

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

Held at the Dewars Centre, Perth,
on Saturday 23rd November 2019 at 1.30pm.

Present: Bob Aitken (Honorary Vice-President), Muriel Robertson (Chair), John Elliot (Vice-chair), 6 other Directors, plus 53 members and guests.

In attendance: Alison Riddell (National Secretary and Treasurer), Eleisha Fahy (Senior Access Officer), Lynda Grant and Ashley Napier (Access Assistants), Karen Inkster (Field Officer), Richard Barron (Operations Director).

1. Apologies

Apologies were offered on behalf of 73 members:

David	Adams	Kenneth	Gibson	Tom	Morris
Alistair	Anderson	Robert	Gilbert	Alastair	Morrison
Hugh	Anderson	Wendy	Gootjes	Steve	Murray
Marsaili	Aspinall	John	Gordon	Roy	Partington
Willie	Beattie	Keith	Griffiths	Helena	Pettie
Anne	Bennet	Peter	Hawkins	Ian	Provan
Jean	Bisset	Terry	Hegarty	David	Purchase
Cris	Bonomy	Chris	Hobster	Danny	Rafferty
Michael	Brambell	Anne	Hunter	Andrew	Robertson
Dorothy	Breckenridge	Lorna	Hutchison	Marion	Shoard
Ken	Campbell	James	Lawson	Frank	Slater
Paul	Campbell	Judith	Lewis	Charles	Smith
Colin	Cheyne	Bruce	Logan	Dennis	Smith
Dick	Clark	Ruth	Logie	Trish	Staniforth
Janet	Clark	Douglas	Lowe	Cath	Stather
Jim	Clark	Olga	Macfadyen	John	Stirling
Rebecca	Coope	John	Macgregor	Linda	Stirling
Alison	Crawford	Hilary	Mackay	Maureen	Sturrock
Carol	Dickson	Peter	Mackay	Liz	Sutherland
Ronald	Douglas	Robert	Mackay	Euan	Terras
Muriel	Dymock	Ian	Marshall	David	Tidmarsh
John	Fitzgerald	David	McCracken	Sandy	Valentine
Neil	Fleming	Brian	McGarrigle	Jim	Williamson
Thomas	Fuchs	Sandra	Milne-Skinner	Peter	Wood
		Ian	Moffett		

The Chair, Muriel Robertson, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Minute of AGM 2019

The draft minute had been posted on the Society's website and there were copies for those in attendance. Approval of the minutes was proposed by Eric Gotts, seconded by Bob Aitken and carried unanimously.

3. To receive the Report of the Directors

Chair Muriel Robertson presented the Directors' Report, summarising the activities over the past year and giving an indication of the board's plans for the future. Directors had revisited ScotWays role and identified three main strands, namely:- expert authority and adviser (clear from the range of enquiries we have to deal with); custodian and manager of the National Catalogue of Rights of Way; and practical guardian and advocate, from the 1,800 or more enquiries received each year whether from solicitors, the public or through consultations on new development. Some of the consultations require personal appearance at a public inquiry. While the total number is large, not all can be resolved promptly and it may require persistence to find a solution.

Everything done by ScotWays revolves around access. During the year, various sub-committees have been set up with the aim of harnessing directors' knowledge on particular subjects to speed up board decision making and so improve support to staff. Finance is a permanent sub-committee, now extended to include risk. Otherwise the groups align with the three year plan and reflect the board's plans for the use of the Society's reserves. The work of the Operations sub-committee includes IT (on which Richard Barron reports later) and on which the board intends to spend around £50,000 in improving the management of data essential to support our work, replacing the current CROW database which is now more than 25 years old. John Elliot chairs the Legal sub-committee, on which Eleisha Fahy also sits, the work of which has included the new law guide and the use of mediation. Karen Inkster deals with outdoor projects and Katharine Taylor heads up the PR and communications sub-committee. Muriel stressed the importance of how ScotWays communicates its 175 years of information and experience.

Muriel thanked all those who contributed to the Society's work at all levels, staff, directors, honorary advisers, volunteers, members and partner organisations, all of whom were passionate about the right to have public access.

She concluded by stressing that ScotWays could be proud of its past and have confidence in its future.

4. To receive the Accounts

A summary of the accounts had been published in the Annual Report, and full copies were available at the meeting as well as on the Society's website. Director Terry Holmes spoke to a number of slides providing a breakdown of the main figures in the accounts, pointing out that there was a healthy surplus this year which had contributed to a significant increase in funds, a proportion of which were designated by the board for specific purposes. Search income had increased to over £100,000 in the past year but membership income has not changed significantly. The board has therefore decided to increase subscription levels with effect from 1 July 2020.

Terry concluded by showing the specific purposes for which funds had been designated.

5. To appoint Directors

Eric Gotts had reached the end of his third three year term and was therefore standing down. Alison Riddell, National Secretary, thanked him for his nine years of service to the Society, referring particularly to his links with COSLA and his championing of the ScotWays walks programme.

Four directors had reached the end of their three year term but were eligible for re-election. Bob Aitken, John Elliot, David Langworth and Peter Wood had all confirmed their willingness to be elected. Jo Doake proposed them, Richard Barron seconded the proposal and they were unanimously reappointed.

6. To appoint Terry Holmes as a Director

National Secretary Alison Riddell introduced Terry Holmes and put forward the Board's recommendation that he be appointed as a Director. Douglas Wright proposed and Eric Gotts seconded the proposal which was then approved unanimously.

7. To appoint the Independent Examiner of the Accounts

National Secretary Alison Riddell proposed the reappointment of Jamie Davidson of Henderson Loggie as Independent Examiner. This was proposed by John Elliot, seconded by Douglas Wright and was then approved.

8. Any other competent business

It was pointed out from the floor that, with the retiral of Eric Gotts, all directors were now based in Lothian and the Borders. Was anything being done to recruit from further afield? Muriel Robertson, chair, confirmed that the board was conscious of the need both to recruit new directors (the maximum permissible is 15) with appropriate skills and to look more widely for them. If directors were based more widely, technologies such as Skype might be used to hold virtual meetings to save everyone having to attend in person. She invited members to contact her if they might be interested in joining the board.

Muriel went on to pay tribute to the contribution of honorary adviser John Mackay for the major contribution he has made to ScotWays responses to windfarm and hydro developments, often appearing at public inquiries on the Society's behalf, in addition to his work as a director, vice chairman and co-editor of the most recent edition of Scottish Hill Tracks.

9. Information management

Operations director Richard Barron provided an update on his report to the 2018 AGM on the development of Atlas, the new software for the office, to improve the management of the wide range of office information currently held in a range of data sources which are not all linked. ExeGeSis has been engaged to provide the new systems which will be in two parts, one to improve the office systems for staff and volunteers and the other on the website to provide more external access to our data and to enable it to be updated more readily. Staff training on the internal aspects is due to start in January with the website being rolled out around March. In response to a question from the floor, Richard confirmed that the scale of mapping would not immediately be improved as to change from 1:50,000 to 1:25,000 was more costly.

10. Sharing knowledge

Director John Elliot explained the aim of sharing the information held by ScotWays as widely as possible, and went on to identify various ways in which this was done: responding to enquiries from solicitors, for which a fee is charged, and from the public, for which ScotWays as a charity makes no charge; providing general information such as by publishing the law guide last year and the new 'Public Access in Scotland' leaflet this year; giving talks (most recently to LAF representatives) and working in support of other organisations such as local authorities, the National Access Forum and COSLA.

Senior Access Officer Eleisha Fahy then provided an update on her work in connection with developing mediation as a tool in solving access disputes, following on from her article in the recent Annual Report. She was pleased to report that the NAF had agreed to explore mediation as a possible resolution of access disputes. Eleisha is on a working group to develop guidelines for its use and expects to provide a further update in the Spring newsletter.

11. Outdoor projects

Field Officer Karen Inkster reported on the various projects currently in progress. She highlighted the small grants scheme and the uses to which claimants were putting their grants, and also the two bridges put in over the past year, one at Carnoch and one on the Upper Quoich. Karen went on to speak about how much ScotWays depends on and is grateful to its army of volunteers, many of whom are currently involved in path and signpost surveys to help keep ScotWays records up to date. She plans to run signpost installation training for volunteers and in September ran an access workshop jointly with Ramblers Scotland attended by more than 50 people. Its success has prompted a demand to make it an annual event.

Karen also spoke about the new waymarker disks and the merchandise with the new logo, including window stickers, pens and buffs. A demonstration was given of the many ways to wear a buff.

12. PR

Director Katharine Taylor introduced herself as chair of the communications sub-committee and spoke about the work of that group. Given the many different versions of the logo that appeared to exist, the group had decided on a standard version and on a strapline to accompany it.

The various publications – the newsletters and annual report – had been refreshed with a more modern look and we were grateful to Neil Braidwood for giving his time as a volunteer to design these for us. A number of advertisements had been taken out, including a flyer for the law guide in Scottish Farming Leader, and an advert on the NFUS wall planner. A social media campaign is being planned to highlight our history and work during our anniversary year. We also have a new roller banner and table cloth for events.

Katharine concluded by talking about plans to celebrate the Society's 175th anniversary year and explained that it had been decided to have a variety of events rather than one big one, in order to raise awareness throughout the year.

A small leaflet of ideas would be available together with a walks programme tailored to events or issues particularly significant to the Society, there would be an access quiz available and it was hoped to place articles in various publications to promote the Society. There would also be a succession of social media posts and there were already anniversary pin badges on sale.

The Secretary then thanked all those present for attending and drew the meeting to a close at 3.45 pm.

Proposed: asd }

xx/ 11/2020

Seconded: asd }