**Outdoor Woodland & learning North East Group Meeting**

**Meeting via Zoom**

**8th June 2020 at 10.30am – 12.30pm.**

**Minutes**

**1. Welcome & Apologies**

**Present:** Joanne Evans, Ian Talboys (Aberdeen City Council Ranger

Service), Neil Taylor (Forestry & Land Scotland Ranger), Julia MacKay (acting

Chair), Jill Birch, Lindsey Duncan, Claire Livingstone (Treasurer),

Stephen Reeves (Dorenell Ranger Service), John Malster, Dawn Ewan (Mucky Boats), Joan Anderson, Juliet Robertson (Creative Star), Susi McLarty (Aberdeenshire Council), Aileen Salway, Bonnie Maggio (Education Programme Manager, FLS), Luke Nicol (Aberdeen City Council).

**Apologies:** Grace Banks, Terri Harrison, Doug Gooday, Kate Malster, Tim Gordon-Roberts.

**2. Minutes of previous meeting 9th March 2020, matters arising**

* All events cancelled due to Covid 19.
* Willow work action raised by Juliet. Training issue for creating and maintaining willow structures. Andrew Saunders, local willow specialist retired 5 years ago. John Malster said he was happy to run willow courses if there is enough demand. Juliet suggested Ashgrove Family Centre as a venue to run a pilot training course. **Action:** date to be agreed at next meeting for John, Juliet and Ian.
* No matters arising. Approved John Malster, seconded Aileen Salway.

**3. Priority Covid Support, Huntly & Stonehaven CPD Taster Days**

* JM raised potential support for CPD in outdoor learning for primary school teachers in Huntly, Stonehaven and Aberdeen City before the schools go back in August 2020. Outdoor learning is likely to be key for schools with current Scottish government guidelines on Covid 19.
* Luke Nicol supported this. Outdoor learning for Early Years has had sound investment and roll-out in Aberdeen City. However it is not the same situation in Primary Schools and more work needs to be done to support outdoor learning. This should be about play based learning with a holistic approach.
* Susi McLarty agreed with Luke Nicol. However Aberdeenshire Council are still waiting Scottish Government advice on how the schools will reopen before August.
* Dawn Ewan has received community funding from Stonehaven Co-op to support schools in the Stonehaven Cluster with outdoor learning. This could be used for training in outdoor learning once government guidelines are clearer for schools re-opening in Stonehaven. OWLNEG could then run a CPD event in Stonehaven for teachers. Dawn said that it would be good to focus on one part of the curriculum e.g. science.
* Luke agreed this could also happen in Aberdeen City. The focus should be on linking play to behaviour and not just curricular activities.
* **Action:** JM proposed a sub-group as a way forward. The following people volunteered:-
  + Ian Talboys
  + Susi McLarty
  + Claire Livingston
  + Dawn Ewan
  + Lindsey Duncan
  + Joanne Evans
  + John Malster
  + Jill Birch
  + Julia MacKay
  + Luke Nicol
  + Stephen Reeves (Huntly event)

Aileen and Joan said that they would help out where possible.

3 events would take place – 1 in each area. Each event would need a different focus. Proposed dates would be late July/early August before schools go back on 11th August. Julia has 2 different proposals. **Action:** Julia to check insurance for health and safety related to Covid 19. **Action:** JM to pull proposals together and email out to sub-group and organise dates for sub-group meeting.

* Dawn/Juliet explained the current government guidance on outdoor nursery settings. Currently ‘bubbles’ of 8 children are allowed outdoors in outdoor nursery settings with 1 adult plus additional adult(s) floating between these groups. This deployment of adults is unworkable at present without additional staffing which financial could prevent some settings opening fully. ELC guidance is due on 15th June 2020.
* Action: Susi said that she was putting a list of outdoor learning practitioners for possible outdoor learning opportunities with schools for Aberdeenshire Council. Please email her if you are interested - [susi.mclarty@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:susi.mclarty@aberdeenshire.gov.uk)

**4. Letters of support for NTS Rangers**

Stephen Reeves explained the current situation in regards to NTS Rangers redundancies:-

* SCRA are writing a statement which will be released this week or next week along with petition (Action: SR to send to JE to circulate)
* Under current NTS proposals 75% of permanent NTS rangers will be made redundant. Seasonal rangers have already been cut. This is due to a decrease in income due to COVID 19.
* Where there is a ranger/property manager role the property manager role will be retained.
* No provision for outdoor learning or education.
* North East Ranger Service will close and therefore no provision in our area and trails will not be maintained.
* There will be some cuts in the gardening teams so managing of outdoor spaces out with the gardens is likely to be lower priority.
* Impact on Branching Out at Crathes as no key contact.
* JM has written on behalf of OWLNEG to local MSP, MP and Community Council.
* Action: all to write to NTS Regional Manager North East Scotland.
* Action: SR to send me above contact details.
* Action: JM to send JE NNOL email from Bonnie for circulation to group.

**5. Branching Out South Aberdeenshire/Covid 19 risk assessment and insurance**

* JM/JB working on a phased approach to restarting Branching Out
* Weekly meetings with Bryan Duncan. ADP have funded his post so that he can be released 1.5 days per week to support Branching Out
* **Action:** JM to chase lottery funding
* National steering group has been set up in regards to Branching Out by Natalie Moriarty
* **Action:** JB to send IT contact details for joining steering group.

**6 W4L grants (JE)**

* 6 application forms have been sent out for 2020-21.
* 1 completed one back from Dunecht School which needs to be updated
* **Action:** JE to send around email reminder to those who have forms already
* It is FLS’s intention to award the group £2,500 to administer W4L grants for 2020 / 2021. However due to COVID 19 FLS have not had their budget approved and we are awaiting clarification.

**7. OWLNEG Finance/Accounts (statement from CH)**

* Reimbursement from FLS £7500 for 2019-20
* £27K is current balance. As we discussed previously, FLS will not be giving us any funding for 2020/2021.
* All monies received for Cults CPD Taster Day

**8. Update from Bonnie/website input**

* Moving forward nationally but sticking with Scottish government Covid 19 guidance
* Administering funding for OWL groups
* 2020-21 budget confirmed prior to lockdown
* New resources published & updated on website
* Planning for National Network Event in 2021

**9. AOCB**

* JM – Kate Malster has volunteered to do Forest Kindergarten training
* Juliet – A selection Creative Star resources are being put online Monday to Thursday at 4pm for 24 hours on website and social media throughout June.

**11. Date for next meeting**

Next meeting September – date and venue TBC

**12. Update from constituent organisations send Doug brief summary for minutes**

**Ian Talboys**

Aberdeen City Council Countryside Ranger Service update 9th March – 8th June 2020

With the Covid-19 restrictions coming in from 23rd March the ACC Countryside Rangers all been working from home.

Some school groups were possible early in March with 5 primary schools having their wilful fires talks for the P6 & P7 classes

Braehead School had two birdwatching sessions at Scotstown Moor in March.

We started a Safe Use of Fire training programme with 12 teachers and completed the first two out of four modules before the lockdown. We hope to resume this once the schools are back in the autumn. We may need to do a refresher to revise the first two sessions given the length of the break between sessions.

We were part way through a Branching Out programme (week five of twelve). Our Healthy Minds colleagues are trying to keep in contact with the clients to give some support. We hope to resume sessions with this cohort of clients once the social distancing rules allow. Again, it may need some additional sessions to rebuild relationships and the confidence of the clients who may not be managing well in lockdown.

Ian attended the NESBiP Awareness Group representing ACC. NESBiP are helping with some schools and community groups in the City with the provision of free wildflower seeds along with advice and assistance in how to grow and manage them. They need to be sowing at least 100m2 to qualify. We are currently working with Friends of Westfield Park along with Scotstown School and Brighter Bucksburn and Bucksburn Academy with these projects. Unfortunately, both have been suspended before the seed was sown.

During the lockdown the Countryside Rangers and Countryside Officer have been filming short videos from their gardens and local walks which have been posted on social media including the council Facebook, YouTube and Twitter pages along with the Countryside Ranger Service Facebook page.

The ones produced so far are:-

Wildlife in your garden [www.youtube.com/watch?v=KcoTRYEQSB8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KcoTRYEQSB8)

Mini minibeast hotels [www.youtube.com/watch?v=YbJwn6DRzM0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YbJwn6DRzM0)

Garden Birds ID part 1 [www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJ8bKyn2f6Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJ8bKyn2f6Y)

Garden Birds ID part 2 [www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJ8bKyn2f6Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJ8bKyn2f6Y)

Minibeast hotel building [www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-0Wd2m-NGM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-0Wd2m-NGM)

Minibeast hunting www.facebook.com/AberdeenCC/videos/240580443834479/UzpfSTI4MDA3ODgxMjEzMzIyMzoxNjcyNzczNDEyODYzNzQ5/

Spring Wildflower ID www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyjtLADHkyk

You could almost call that a boxed set! If you haven’t had a look then do so, they are all under 2mins in length.

Future ones are likely to be about bees and beekeeping, cleaning out bird feeders and feeding birds in the summer, nesting blue tits, and possibly tree id. These are put together by our Comms Team from the footage we film ourselves. It seems to work and attracts a lot of interest with most of them being viewed 5,000-10,000 times each. These will continue until we reach phase 2 of the Covid-19 restriction relaxations.

We have also been posting wildlife quizzes of various types, some made ourselves others shared from other sites which also have been very popular, some achieving over 88,000 views!

We have been in discussions with the Greyhope Bay project which is looking at developing a visitor facility at Torry Battery primarily as an indoor dolphin and other marine wildlife watching point with a coffee shop, indoor interpretation and outdoor seating etc. They plan on having two converted shipping containers as a temporary structure for this. It was due to be on site in June 2020 but is delayed by the Covid-19 restrictions. It is being funded by donations sponsorship and grants as a not for profit business, not sure of the exact business model. They are looking to develop all kinds of interactions with visitors about the wildlife, history and stories of the area, some of which are going to be online to start with but linking to the site when things are more normal. This could provide a useful focus for outdoor learning around this part of the coast.

**Joan Anderson**

All 30 Easter walks were cancelled and still hoping to revive some free, guided outdoor walks for later in summer.

New community information hub at Halls (plus planned, associated CNPA hub) opening delayed, but research for the halls has thrown up lots of forgotten woodland/walks connections, including Baillie Austin, the man credited with getting full public access for locals to Craigendarroch Woods and Hill 100 years ago. Awaiting small piece of jigsaw from Invercauld Estate.

Helping history teacher in Netherlands with research into 18 and 19-year olds who died liberating his (the teacher's ) town in 1944. This has led to discovery of a Ballater man who used to drive trucks for the Newfoundlanders at the Dalmochie lumber camp (itself part of a heritage project), in turn connected to a heritage project by Ballater children and is awaiting access to school records.

Revising and extending (into much rougher ground) the risk assessment for the walk from Ballater to Fit o Gairn to ensure it is potentially fully accessible for wheelchairs - only been partial til now. Becoming very familiar with gorse bushes, fallen branches and tree roots, but have solved the problem of steep access at one end (this done during daily exercise - fully legal).

I have a query for OWLs about wider access to Claire Hewitt's book on Scottish trees, but wasn't sure where to address it.

**Neil Taylor**

Our car parks are currently shut.  This is due to the Scottish government advice to avoid travelling to visit the countryside.  This is giving us some issues with people trying to get into car parks, and parking on roadsides and in front of gates.

I do not have a date for car park reopening as this will depend on both the Scottish Government restrictions, and our internal processes to make sure staff are safe and the sites are safe.  At present local people can access our land, but we have not been doing any trail checks since lockdown began.

All events and permissions are cancelled until the 30th of June, but this will be reviewed shortly.  Group events are likely to be put off for longer unless they can be done with physical distancing.

We are doing a lot of work behind the scenes to try and be ready when lockdown restrictions are eased further.

**Lindsey Duncan**

I've not been able to work since the schools closed as I have my two kids at home.

I have however been asked to provide weekly activities for the child I had been doing LPP work with at Cluny School.

Aberdeenshire Council have said they will still pay for the sessions I was due to provide, despite me not being able to run them.

Dunecht School also paid for all the Forest School Sessions I was due to run for the rest of the school year.

**Julia MacKay**

**Forest School Training**

Face to face sessions have been cancelled for now but we have been delivering L&D via Zoom tutorials and set up a new Facebook page to support their learning by posing video’s, articles etc. relevant to FOLA level 8

**EYN**

Initial face to face has been cancelled but we are using Zoom for on-line tutorials. Kate is planning 1:1 site visits, keeping within Government guidelines.

We are having a lot of new interest from teachers regarding outdoor learning so we are looking at new ways we can support 1:1 and 1:3 delivery

**Stephen Reeves**

Here’s a bit of an update from the Dorenell Ranger Service, nothing much to report unfortunately.

·        Both Mark and myself are still working full time.

·        Mark (Wildlife Ranger) continues to undertake extensive wildlife surveys on the wind farm and manage contractors for water quality and vegetation monitoring.

·        I (Stephen, Access Ranger) have mainly been working from home with the lockdown having more of an effect on my work which was due to be mostly public engagement over the last couple of months. I have been concentrating more on the access side of the job, completing trail audits and am now going to site more to install new waymarkers. Itching to get back to doing more public engagement when I can.

·        Dorenell Visitor centre remains closed.

**Juliet Robertson**

* Service Level Agreement renewed for Aberdeen City for improving outdoor learning within Early Years sector.
* Continuing to finalise Stepping Outside guidance for Aberdeenshire Early Years
* Outdoor Numeracy work extended for a 3rd year with Dundee City Council. We are embedding processes with 6 schools to evidence impact of outdoor numeracy on attainment as well as engagement of children.
* Running several online webinars with several charities to help raise funds for them as paid for events.
* The Thinking Child Literacy and Numeracy resources for KS1 and KS2 are now free to download from my website. Please do share this link <https://creativestarlearning.co.uk/resources/the-thinking-child-free-outdoor-numeracy-and-literacy-resources/>

**Joanne Evans**

* Gardening4Kids 2020 not operating due to current restrictions
* Beechgrove Garden has stopped filming at the garden at present. Programme is being self-shot by presenters from their own gardens.
* Gerbera Designs – ongoing garden design work and spring planting.
* Gardening Scotland was cancelled and then went into financially administration due to current situation. Therefore no show garden for Trellis. Hoping it will be built at a local care home anyway.
* Passed first project in Society of Garden Designs adjudication. Only 2 projects to go!
* Planting trees in a newly developed bushcraft area at Daviot Oldmeldrum Scout Group site.