

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

Held at the Dewars Centre, Perth, on Saturday 22nd November 2014 at 2pm.

Present: George Menzies (Chairman), Philip Lawson (Vice President), 7 other Directors, plus 45 members and guests.

In attendance: Alison Riddell (Secretary and Treasurer), Eleisha Fahy (Access Enquiries Officer), Jo Doake and Lynda Grant (Access Enquiries Assistants).

Apologies: Apologies were offered on behalf of Bob Aitken, Hugh Anderson, Richard Barron, Jean Bisset, Jim Clark, Keith Griffiths, Olga MacFadyen, Roy Partington, Ian Provan, Pat Somerville and Ken Thomson.

The Chairman, George Menzies, welcomed everyone to the meeting, making particular reference to Anne Bennet, widow of the late Donald Bennet, especially as a memorial to Donald was on the agenda, and to George MacQuarrie, recently retired National Secretary.

1. Minute of AGM 2013

The draft minute had been posted on the Society's website and there were copies for those in attendance. John Mackay suggested an amendment of paragraph 7 relating to level crossings as he understood that, contrary to what the minute says, no one had been formally charged with crossing the railway line but six had been given formal warnings. The Chairman commented that it was interesting that Network Rail was monitoring crossings but that no prosecutions had been raised. The Law Society of Scotland was of the view that there was no power to prosecute in the countryside, but he understood that this point would be clarified by the new legislation. The issue of access rights and railways is reserved to the Scottish Parliament so there has been no response by Westminster, and it is worthwhile continuing to lobby. The Chairman warned that we could expect a future law of trespass, except where there were rights of way, included in the legislation.

There were no other comments and acceptance of the minute was proposed by John Pope and seconded by Sandy Valentine and approved unanimously.

2. To receive the Report of the Directors

Chairman George Menzies presented the Directors' Report. He expressed gratitude to all those involved in the work of the Society - staff, board members and volunteers.

The Chairman highlighted the continued involvement in wind farm consultations, which we oppose if they have an adverse effect on access. He paid particular thanks to John Mackay for his great contribution to the Society's effectiveness in responding to major wind farm proposals, preparing objections and appearing at inquiries. He also gave credit to staff members involved in the consultations.

John Mackay referred to two particular cases, Harburnhead, near West Calder which has got consent, and Faugh Hill, also in West Lothian, which has been refused. John has also put in a great deal of work in connection with Glenmorie wind farm near Bonar Bridge, which has been refused by the reporter on the basis of its effect on the wild land. He was also involved in Brunta Hill, near Lauder, which is close to the Southern Upland Way. It was also refused partly on recreational grounds for its proximity to the SUW.

The Chairman also referred to a recent conference he had attended, along with Eleisha Fahy, on common land, its ownership and its disappearance.

Finally, he highlighted the Society's walks programme and the enjoyment obtained by members from the information they gleaned from local leaders during the walk. He mentioned that the first walk of next year's programme would be led by Fiona Black along part of the Antonine Wall. Her husband Cameron Black had just written a book about it so they would be particularly well informed on the subject.

There were no questions on the Directors' Report.

Before handing over to Kenneth Ritchie, Finance Committee Chairman, to present the financial report, he noted that Ken was retiring as a director at the AGM and thanked him for his contribution to the Society and his careful handling of the Society's finances.

3. To receive the Accounts

A summary of the accounts had been published in the Annual Report, and full copies were available at the meeting. The Finance Committee Chairman, Kenneth Ritchie, was pleased to report that a surplus had been achieved for the second year running and thanked staff and volunteers for their hard work. Since sources of public funding have all but dried up, it is to the Society's credit that it ends the year with a surplus and, with current assets in excess of £100,000, in a reasonably comfortable position. He pointed out that the Society relies on two major sources of income: solicitors' searches, which have exceeded budget in the last two years; and members' contributions, largely through subscriptions. He noted that the subscriptions are lower this year than last but the six year average is about £17,000 so this year's total of £16,500 is in line with this. He underlined the importance of membership to the Society, thanked members for their support and urged those present to recruit new members by trying to get friends to join. He also mentioned the importance of Gift Aid to the Society and encouraged everyone to sign a gift aid declaration if they were in a position to do so.

He concluded by saying that he was happy to leave the Society in a reasonably good state and said that he hopes to remain involved in the future.

4. To appoint Directors

Three directors were due to retire by rotation, and all were willing to stand for re-election.

Richard Barron is highly regarded as an expert on access issues, as was confirmed by the response to his views at the recent SOAN conference. He worked at ScotWays before becoming an access officer and provides invaluable help to office staff on difficult access issues. His appointment was proposed by George Menzies, seconded by Peter Wood and carried unanimously.

Douglas Wright, based in Peebles, deals with issues in the Borders with energy and a wide knowledge, and has been recognised locally for his efforts on behalf of the community. His appointment was proposed by John Pope, seconded by Jo Doake and carried unanimously.

David Dixon is a very experienced walker, a practical man and very shrewd with figures as the Board were well aware. His appointment was proposed by Douglas Wright, seconded by Philip Lawson and was carried unanimously.

5. To appoint Muriel Robertson as a Director. Muriel Robertson had been recommended by the Board and a brief summary about her was in the agenda. Her appointment was proposed by Ken Ritchie, who had known and worked with her for a number of years, seconded by John Pope and carried unanimously.

6. To appoint the Independent Examiner of the Accounts

The Chairman thanked the Accountants, Henderson Loggie, for the preparation of the accounts and noted the good relationship the Society has with Mrs Janet Stevenson there, an expert in charity accounting. He proposed the re-appointment of Mrs Janet Stevenson of Henderson Loggie as Independent Financial Examiner of the Accounts. The proposal was seconded by Ken Ritchie and approved unanimously.

7. Memorial to Donald Bennet

Peter Mackay addressed the meeting, having had the most involvement in the search for a suitable memorial. He started by pointing out that there had been a discussion about a potential memorial at last year's AGM and that members had been asked for suggestions, few of which had been forthcoming. We would like the project to be a worthwhile one in view of Donald's high profile in the walking and climbing world.

In August 2014, a great storm caused about £250,000 damage in the national parks, and about £200,000 of damage was done to the Mar Lodge estate owned by the National Trust for Scotland. Two bridges were washed away, one over the Quoich, which had just received its completion certificate weeks earlier, and one over the Derry Burn which forms an important connection to two routes from the Linn of Dee, the Lairig Ghru and the Lairig an Laoigh. The Society has a number of memorial bridges, including the Bedford bridge at Glen Tarff and one in Glen Feshie, so the Derry bridge, on two important routes, would seem to be a good candidate for the Donald Bennet memorial bridge.

The NTS is in a long consultation with its insurers so we have yet to make a formal proposition to them. It would be a major undertaking so our involvement would be to help finance it rather than to finance it all ourselves. The Cairngorm Club is also offering help but has had no response from the NTS as yet. It is

hoped that we could get together with the Cairngorm Club and the Scottish Mountaineering Trust to raise funds.

Peter asked the meeting whether members agreed to support the idea of a bridge at the Derry Burn as a memorial to Donald Bennet. He confirmed that it had Anne Bennet's approval. If members agreed, it would strengthen the hand of the Society in approaching the NTS in offering to mount an appeal for the replacement of the lost bridge to mark Donald's herculean contribution to the outdoors.

The question was raised as to what would happen if the NTS had their claim covered by insurance. Peter explained that the insurance would only cover specific things like bridges, so if they made a successful claim but also accepted our offer to raise funds, our funds could be used for the bridge and the insurance money put to good use elsewhere repairing paths and the like. He has been unable to get a clear picture of the situation from the NTS.

Another question was whether the bridge could be rebuilt in the same place, as the bank had been washed away. Peter said that the NTS was considering how to replace it, and it would probably not be exactly the same. One possibility was to have two bridges, one pedestrian and one vehicular, and he expected that the Society would only be interested in the pedestrian one.

Fiona Black asked how much we would need to raise. Peter had difficulty in identifying a specific figure, pointing out that it would be too much for ScotWays to raise on its own. The bridge we have in storage is unlikely to fit. While it is modular and so can be extended, the increased span would mean it had points of weakness. The amount of damage incurred in the Cairngorms NP increases the chances that we can find somewhere there to install it.

The meeting confirmed its wish to pursue the Derry Burn bridge as a potential memorial to Donald Bennet.

8. Any other competent business

ScotWays branded clothing

Douglas Wright drew attention to the branded clothing available and thanked George MacQuarrie for acting so promptly on his suggestion at the AGM last year. He noted that two of the directors were wearing clothing with the ScotWays logo and said that the clothing produced was of good quality and at reasonable prices which he would commend to members.

The Chairman then thanked all those present for attending and drew the meeting to a close at 3.00.

21/11/2015

Unfinished business - more National Parks for Scotland?

The meeting was followed by a talk by John Mayhew, Chief Officer of the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland. The talk was very well-received by the meeting and the supply of reports brought by John was exceeded by demand for them.