. If anyone has any further issues then contact Diane Adams on 01595 744843 or email [diane.adams@shetland.gov.uk](mailto:diane.adams@shetland.gov.uk).

## **6. Date and time of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting will be 28<sup>th</sup> May 2009 at 10am in the Grantfield Conference Room, Lerwick.