

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL20 April 2016Report by Director of EnvironmentEAST RENFREWSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the dissolution of the East Renfrewshire Local Access Forum in its present form and agree the establishment of a new, more representative Local Access Forum that meets the statutory requirements set out in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The Council is asked to;
- (a) agree the dissolution of the current East Renfrewshire Local Access Forum; and
 - (b) agree that the Director of Environment should make arrangements to establish a new Local Access Forum

BACKGROUND

3. Section 25 of The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 places a duty on local authorities to establish a local access forum consisting of persons, organisations, land owners and managers with an interest in outdoor public access and recreation, or organisations representative of land owners and managers. The Act enables local authorities to appoint the persons who sit on the Local Access Forum.

4. The first East Renfrewshire Local Access Forum was formed in advance of the Land Reform Act in March 2001. A memorandum of understanding established the Forum's operating function and remit.

5. In 2007 two operating bodies were established in the form of the Local Access Forum (as a wider group of interests with a membership of 32 people) and a Core Group with a membership of 12.

6. The larger Local Access Forum incorporated a wide range of interests drawn from outdoor recreation organisations. This group typically met on an annual basis to bring together interests, to feedback on progress relating to outdoor access related work and to discuss future projects.

7. The Core Group was established as a smaller and more effective decision making group able to undertake the core business of the Forum. The Core Group was established with 12 members, divided into the following: land owners and land managers, community groups, user groups (e.g. ramblers clubs, horse riding associations, cycling groups) and public body representatives.

8. Over time, attendance, productivity and the effectiveness of the Local Access Forum have diminished and the group has not achieved the requirements set out by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. At the same time, outdoor access activities and opportunities have expanded greatly since the establishment of the Forum and it is now considered that it is appropriate to renew and refresh the membership of the Local Access Forum.

REPORT

9. The Land Reform (Scotland) legislation sets out as follows the functions of the Local Access Forum;

- advise local authorities when drawing up and revising statutory core paths plans.
- provide assistance in any outdoor access dispute resolution
- advise on the existence and delineation of rights of way
- advise on the establishment of byelaws under section 12 of the aforementioned Act.

10. The Forum can also provide support and assistance in the resolution of disputes and with events, publicity and project work, of which a considerable amount is ongoing within East Renfrewshire.

11. In addition, the benefits of improved health and wellbeing amongst our population and the importance of sustainable places are all widely recognised and reflected through national policy.

12. Recent work to create improved opportunities for walking, running and cycling, and for the enjoyment of the local environment have allowed the Council to become heavily involved with the local community and with interest groups. The establishment of a new Local Access Forum, which would incorporate a range of local interests, would pave the way for the Council to continue its work, but also for the development of more community led projects.

13. A further emerging piece of work relates to the statutory East Renfrewshire Core Paths Plan, which was adopted in 2012 and is now due to be updated.

14. The opportunity to include new interest groups on the new Local Access Forum is important and will improve the value of the group. Eastwood Ramblers have intimated that they would like to play a role in a proactive and positive Local Access Forum that promotes and supports better health outcomes, promotes the local area for outdoor activities and assists with the resolution of disputes. In addition, the recent establishment of a proactive local cycle group in East Renfrewshire demonstrates how a successful Local Access Forum might work. Council officers attend this informal group who have assisted the Council's Planning and Road Services in the creation of cycle guides and publicity material, supported the Council at public events and organised their own programme of activities and cycle rides. They have added value to the Council's work in this area, while the group's members have developed their own skills and confidence. Their activities are a working demonstration of the Council's "community engagement" capability in action.

15. It is proposed that a new Forum be established using the Scottish Natural Heritage guidance "Local Access Forums: A Guide to Good Practice", which was introduced in 2010. In line with this guidance, the new Forum would operate with a core group of 6 to 12

individuals who would undertake the Forum's business. This will be a simpler, more focused Local Access Forum than the previous 2 tier arrangement. Wider interests will be promoted through an information/social style event held annually to ensure that all interested parties have a voice.

16. Subject to Council agreement, the core group will be established following a formal nomination process (as suggested by the Scottish Natural Heritage's guidance detailed above). The Council will actively seek nominations through direct contact with the 4 main groups of stakeholders and a publicity campaign. Nominations will be assessed by appropriate Council staff who will appoint a balanced core group that satisfies section 25(4) of the Act which specifies that the core group will comprise representative(s) from the four interest groups or constituencies of interest:

- Land managers
- Participants in outdoor access
- Relevant public agencies
- Interested people in local communities

17. Local Access Forum members are appointed to represent constituencies of interest and must take active steps to stay in touch with the constituency they represent in order to convey its views to the Forum. Measures will be put in place to ensure this is achieved.

FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY

18. The proposals contained within this report will be implemented utilising existing resources.

CONSULTATION AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING

19. This report has been prepared following consultation with stakeholders with a range of interests. The Local Access Forum will be a partnership and its re-establishment will pave the way for a wide range of positive joint working.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS

20. There are no IT, sustainability, staffing or other implications associated with this report.

CONCLUSION

21. A newly established Local Access Forum will be more representative of the wider access agenda and the range of proactive organisations and land management interests which exist within East Renfrewshire, and meet the statutory requirements set out in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

RECOMMENDATIONS

22. The Council is asked to;

- (a) agree the dissolution of the current East Renfrewshire Local Access Forum;
and

- (b) agree that the Director of Environment should make arrangements to establish a new Local Access Forum

Director of Environment

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KEY WORDS

Land Reform (Scotland) Act, East Renfrewshire Local Access Forum