

**CAITHNESS BIODIVERSITY GROUP**  
**Meeting Thursday 26 January 2006**  
**Park Hotel, Thurso**

**Present:** Ken Butler (KB) Ruth Sutherland (RS)  
David Glass (DG) Norrie Russell (NR)  
Dave Mackay (DM) Marina Swanson (MS)  
Barbara Bremner (BB) David Watt (DW)  
Anna MacConnell (AM)

Also Present: Niall Smith (NS) – Caithness Voluntary Groups

**Apologies:** Jonathan Willet (JW) Mary Legg (ML)  
Julian Smith (JS) Angus Spirit (AS)

ITEM	ACTION POINTS
<p><b>1. Minutes of Meetings</b>  MS was thanked for taking minutes at the previous meeting. This was followed by a short discussion whether anyone had any comments to make on their accuracy and content. This led to a more lengthy discussion about what the minutes should cover, level of detail and what should go on the Web. Each person attending the meeting was asked for their opinion. Opinions varied widely from very short minutes (simply showing agreed points, decisions made &amp; action points) to lengthy minutes including all of the above, plus any discussions. In general, it was agreed that the minutes of the previous meeting were sufficient.  DM would take the minutes of this meeting.  The issue of what The Highland Council (THC) requires as a result of local biodiversity group meetings was also mentioned and what needs/should go on the web. BB to check with JW what THC requirements are.  Concern was also expressed about naming individuals, such as landowners, in case the minutes are put on the Web, before these individuals had been personally contacted.  It was agreed that minutes should be circulated and any comments made to the Chair. Minutes would then be approved at the next meeting or possibly by email (if meetings infrequent), depending on THC requirements.</p>	<p><b>AP1</b> – DM to take minutes of meeting &amp; circulate to Group members within 2 weeks of meeting. Hard copy of minutes to DW.   <b>AP2</b> – All to send comments on draft minutes to BB.   <b>AP3</b>- BB to check THC requirements for minutes with JW.</p>
<p><b>2. Highland Biodiversity Partnership Update</b>  BB provided an update (on behalf of JW) on the state of play regarding the partnership.  Mention was also made of possible places available for Orkney Recorders trip in late March.  Review of LBAPs and contractors undertaking work was briefly covered, including the creation of database for each LBAP area and HLF grant on actions identified for each LBAP area.  All invited to meeting with contractors undertaking review work.</p>	
<p><b>3. Structure of Caithness Group – its role and future focus</b>  <b>a. Purpose of Group</b>  General concern was expressed about individuals and the Group undertaking projects on the ground without risk assessment and liability insurance procedures being adequately in place. This could</p>	

leave individuals and the Group open to potential legal action.

Round table discussion of what we want to do on the ground as a Group: Practical projects; provide funding & advice to others; or raise awareness of biodiversity.

DG stated it needed to be clear what projects could be /are being done by others, such as restoration of blanket bog after tree-felling, and what projects would not happen without the Group e.g. Beil dam project near John O'Groats.

KB discussed the pros & cons of each approach, using examples of projects already undertaken by the Group and his involvement with the Caithness Field Club.

This was followed by a discussion about the end result of the review of each LBAP if we decided not to take forward practical projects ourselves - could we push others to undertake projects instead.

#### **b. Constitution**

KB circulated copies of the draft constitution and ran through the main points. KB had also sent this to NS for comment regarding creation of a constitution & clarification of liability issues. NS and KB then worked on various drafts.

KB reported back on discussions he had with AM in relation to how Caithness Partnership could assist Group in relation to extent to SNH funding for post held by AM. The latest stage is AM has been asked to seek views of Caithness Partnership regarding input to Group. 3 options were mentioned: 1. back away from direct action; 2. Constitute ourselves and then direct action; or 3. go under "wing" of Caithness Partnership which is a limited company.

AM clarified role regarding Sutherland model with advice she received from William Sutherland (Anna's equivalent in Sutherland). The Caithness Partnership is unable to take on employment of people to deliver projects and does not have the capacity to take on responsibility of a sub-group undertaking projects on behalf of the Partnership. However, AM made it clear it does have a facilitation role. Directors of Partnership wish further time to answer the 3 ways (as detailed in email from KB to AM) in which Partnership could assist Group.

NS provided advice on different structures including whether we decided to have just a planning role or a planning and delivery role (with projects being undertaken). Reference was made again to the Sutherland model.

There was a brief discussion on the issue of liability and maintenance and whether any grant-awarding body would give financial aid to groups/individuals to cover these issues. DG mentioned the case regarding the water vole survey and queried whether THC could fund this type of insurance annually.

The issue of sustainability was raised concerning time length of projects and planning - focusing on what are these projects delivering in the long-term.

General feeling in the Group that we wish to accumulate funds, so if people approach Group with suitable ideas, we could provide financial assistance towards projects. The Group would wish to see things happening and do not wish to see the Group becoming just a "talking shop", but we need to be clear over liability issues. We may need to

<p>reject future projects if liability issues not clear or projects too large for Group.</p> <p>Advice from NS suggested that if we opted to undertake large-scale projects and employing people, a Ltd company may be best. This has the advantage of being easy of set up, but the disadvantage of being difficult to shut down. It may be best to employ self-employed contractors for any projects.</p> <p>NS advised that an unincorporated association with a constitution may be the best approach for the Group. NS to provide KB with further details, KB then to circulate and discuss at next meeting.</p> <p><b>c. Membership</b> (DG asked for this to be put on agenda)</p> <p>BB agreed membership of Group needs to be widened. Details of Group on Caithness.org have attracted no interest. NS stated there are around 700 groups within Caithness.</p> <p>General comments from Group that groups represented on Group has declined. We need to identify other potential members.</p> <p>DG to draft press release of water vole survey to raise awareness of Group and MS to offer to John O’Groat Journal.</p> <p>This was followed by a discussion of whom and what body should be represented on the Group. It was thought that a number of particular areas are currently lacking including, freshwater, fisheries and estates. BB had envisaged the Group would have been bigger, with a smaller core group essentially covering operational requirements and processes. There was general agreement that it would be unlikely the Group would be overwhelmed if we opened the Group to anyone. General comments about usual faces at the different meetings throughout the area. As the Group is currently very open, most thought this shouldn’t change.</p> <p>BB reported back on Scottish Biodiversity Forum on behalf of JW regarding Marine &amp; Coastal issues. BB to circulate contact to Group.</p>	<p><b>AP4</b> – NS to provide KB with further details &amp; KB then to circulate.</p> <p><b>AP5</b> - All to think about other potential groups/individuals who could join Group.</p> <p><b>AP6</b> – DG to draft press release. MS to send to Groat office.</p> <p><b>AP7</b> – BB to circulate email contact on Marine/coastal issues.</p>
<p><b>4. Project update – existing projects</b></p> <p>DG was thanked for compiling a list of all existing and potential project ideas. The list was then tabled and all agreed it was a good idea. DG agreed to update list as required.</p> <p>BB reported the osprey poles project will now not happen and proposed to drop idea. Kenny Graham had expressed concern about some locations of the poles.</p> <p>MS reported on potential project at Newtonhill. There are problems with water on the old landfill site which needs to be tested first. Best to move project to possible future projects until water quality issue is resolved.</p> <p>As AS was not present at the meeting, BB said she would contact him about his idea of an education pack.</p> <p>Need to identify available sums left from £10,000 allocation – BB to check and let Group know. BB suggested all should come to next meeting with potential ideas.</p> <p>Big promotional event needs to be planned for around October 2006 and all money needs to be spent by then.</p> <p>BB thanked NS and AM for their input.</p> <p>KB and AM agreed to discuss and clarify future role further.</p>	<p><b>AP8</b> – DG to update project list.</p> <p><b>AP9</b> – BB to contact AS RE. Education pack.</p> <p><b>AP10</b> – BB to circulate details of remaining funds.</p> <p><b>AP11</b> – All to come to next meeting with potential ideas.</p> <p><b>AP12</b> – KB &amp; AM to discuss role of Caithness Partnership.</p>

<p><b>5. Projects - future ideas</b>  BB suggested we need to identify potential projects now, in preparation for likely £10,000 allocation from Highland Biodiversity Project.  DW mentioned he had a dead water rail which could be stuffed and then used as an education resource. Agreed to discuss at next meeting.  NR reported on a possible project involving a repeat survey of usage of inbye land by golden plover (&amp; other peatland birds). Work originally done by Durham University, but now MSc student working with RSPB through Imperial College plans to repeat - query by NR whether Group could contribute towards travelling expenses component (likely to be a few hundred £s). Project identified as an action in the Peatlands Strategy.</p>	<p><b>AP13</b> - DW to develop project idea.</p> <p><b>AP14</b> - NR to develop project idea &amp; circulate to Group for comment.</p>
<p><b>6. AOB</b>  No issues raised.</p>	
<p><b>7. Date of Next Meeting</b>  No date was set, but BB suggested meeting sometime during next 2 months.</p>	<p><b>AP15</b> - BB to circulate possible dates for next meeting.</p>