

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

Held in The Merchants House of Glasgow and on Zoom  
on Saturday 19 November 2022 at 11am.

**Present:** Bob Aitken (Honorary Vice-President), John Elliot (Chair), Katharine Taylor (Vice-chair), 10 other Directors, plus 17 members and guests in person, a further 18 joining online.

**In attendance:** Alison Riddell (National Secretary and Treasurer), Eleisha Fahy (Senior Access Officer), Lynda Grant, Neil Feggans and Karen Lowrie (Access Officers), Neil Birch (Access officer, Outreach), Richard Barron (Chief Operating Officer)

## 1. Apologies

Apologies were offered on behalf of 9 members:

Alistair	Anderson	John	Naylor
Tom	Bell	John	Onslow
David	Dixon	Ian	Provan
John	Duberley	Muriel	Robertson
Margaret	Hunter	Sandy	Valentine

Proxies had been lodged on behalf of 26 members.

The Chair, John Elliot, welcomed everyone to the meeting. Before starting the formal business, he paid tribute to John Innes, an Edinburgh lawyer who had died earlier that week. He described him as a quiet, charming man who had been a valued legal adviser to ScotWays for many years.

## 2. Minute of AGM 2021

The draft minute had been posted on the Society's website and there were copies for those in attendance. There being no amendments, approval of the minutes was proposed by John Elliot, seconded by Stephan Hennig and carried unanimously.

## 3. To receive the Report of the Directors

Chair John Elliot presented the Directors' Report, saying that the detailed summary of the year's activities and an indication of future plans was set out in the Annual Report and he had little to add to it. He did however thank the staff for their hard work and dedication during the year, dealing with an increasing number of search requests and making noticeable inroads into long-standing issues such as signposting, largely while working from home.

He went on to thank all those who volunteer for the Society in so many roles, without whose contribution the Society would not achieve nearly as much.

## 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 talked those present through the accounts, pointing out the increases in donations and search income, part of which had been invested in staffing, the main cost. There was a loss of £4,000 in the investments disposed of. More worrying was the unrealised loss on investments of £49,000 for the year, an increase of £38,000 on the previous year although there had been some recovery since the year end. This had generated a book loss of £55,000 compared with a surplus of £22,000 the previous year. Its reserves meant that the Society was however well placed to go forward. The movement in investments was clear from the balance sheet. Terry highlighted various figures in the reserves.

John Elliot then spoke about the investment portfolio in more detail, noting its significant drop in value by the year end of 30 June. He explained that the portfolio was invested with the aim of protecting the value of the capital and generating some income. ScotWays was advised by investment managers Investec, who managed the portfolio on a low to medium balanced risk basis, looking over a five year term. A graph demonstrated the movement over the past five years. Investec expressed cautious optimism that US inflation would decrease, US inflation having a greater impact on the market than UK inflation rates. They anticipated good returns in due course as inflation decreased.

Eric Gotts questioned the level of subscriptions from local authorities which was considerably lower than previously. John Elliot explained that they had not been invoiced while the Society switched over from its old version of CROW to the new one, but that they were once again being invoiced for 2022/23 so the level would be closer to its usual level in next year's accounts.

#### **5. To reappoint Directors**

Two directors had reached the end of their three year term but were eligible for re-election and had confirmed they were willing to stand for election again. Vice chair Katharine Taylor took over the chair for this part of the meeting as chair John Elliot, was standing for re-election along with David Langworth. Eric Gotts proposed and Terry Holmes seconded the appointment of John Elliot while John Elliot proposed and John Pope seconded the appointment of David Langworth. Both were reappointed.

#### **6. To appoint new Directors**

The Board was recommending the appointment of six directors standing for the first time, five of whom had been co-opted by the Board during the year. They were:-

Alistair Anderson, proposed by John Elliot, seconded by Stephan Hennig  
Dorothy Breckenridge, proposed by Bob Aitken, seconded by Helene Mauchlen  
Hannah Downie, proposed by Katharine Taylor, seconded by Peter Wood  
Peter Hildrew, proposed by David Langworth, seconded by Bruce Logan  
Linda Johnson, proposed by Tim Simons, seconded by Terry Holmes  
John Onslow, proposed by Tim Simons, seconded by Stephan Hennig.

All were invited to say a few words to introduce themselves before they were appointed. Alistair Anderson and John Onslow having submitted apologies for the meeting, John Elliot spoke on their behalf.

Alistair Anderson has been a solicitor for about forty years, the last fifteen of which have focussed on agricultural property work, during which he ensures his clients are aware of their rights and obligations under Scotland's access laws.

John Onslow lives in the Borders where his main interests are walking and painting. He is the principal architect of the Society's strategic review, bringing his experience of working in local government to the board.

Dorothy Breckenridge lives in Stirling and is interested in anything to do with the outdoors, particularly outdoor recreation and access. She was involved in helping the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 through parliament but regards its maintenance as more important and recognises the role the Society has to play in this work.

Hannah Downie's background is in law and legal publishing, moving from there into communications and public relations.

Peter Hildrew has been a walker since the age of 3 and was a journalist for twenty years before moving into voluntary sector communications and NHS board work. He therefore brings experience both as a board member and in communications to the Society. Having moved to Edinburgh at the start of lockdown, he has explored a lot of East Lothian, checked a lot of signs and is now the Society's representative on the East Lothian local access forum.

Linda Johnson lives in Ballachulish and has a passion for wild spaces. Her initial link to the Society was when she volunteered to help survey Scottish Hill Tracks. When she mentioned in her volunteer registration form that she was an accountant, she was invited to join the board and is keen to work with the Society's board and staff to help protect access rights.

## **7. To appoint the Independent Examiner of the Accounts**

Linda Johnson proposed the reappointment of Kevin Cattanach of Whitelaw Wells as Independent Examiner. This was seconded by Terry Holmes and was then approved.

## **8. ScotWays in Action**

Katharine Taylor spoke about the strategic review, a draft of which had been sent to all members for feedback. She explained that the staff continued to work hard on the core work of searches, communications, maintenance of technology and general administration but the ongoing theme was that there was little capacity to take on new projects or engage with politicians for example. The Society's public profile and level of influence was low. Directors joining the board found they were involved in more of the practical work than anticipated instead of simply the more strategic input.

Since the pandemic, the way of working and the ways of taking access had changed and the ongoing challenge was how best to remain relevant. It was therefore felt necessary to set goals and milestones which were understood by all affected. This would then help identify gaps in capacity. All staff and directors

had been asked to identify key issues, the strategic direction of the Society and what action might be taken to make it more influential. We needed to find new sources of income, work smarter, resource and prioritise our activities. After several online meetings, John Onslow collated the key points which had been identified and produced a draft document which after refinement was now with members for comment. The mission and values had been set out on a slide as were the strategic objectives of:

- Raising profile of responsible access to land and inland water
- Protecting and promoting outdoor access rights
- Improving the resilience of the Society through new income streams and reducing carbon emissions.

Specific targets had been set for the current year and the intention was to have a detailed action plan for each year.

Bruce Logan asked about potential funding from the Scottish government in the context of its commitment to apply 10% of the transport budget to active travel. It was confirmed that the Society currently receives no funding from the government for its core work.

Eric Gotts asked about the appointment of an honorary president, and also the progress in improving links with COSLA, in the context of profile-raising. John Elliot replied that suggestions were invited for potential presidents and that he had emailed the chairman of COSLA on more than one occasion following the meeting he and Eric had had with the chairman, but there had been no response.

Bob Aitken congratulated directors and staff on compressing a complex set of objectives into such a crisp focussed document but expressed concern that the aspiration should not solely be to pursue these objectives but that the statement perhaps missed the aim of creating a high quality resource for the public. He also drew attention to the fact that 'amenity' was mentioned in the Articles of Association but was missing from the objectives in the strategy document.

Neil Birch, access officer (outreach) then spoke about the work with the new edition of Scottish Hill Tracks (SHT) and with volunteers. 2021/22 had been the first full year of the new volunteer policy and of relative normality. The volunteer statistics had been set out on a slide, with a necessarily strong bias at present towards SHT. There were representatives in many local access fora although 18 of the 39 were not currently active. He mentioned the various bridges to which the Society had contributed in different ways, and noted that the walks programme had made a welcome return. He thanked those who had offered to lead walks in the coming year and asked for responses to the walks survey which had been circulated. Neil also highlighted the various areas in which help was needed.

Tim Simons, director, followed by speaking about the SHT work in more detail, noting that while the Annual Report had recorded that 85% of tracks had been surveyed, the position by the time of the meeting was that 98% had been done. Seven routes remained and there were volunteers lined up to do them. It had been agreed to add a new section relating to the Western Isles so there were nine routes to be surveyed from scratch. A total of 150 volunteers had been

involved in walking, cycling, riding or running the routes and the focus was now turning to editing the reports that had come in, by a team of five editors. Each route was being plotted to get a GPX file. The aim was to publish by Spring 2024 and to have the editing completed by late summer 2023. The editorial team was working closely with the Scottish Mountaineering Trust in this work.

Neil then spoke about the signpost verification project which was about half way through bringing all records into the one place and checking each one. He expressed his thanks to all those helping to clear the backlog. 50% of signs had now been surveyed so he was looking for help to process the surveys which had been submitted. Thirty brand new signs had been installed, and he was very impressed by the level of activity of the volunteers with this.

Bruce Logan asked if there was any contribution from local authorities towards the cost of any work needed to signs which were on core paths. Neil said that in fact there were relatively few on core paths. In some cases the local authority had replaced the Society's sign with their own. He did not have any detailed figures available.

Eric Gotts had noted in the Annual Report that there were representatives on thirteen local access fora. He wondered therefore whether the representatives might be able to lobby their local authority to do maintenance work. Neil responded by saying that such representatives as were in place were doing so but little could be done where the LAF was in abeyance.

Malcolm Combe suggested that there might be scope for funding from some of the Gaelic agencies for bilingual signs in the Western Isles. Neil replied that he was working on three bilingual signs at present with assistance from The Highland Council. The possibility of seeking funding from the range of small trust funds administered by solicitors was also raised.

Chair John Elliot thanked Tim, Neil and all the volunteers for their remarkable efforts and successes over the year on both SHT and signage work. He was also very pleased to report the recent receipt of £5,000 from the E M Whittome 2013 Charitable Trust specifically for signage work.

Richard Barron spoke about the results of the recent walks survey. It had no closing date so responses were still welcome. While 95% of respondents are keen to retain the walks programme, most of those have not been on a ScotWays walk. He questioned what would encourage them to participate.

Bob Aitken congratulated the staff and directors for the achievements of the Society especially in the face of the pandemic. Neil Feggans said that he had found it perfectly reasonable to work from home – he is based in Ayr – and thought that staff could be more productive at home as there were fewer distractions.

Eric Gotts asked about the new requirement to have a first aider on walks and wondered if that although a good idea would be a deterrent. John Pope, retired GP, felt that it made sense to have a first aider.

John Elliot concluded the meeting by acknowledging the contribution of three retiring directors, Bob Aitken, Peter Wood and Terry Holmes. He was delighted that Bob's connection would continue as honorary vice president and noted his intrinsic feel for the impact of events on access issues. He had brought this vital understanding and knowledge to the board. Peter Wood was standing down after three three-year terms of office as director but had previously worked as an office volunteer and had also been involved in editing the current edition of SHT. While serving on the board he had contributed to the work of the operations sub-committee and the important task of compiling and maintaining the risk register. Terry Holmes had been a director for three years, assisting particularly with the finance committee, producing careful data and encouraging care in how the Society spent its money.

The National Secretary then thanked all those present for attending, invited feedback on what was a new venue for the Society and drew the meeting to a close at 12.30 pm.

Proposed: asd }

xx/ 11/2023

Seconded: asd }