

# 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 18 November 2023 at 2.30 pm.

**Present:** Bob Aitken (Honorary Vice-President), Katharine Taylor (Chair), 4 other Directors plus 27 members and guests in person, a further 4 Directors and 15 members and guests 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), Craig Reilly, (Information Officer).

## 1. Apologies

Apologies were offered on behalf of 12 members:

|          |          |        |         |         |           |
|----------|----------|--------|---------|---------|-----------|
| Peter    | Brown    | Craig  | Gilbert | Stephen | Murray    |
| John     | Duberley | Judith | Lewis   | Ian     | Provan    |
| John     | Fahy     | Bruce  | Logan   | Sandy   | Valentine |
| Margaret | Garvie   | David  | Lyle    | Alison  | Wood      |

A proxy had been lodged on behalf of one member.

The Chair, Katharine Taylor, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

## 2. Minute of AGM 2022

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 Pope, seconded by Eric Gotts and carried unanimously.

## 3. To receive the Report of the Directors

Chair Katharine Taylor presented the Directors' Report, reminding members of the creation of the Strategic Plan in 2022 and taking them through the range of activities which had taken place during the period since then under the three strands of the plan, namely, working with other organisations, protecting outdoor access rights and ensuring the resilience of ScotWays. She thanked the staff and also the board, all of whom are volunteers, for all their hard work during the year. She noted that the deficit for the year of £39,000 included the movement on investments so the operating deficit was about £22,000. As the Society had reserves of about £513,000, there was no immediate prospect of insolvency. It should be remembered that the funds were there to deliver the Society's objectives and not simply to be hoarded, but the board would monitor the situation.

The board also had a responsibility to ensure the charity was delivering its objectives. Its data was an important asset so Craig Reilly was recruited in October to manage and update the data. Other aims for the year included completing the platform change for the National Catalogue of Rights of Way; continuing to work on the Dalwhinnie level

crossing closure; launching the new edition of Scottish Hill Tracks, and holding another volunteers' day after the success of the first once held in July 2023. The Board also wanted to build closer relations with politicians and influencers, and increasing the number of members would give us a greater voice to do so. More directors were also needed after two resigned last year and Linda Johnson resigned in September, while David Langworth was standing down at this meeting. Anyone interested in joining the board should speak to Katharine Taylor or the staff.

Eric Gotts, as a former councillor, enquired about links with COSLA as there had previously been a COSLA representative on the Board. Katharine explained that the matter had been discussed earlier in the year but that there was not much enthusiasm from COSLA for the link.

#### **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. Treasurer Alison Riddell talked those present through the accounts, starting with the sources of income and the reduction in 'Donations and Legacies', the reduction being the net result of increased local authority funding but reduced donations and legacies. Excluding the Digital Boost grant for IT equipment received in 2022 left more comparable legacy figures but no legacies had been received in the financial year just ended. She encouraged members to bear ScotWays in mind when updating their wills, as well as to spread the word about joining ScotWays.

She pointed out the requirement to set out movement on investments in the accounts, whether or not the investment had been sold, and the impact that such movement had on the outcome for the year. The loss in 2022/23 was rather less than the previous year, and she reminded members that we had in addition received about £11,000 of income from the portfolio. She noted that there had been an operating deficit for several years now, which the directors recognised was unsustainable. They were actively considering how to address it.

In response to a question from Eric Gotts, Alison confirmed that about half of local authorities were paying subscriptions to ScotWays. Some had confirmed they had no funds to spare for it, or there was no access officer in post.

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

Four 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. Director Dorothy Breckenridge took over the chair for this part of the meeting as chair Katharine Taylor was standing for re-election along with Stephan Hennig, Helene Mauchlen and Tim Simons.

Katharine Taylor: Proposed Peter Wood; Seconded: Stephan Hennig

Stephan Hennig: Proposed Bob Aitken; Seconded: Dorothy Breckenridge

Helene Mauchlen: Proposed David Langworth; Seconded: Dorothy Breckenridge

Tim Simons: Proposed Alan Duncan; Seconded: Eric Gotts.

All were reappointed.

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

The Board was recommending the appointment of two directors standing for the first time. They were:-

Jonathan Binny, proposed by Tim Simons, seconded by Bob Aitken

David Dixon, proposed by John Pope, seconded by Peter Stewart

Both were invited to say a few words to introduce themselves before they were appointed.

Jonathan Binny is a retired geography teacher, trained as a land surveyor, who has been on the board of Mountaineering Scotland and the Nevis Partnership. He is fairly active outdoors and takes the view that Scotland has great landscapes and scenery but that we need access to it.

David Dixon served on the board between 2011 and 2020 but is now eligible to join again. He has a particular interest in the principle of access and in restoring damaged bridges to facilitate access. His main objective is to forge closer links with landowners.

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

John Elliot proposed the reappointment of Kevin Cattanach of Whitelaw Wells as Independent Examiner. This was seconded by Fiona Dick and was then approved.

## **8. ScotWays in Action**

Tim Simons, director started by explaining how he had become involved with the preparation of a new edition of *Scottish Hill Tracks*, It had taken up a great deal of his time but he had thoroughly enjoyed the task and was grateful to have been invited to do it. All the routes have now been resurveyed, 350 principal routes with a further 175 variations, giving a total of 7,600km of route, 293,000m of ascent and a highest point of 1,050m. The text has now been sent to Scottish Mountaineering Press who will be working on the layout and style to match their existing *Highland Scrambles*. The next task was to consider how best to launch it when it is printed in the spring.

He went on to speak about volunteer development, since he as director supported that that responsibility, working with Neil Birch who he considered was doing a tremendous job. The volunteer day in July had been very successful in providing training and gathering ideas, and another was planned for the coming year.

Neil Birch, access officer (outreach) then spoke about following up the many ideas which had come out of the volunteer day. Volunteers had said they wanted to be in touch with each other, but everyone involved had to consent before contact details could be passed over so there was limited progress with this to date. Now that Scottish Hill Tracks surveys were complete, attention could turn to completing a survey of signs and in due course Heritage Paths. More capacity was however needed to handle all the information coming in. There was the drive to go to print pushing the Scottish Hill Tracks surveying whereas surveying Heritage Paths would be an ongoing task. There was about 24% of signs awaiting survey but they tended to be in further flung spots and so more

challenging to address. Neil confirmed he had about 1500 reports to be checked and logged and hoped to catch up with that over the winter. Having logged the surveys, he would then have to consider a plan for repairs to be carried out.

Last year, 38 signs were installed, a mixture of new and refurbished ones. This year, the figure to date was 40. The target was to fix 20% of those needing repair, a total of 37 signs. Some of the 40 dealt with this year were new and so outwith the target. As regards future plans, he had no capacity to deal with more surveying at present, until he had processed the backlog of reports. Walks leaders would be needed for the 2023/24 programme, which would be shorter than previous years and geared to highlight and celebrate Scottish Hill Tracks. He hoped that guests would be allowed on walks, but was waiting confirmation of that from our insurers. He was also looking for volunteer help to staff stalls at various festivals and to help distribute leaflets.

## **9 Any Other Business**

John Pope wondered if ScotWays could help develop a Scottish coastal path, at least on the east coast. The question would be responsibility for the maintenance and management of it.

Eric Gotts asked if any progress had been made on appointing an honorary president. It was confirmed that no progress had been made. Several people had been approached with there had been no response. Katharine Taylor, chair, invited suggestions. Paul Murton, who had written a very good foreword to Scottish Hill Tracks, was one of the names mentioned.

Ann Glen of Monkland Glen Community Council told the meeting about their campaign to raise funds for the repair of Maggie's Bridge over the Monkland Canal. It is a scheduled monument over an extension of the canal engineered by James Watt and local people are keen to get it reopened. Neil Birch suggested the Ian Findlay Path Fund managed by Paths for All might be able to help, and agreed to discuss it with her in more detail.

Peter Stewart thanked all staff and directors for their hard work during the year.

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

Proposed: asd }

xx/ 11/2024

Seconded: asd }