

Countryside Access Forum
Tuesday 7 July 2009
10am Grantfield Conference Room – Lerwick
Minutes

Present:

Ian Walterson	A.S.C.C (Chair)
Malcolm Johnson	Disability Shetland
Jonathan Swale	SNH
Jim Henry	Councillor for Lerwick South
Hannah Nelson	SIC, Planning
Alec Miller	Shetland Anglers Association (Vice Chair)
Howard Towel	SAT
Sheila Johnson	SIC, Planning

Apologies

Abigail Robertson	Equestrian Association
Deborah Kerr	Visit Shetland
Jill Blackadder	Shetland Field Studies Group
David Adamson	National Farmers Union Scotland
Paul Harvey	Shetland Amenity Trust

1. Welcome and Introduction

Ian welcomed everyone to the meeting and the usual introductions were made.

Ian noted that this was a special meeting to discuss the statutory consultation on the Viking Energy Wind Farm Application.

2. Apologies

There were few apologies and they are noted above.

3. Viking Energy Wind Farm Application

3.1 Aim of the meeting

The aim of the meeting was to view the wind farm proposals affect on access and decide on a way forward for submitting comments on the Consultation.

3.2 Comments

All comments will be channelled through the access forum and passed onto the planning Service.

Sheila proposed to get consultation started and see if anyone wanted to put comments to planning. She ensured that all forum members had access to the application either via Internet or had a paper copy so they can discuss it with their organisations.

All forum members have received a copy of the most relevant chapter of the consultation (chapter 19) and were asked to get their comments back to Sheila by Tuesday 4th August 2009. Sheila will then combine all comments into one document and

e-mail it to forum members for approval. Once the document has been agreed on, it will be forwarded on to Planning by the 14th August 2009. Sheila has been advised that she is not to write the Forum's comments but can offer support.

3.3 A.S.C.C Comments

Ian noted that his organisation found it difficult to comment on the application, as it was hard to represent everyone and comment on behalf of all Community Councils as the opinions were quite divided.

Every comment they do make has to be backed up with facts.

3.4 Shetland Anglers Association Comments

Alec mentioned that his organisation held a meeting which was open to the public and went quite well.

He then referred to the issue of restricted access to some of the lochs during the construction period, which can take up to five years. He thought this should be commented on. The SAA either own or have leased fishing rights to some of the lochs that will be affected.

Alec would like to enquire about the state of access after construction, whether it would be open or fenced off. If it is fenced off then stiles or gates will need to be installed.

3.5 Access Management Plan

Howard pointed out the necessity of putting together an Access Management Plan. In reply Sheila quoted a paragraph from John Holden's letter asking what we would consider were the key components of an access plan. The difficulty of such a task was discussed given that there is no detailed information available on the management plan. Reference was made to the Whitelees Access Action Plan.

The Access Management Plan is mentioned in the SEA but it is felt that not enough detail is known about this. For example, when will that be produced? Will they employ an access manager? Will the Access Forum be involved and will access be built into the whole project?

Jonathan said that access had to be managed after the works had been complete. He mentioned hearing about a plan to gate tracks entrances to restrict vehicle access. Howard replied that there were no clear indications to what kind of restricted access would be in place. It was also mentioned that crofters may want vehicle access left open for them to access their land. Perhaps this is something the NFU will comment on.

3.6 Disabled Vehicle Access

Malcolm mentioned that the tracks would also need to be available for disabled access users.

This would provide a great opportunity for disabled access and needs to be investigated further. Malcolm also mentioned that he didn't think access should be restricted for other vehicle users if they were to drive slowly and carefully, taking responsibility for their actions.

Hannah mentioned signage use for access tracks i.e. putting up signs in appropriate areas advising them to take responsibility for their actions and driving carefully.

3.7 Whitelees Area

Ian asked whether there would be an access management plan for Whitelees area.

Jonathan said that access had to be improved after construction works were complete.

Howard noted that once the construction was complete, access in the area would be pretty much unrestricted.

Sheila mentioned three paths that may be affected by the wind farm development: -

- Core path at Scord, Weisdale, to the Burn of Tactigall
- Aspirational route from Setter, Weisdale to the Burn of Lunklet
- Aspirational route from Wester Scord, Voe to Skelladale, Brae

Sheila said she could e-mail maps of these routes to the forum members if any of them were interested.

3.8 Compensation for Loss of Access

Sheila mentioned that Diane Adams talked about compensation of loss of access at one of the previous meetings. Hannah replied by saying that it was difficult to get evidence of current access usage. Howard agreed adding that it was hard to tell how much access is used.

Sheila went on to say that compensation could be used for specific projects like Core Paths, as a way of improving general access given the restrictions put in place on these effected areas.

Ian continued to say that it wouldn't hurt to enquire about the compensation, adding that stating the reason for applying and how the funds will be used would give the group a better chance of receiving help.

3.9 Wind Mill Sites

Ian spoke about hills access mentioning that Jill had strong feelings about this particular issue, but unfortunately she wasn't present at this meeting, so the issue wasn't developed further.

Hannah spoke about siting for the wind mills saying that all sites had to be inspected individually to establish whether it was suitable, otherwise an alternative site had to be found, therefore exact sites could still change and planning department would need to be consulted.

4. Conclusions

Each member has access to the SEA files, the letter from Planning and the Whitelees Access Action Plan. They shall now consult with their own organisation and submit any comments on Access to Sheila by the 4th August. She shall collate the responses and email them out for everyone to check before they are submitted to Planning.