

MINUTE OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE SCOTTISH RIGHTS OF WAY AND ACCESS SOCIETY

**Held by Zoom
on Saturday 21st November 2020 at 11 am.**

Present: Bob Aitken (Honorary Vice-President), John Elliot (Chair), Katharine Taylor (Vice-chair), 9 other Directors, plus 65 members and guests.

In attendance: Alison Riddell (National Secretary and Treasurer), Eleisha Fahy (Senior Access Officer), Lynda Grant, Jane Gibson and Shenja Erismann (Access Officers), Karen Inkster (Field Officer), Richard Barron (Chief Operating Officer).

1. Apologies

Apologies were offered on behalf of six members.

The Chair, John Elliot, welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly those from further afield who would have been unable to travel for a meeting in person but were able to participate in a virtual meeting.

2. Minutes of AGM 2019

The draft minutes had been posted on the Society's website. The minutes were approved after being proposed by John Clibborn and seconded by Muriel Robertson.

3. To receive the Report of the Directors

John Elliot presented the Directors' Report, summarising the activities over the past year and giving an indication of the board's plans for the future. The year had fallen into two parts, pre- and post-pandemic. During both, the Society had continued to follow its aims. It had provided information by responding to enquiries both from members of the public and from solicitors, by distributing the short law guide and by posting on social media. It had worked towards upholding public access in its support of local groups, in working with local authorities and in responding to planning applications and their impact. The Society had worked on outdoor projects by taking practical steps such as helping to repair bridges or providing small grants to local groups as well as working with a range of other organisations.

The Society was continuing to work effectively during lockdown, which would not have been possible without the new computer software. None of the staff had been put on furlough and all were working remotely. He paid tribute to all members of staff for working under these conditions and went on to thank the directors for all their work over the past year.

4. To receive the Accounts

A summary of the accounts had been published in the Annual Report, and full copies were available on the Society's website. Director Terry Holmes spoke to a number of slides providing a breakdown of the main figures in the accounts. He

noted that this year there had been a loss of £128,000. The new computer program had been a substantial cost and work was continuing on bringing the systems up to date. Search income had been increasing steadily until Covid struck while membership income remained fairly constant. The effect of the increase in subscriptions from 1 July 2020 would be reflected in next year's accounts. Income from legacies was unpredictable, varying in recent years between £500 and £131,000. The size of the deficit however varied with the amount of legacy income.

By the end of the year, the reserves were around £600,000. Of that figure, about £250,000 had been designated by directors for particular purposes. As the expenses of an average year come to about £200,000, the undesignated reserves would cover that cost for about 18 months to 2 years.

5. To appoint Directors

David Dixon and Douglas Wright had both reached the end of their respective third three-year terms and were therefore obliged to stand down. John Elliot thanked both for their nine years of service to the Society. In David's case, he had been very involved in the appointment of the development officer, which brought a new dynamic to the organisation. He was also very keen that some of our attention should be directed towards bridges and had led on several bridge projects with notable perseverance. He was also a valued member of the finance committee. Douglas had a deep understanding and practical knowledge of access issues and had made a particular contribution to the Society's work as its representative on the National Access Forum.

Two directors had reached the end of their three-year term but were eligible for re-election. Muriel Robertson and Katharine Taylor had both confirmed their willingness to be elected. Muriel was proposed by Douglas Wright and seconded by Craig Gilbert while Katharine was proposed by John Pope and seconded by Steve Murray. Both were reappointed.

6. Three new directors were standing for election. Each introduced themselves before a vote was held and each was elected.
 - a. **Tim Simons** – nominated by David Dixon and seconded by Bob Aitken
 - b. **Helene Mauchlen** – nominated by David Langworth and seconded by Katharine Taylor
 - c. **Stephan Hennig** – nominated by Bob Aitken and seconded by Richard Barron.

7. To appoint the Independent Examiner of the Accounts

Directors had decided that it was appropriate to review the appointment of Henderson Loggie as independent examiners as they had held this position for a number of years. The motion was therefore amended to "To allow Directors to appoint Independent Examiners after Due Diligence" which was proposed by Muriel Robertson and seconded by Peter Wood and was then approved.

8. Our 175th anniversary activities

Richard Barron, Chief Operating Officer, provided a summary of the activities which had been planned and those that had taken place to mark the anniversary, pointing out that we had a track record of not celebrating in the correct year as our 100th anniversary had coincided with World War II. The staff had had a virtual lunch rather than in the hotel where the first meeting had taken place. The walks programme had been a key casualty of the pandemic but it was hoped that the programme could be run in the spring, restrictions permitting. The social media campaign had been almost as planned and proved very effective at raising the Society's profile as had the virtual challenge which encouraged participants to follow the route of the 1885 signposting expedition. This had also prompted press coverage, which had contributed to an increase in membership.

Richard had also delivered a presentation on the history of the Society for the National Library of Scotland. Since it had to be a virtual event, more than 280 people had watched it live and a further 419 had seen a recording at a later date.

9. ScotWays in action

Field Officer Karen Inkster spoke about the various aspects of her work:

- giving talks to a range of organisations,
- organising signposting training (postponed by the pandemic but it was hoped to run it as a virtual session early in 2021),
- access training for Local Access Forum representatives (very well received in 2019, but again a repeat session had been postponed by the pandemic),
- working with volunteers. It is not clear when we would be able to involve our office volunteers again but hoped to be able to have the field volunteers carrying out route and signpost surveys for us soon.
- contributing to the preparation of a new edition of *Scottish Hill Tracks*
- ScotWays bridge projects – Retiring director David Dixon has been the driving force behind this and the mantle has been passed to new director Tim Simons.

Senior Access Officer Eleisha Fahy spoke about the impact of the pandemic and lockdown on access rights and consequently on ScotWays work. There was no change to the legal underpinning of public access rights but it is an offence not to follow the relevant legislation and access cannot be said to be taken responsibly if an offence is being committed. She had been working with a wide range of other groups in order to publicise the message about what people could do. ScotWays had also had input into the SNH guidance and into the ministerial guidance and its promotion. As people took their permitted exercise, there had been a vast increase in public enquiries, many in connection with Covid-related signage encountered in local explorations, all while staff were adjusting to working from home and learning how to use the new Atlas system, training new staff and missing the help of our band of office volunteers. With more people being more active, there was increased appreciation of the outdoors and of the under-resourced access teams at local authorities, a matter highlighted by the recent Scottish Outdoor Access Network survey of the dwindling number of access officers. Eleisha also highlighted the Society's contribution to the Scottish Outdoor Recreation Association draft manifesto for next year's Scottish elections. The issue of wild camping was raised, which even when carried out responsibly

could have a cumulative impact, as distinct from 'dirty' camping which always left an impact.

Richard Barron provided an update on the new software which has enabled the staff to continue working almost as usual during lockdown. He pointed out that fundamental changes were needed to data management as the new system had highlighted discrepancies between mapping and text. He demonstrated how the new web-based system would work and hoped to provide an update early in 2021. The Chair recognised the significant contribution Richard had made to getting the new system installed and operational.

Director Katharine Taylor, chair of the communications sub-committee, spoke about the results of the recent members' communication survey which had a reasonable 6.1% response rate, 71 out of around 1000 members. Of those, 84% were over the age of 64. While we were pleased to have such members, it would also be good to engage with a younger demographic. The majority preferred email rather than social media – we have a large number of followers on social media but most are not (yet) members. The vast majority of respondents favoured printed communications to electronic and almost half never looked at the website. As for topics of interest, there was a clear demand for topical and political issues to be addressed in communications and the most important task for ScotWays was identified as upholding existing access rights. Katharine did not anticipate any radical changes as a result of the survey but it would be useful for the Board in reassessing priorities for the best focus for the Society's limited resources.

10. Any other competent business

Members were reminded of the consultation about the Pentland Hills and encouraged to complete it.

Bob Aitken thanked staff and directors for their efforts and ingenuity in tackling the particular challenges of the last six months.

The Chair then thanked all those present for attending and drew the meeting to a close at 12.30 pm.

Proposed: asd }

xx/ 11/2021

Seconded: asd }