

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

Held at the Dewars Centre, Perth, on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2017 at 2pm.

**Present:** Bob Aitken (Honorary Vice-President), Muriel Robertson (Chair), Richard Barron (Vice-chair), 7 other Directors, plus 41 members and guests.

**In attendance:** Alison Riddell (Secretary and Treasurer), Eleisha Fahy (Senior Access Officer), Lynda Grant and Craig Gilbert (Access Assistants), Karen Inkster (Development Officer).

## 1. Apologies

Apologies were offered on behalf of Jean Bisset, Janet Clark, Pat Hunter, Judith Lewis, Ian Provan, Debbie and Andrew Ramage, Derek Sime, Euan Terras, Graham Tuley, Sandy Valentine and Bill Wheeler.

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

## 2. Minute of AGM 2016

The draft minute had been posted on the Society's website and there were copies for those in attendance. The only comment was to note the absence of Bob Aitken's name from those directors present. Subject to that addition, approval of the minutes was proposed by Jo Doake, seconded by John Craig and carried unanimously.

## 3. To receive the Report of the Directors

Chair Muriel Robertson presented the Directors' Report in two parts, the activities over the past year and what was planned for the coming year. Much of the year had been occupied as usual with defending access rights and advising on and finding solutions to access problems. She invited Eleisha Fahy to speak briefly about what she enjoyed about her work as the Society's senior access officer and acknowledged how fortunate the Society was to have someone so devoted to its work.

After summarising the principal activities of the year, and the contributions of Bob Aitken in updating the talks and of Karen Inkster in developing the volunteer network and improving contact with other organisations, she highlighted a few particular issues. These included the work of director John Pope and two other volunteers in mitigating the impact of road changes on access, the attendance of Eleisha Fahy at a meeting at Holyrood to identify the priorities of the new Scottish Land Commission and of George Menzies representing the Society at meetings of the National Access Forum where his legal input was well respected.

She was delighted to report with reference to the Donald Bennet memorial appeal that the National Trust for Scotland had just installed the Quoich Bridge. It had been a long drawn out process to reach this stage and directors would continue to discuss with the NTS as to how the residue of the fund would be applied. Directors were concerned to secure the abutments of the Derry Bridge installed as a 'temporary' bridge but which the NTS regarded as longer term.

The Society was grateful to George Menzies and Judith Lewis for attending the Drumlean court case and for providing a useful summary of the hearings. We were also pleased to have been involved in securing grant funding to improve the Dasher Bridge at Kippen in conjunction with Kippen Community Council.

Muriel concluded by thanking staff, directors, honorary advisers, volunteers and members for their contributions to the work of ScotWays 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 at the meeting as well as on the Society's website. The Treasurer, Alison Riddell, spoke to a number of slides providing a breakdown of the main figures in the accounts, pointing out that the surplus this year almost equated to the balance of the Brown Souter legacy received in January 2017 (the bulk of it having been received on 30 June 2016). Excluding legacies, the main sources of income were from members and the fees charged for legal searches. In view of the gentle decline in membership income, and a wish not to be over dependent on search income, all those present were encouraged to invite friends and family to join.

The level of search income had seen a sharp increase in the past few years, was quieter last year but was picking up again this year and remained high compared with only a few years ago. The total number of enquiries from both solicitors and members of the public also remained high.

Expenditure had increased about £40,000 since last year, largely due to a new member of staff but also the introduction of death in service benefit and a staff pension scheme for the staff. There were also several one off costs associated with setting up the pension scheme, the changes to the articles of association and the new accounting system.

Next year's budget was for a small deficit for the core activities. OSCAR is keen that charities can justify the size of their reserves and are using their funds for charitable purposes rather than simply accumulating them. As the Brown Soutar bequest had had such a major impact on the Society's reserves, the directors were planning to invest some for future use and use the rest for charitable activities. As the stock market was currently very high, they would be cautious about investment. Future plans included digitisation of files and papers, building on the work of the development officer, and the employment of Richard Barron as a consultant.

#### **5. To appoint Directors**

Bob Aitken started by reminding the meeting that it had been resolved at last year's AGM to appoint George Menzies as the Society's Honorary Vice-President. He recommended George's election to the role in recognition of his long service to ScotWays and also for his legal expertise. The recommendation was passed by acclaim.

Bob pointed out that in such a small organisation a director plays a more executive role than they might expect to do elsewhere, in the office, at meetings and in a representative role across the country. He went on to pay tribute to the directors who were standing down from the Board.

Hugh Anderson had stood down during the year having been involved in ScotWays since 1999 in Perth & Kinross, and he was also on the Perth & Kinross Local Access Forum. We were grateful for his advice.

Pat Hunter had been a director since 2006. Her contribution was particularly valued for her knowledge of matters equestrian at a time when criticism had been made that the Society was focussed on pedestrian access. She had been an assiduous attender at board meetings until a change of employment made this impossible. We were fortunate that Karen Inkster, the development officer, was also a keen rider and could help with issues involving equestrian access takers.

Richard Barron was appointed a director of ScotWays in 2002. He had now left the post of Senior Access Officer of Stirling Council which he had occupied for many years, and was widely respected among access professionals for his exceptional technical grasp of access law, particularly with regard to the Land Reform legislation. Although he was due to step down from the Board, directors were very reluctant to lose him and retained him as a Honorary Advisor in order to continue to benefit from his expertise.

Three directors had completed their three year term. All were eligible to stand for re-election and had confirmed their willingness to do so.

David Dixon's appointment was proposed by John Pope, seconded by George Menzies and carried unanimously.

Muriel Robertson's appointment was proposed by John Craig, seconded by Eric Gotts and carried unanimously.

Douglas Wright's appointment was proposed by Philip Lawson, seconded by Hugh Anderson and carried unanimously.

#### **6. To elect Katharine Taylor as a director**

Katharine Taylor was standing as director for the first time, having had extensive experience of outdoor access issues while working at Sustrans. Her appointment was proposed by Peter Wood, seconded by David Langworth and carried unanimously.

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

The Treasurer, Alison Riddell, noted how helpful and efficient the accountants, Henderson Loggie, had been, both in relation to the preparation of the annual accounts and also in providing advice relating to VAT. She recommended the re-appointment of Henderson Loggie as Independent Financial Examiner of the Accounts. Their appointment was proposed by Douglas Wright, seconded by Eric Gotts and approved unanimously.

## **8. Any other competent business**

Alison Riddell mentioned three items. She drew members' attention to the fact that woolly hats with the ScotWays logo and felt badges were available for sale as it had been noted at last year's AGM that the £5 flat rate for P+P charged by the manufacturer was a deterrent to sales if that was the only item bought.

She mentioned that members could expect communication from the Society in the New Year regarding the General Data Protection Regulation, with which we were required to be compliant by 25 May 2018. As and when communication was sent out, a positive response would be required to it to enable the Society to continue to communicate with members.

She referred to plans to have the office files digitised by Capture All, with optical character recognition for easier searching.

## **9. Update from Strategy Day – January 2017**

Chair Muriel Robertson provided an update from the Strategy Day held in January when volunteer facilitator David Clarke led us through the preparation for and discussion at the meeting. John Mackay produced a very helpful Political, Economic, Sociological, Technological, Legal and Environmental (PESTLE) analysis while directors and staff all contributed to a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis. Almost all directors, staff and honorary advisers attended what was a very illuminating meeting. We identified a need to look at the balance of what we do rather than a need for major change, having respect for our history but at the same time being ready for the future. The Brown Soutar legacy could be used to help with this, and to help make ScotWays more widely known as a recognised and respected source of expertise. We identified our mission to be THE leader in access.

As part of this, we agreed to produce a new guide to access law in Scotland written by Malcolm Combe, a lecturer in law at Aberdeen University specialising in land law. It was proving difficult to produce a suitable text written in plain English but it is hoped to have it available by next year's AGM, in hard copy if not also in electronic format. George Menzies and Judith Lewis also produced a number of case summaries and we were considering how to make them more widely available. We were also considering providing training on access law in conjunction with the new law guide.

Another aspect identified at the meeting was building relationships with other organisations including the National Access Forum and Local Access Fora. Karen Inkster had been involved in this as part of her work as development officer.

We debated ways of making access information public. George Menzies through the NAF was involved in discussions about core paths and rights of way appearing on Ordnance Survey maps. We aimed to strengthen the ScotWays website, partly through integration with the Heritage Paths website, and would continue to monitor website activity to find ways of improving it. We also considered our signposting policy and what our priorities were for signposting as

an obvious way of publicising rights of way. Craig Gilbert and a volunteer had done a lot of work on mapping the signposts we have and their condition.

In order to raise public awareness of the Society and its work, Bob Aitken had given a number of talks to various groups over the past year, together with several published articles and interviews. This was clearly a long term investment towards increasing membership and it was likely to take time to see results.

We were also trying to 'work smarter', to identify more efficient ways of doing what we do, as well as identifying and managing risks to our work and putting in place a business continuity plan. This included digitising many of our files both to secure their contents for the future and to make them more easily searchable. It should also enable remote working in the event of a disaster where the office became unusable for any length of time. The aim was for a better working environment.

Finally, the board wanted the staff to develop and take opportunities to represent the Society elsewhere, and had a modest training budget to assist with this.

A number of priorities were identified at the strategy day, to many of which Richard Barron was the largest contributor. The board were very pleased to employ him as a consultant for a year and had a list of tasks for him to tackle, mostly ones which the staff did not have the capacity to undertake. These included a number of the matters already mentioned.

In addition, the Board had decided to use some of the funds inherited by the Society to set up a small grants scheme offering grants from £500 to £1500 to community-led access related projects. A budget of £10,000 had been set for this to cover the period to June 2020. It would be launched by contacting the clubs and community councils which were ScotWays supporters by the end of November 2017.

#### **10. Update from Karen Inkster, development officer**

As Karen had been in post for just over a year, she reported on her year's activities. She had carried out a survey of members to identify potential volunteers and how they might be willing to help the Society. She was delighted to have received 114 responses and stressed that the Society could not function without the support of volunteers. Through this process, there had been identified three new walks leaders, two representatives for the A96 dualling consultation, three local access forum representatives and five area coordinators to identify local problems and look after volunteers in their area.

She had been assisting Jo Doake and Lynda Grant with next year's walks programme and had also been updating various ScotWays policies. She had run a first aid course led by Richard Barron for walks leaders, and publicised training run by Paths for All. She was encouraging members to submit paths and signpost surveys, having received five path surveys and thirty signpost surveys to date. These would help office staff to be aware of problems.

One of Karen's priorities is to raise the profile of ScotWays and she had attended a number of festivals and other events, getting to know other organisations and individuals. She had attended talks given by Bob Aitken in Clackmannan and Crieff and had arranged for Eleisha to provide a training session on outdoor access to members of the British Horse Society Scotland which was well received.

Karen has also been involved in work replacing bridges such as the Quoich Bridge and the Sawmill Bridge on the Airlie estates in Angus, and she participated in a path maintenance group at Crichton. Future plans include:

- Recruiting more volunteers;
- Developing volunteer training and support;
- Promoting membership, through talks;
- Extending the area coordinators scheme once it is seen how the trial works
- Following up the results of the signposting survey.

### **11. Signposting policy**

Richard Barron had carried out a signposting survey and reported to the meeting on the results. He drew members' attention to a display of pictures and examples of the types of sign in use. He started with a brief history of signposting, from the Romans, the Turnpike Act of 1773 and then ScotWays signs the oldest of which dated from 1885. The detailed results of the survey would be posted on the Society's website, but he was very pleased to have received 213 responses from a wide range of people. The results were generally very positive with a large majority in favour of the Society putting in new signs and also maintaining signs, keeping the same colouring as at present. The range of comments put in the space for free text at the end included many along the lines of 'keep up the good work' which was very heartening.

Peter Mackay gave a vote of thanks to the Chair, directors and staff and commented that the Society had never been in better heart.

The Chair then thanked all those present for attending and drew the meeting to a close at 3 pm.

Proposed: asd }

xx/ 11/2018

Seconded: asd }

### **Caledonian Caminos:**

The meeting was followed by a talk by Nick Cooke of the Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum.