



2019-20 Co-Convenor's Report:

2019/2020 will long be remembered for reasons even beyond the remit of SOAN and we should probably just bask in the success that we are all hopefully healthy and playing a role as society as a whole navigates some challenging times.

It seems odd to try to rack the brain for what the world was like before March 2020, but I will try briefly to summarise events pre-global pandemic and give some insight into SOAN work since.

At our last AGM and event in Glasgow, which focused on legal updates, we had 42 attendees and exceptionally positive feedback.

Later in the year we managed to facilitate a site-based September training event in Dumfries on 'place and community' (15 attended), as well as a similar event in Auchterarder in November on 'shared use paths', which was enjoyed by 16 attendees.

Follow-up site-based events were planned covering: 'Mountain biking in forestry' (Aberdeenshire); 'Drainage and ecological considerations' (NCN78 Oban); 'Path maintenance, apprenticeships' (East Ayrshire); and 'Community engagement' (Tweed Valley). Covid-19 restrictions meant these events have had to be postponed, but hopefully they can happen in the future.

We also had an exciting May event and AGM developed and planned for May 2020 in Stirling on 'Access and Planning', which we sadly had to cancel.

One thing is for sure, that professional networks have never been more important, and hopefully members have continued to find the Knowledge Hub resource valuable, and have continued to connect across the SOAN network. The SOAN Committee has been beavering away behind the scenes offering insights, input and connections relating to: Scottish Government LRA Guidance (ongoing); Covid-19 and public access considerations; and the Dogs and Livestock Bill. We've also been helping the SOAN network survey and understand the current issues and concerns across our work. Another positive - our work is extremely valuable.... Who knew?

We were ahead of the curve, and have worked hard over a couple of years to develop a **new sustainable model** which ensures continuing networking and development opportunities for our members. We are committed to the strategic framework agreed at the 2019 AGM which our new committee structure is helping us deliver, with new training opportunities moving forward, and Emma Donaldson, our Administrator, now performing a key role in co-ordinating efforts and supporting the committee. In particular the **Cycling, Walking and Access – Training and Development Working Group** (hosted by Cycling Scotland) has been exploring more formal CPD and online learning opportunities for its members and this project has now moved an important step forward with funding from Transport Scotland.

In committee news, during the year Karlene, our fellow Co-Convenor, moved to a new job with the Scottish Land Commission (congrats Karlene!) and Jason Rust changed roles within Scottish Land & Estates, so they both move on with our thanks. However, we are delighted to recommend that the membership endorse Rowena and Emma onto the committee, offering insights from Cycling Scotland and SLE, respectively. Forestry & Land Scotland have also approached the committee with the aim of involving their staff in the wider SOAN network.

Co-convenorships between myself, Sue and Martin have helped us share the load, and **Alan as Treasurer and Helen as Secretary** have ensured that SOAN has mostly hit its timelines and deadlines for actions despite the current circumstances; their devotion to the network is particularly appreciated. Richard and Emma have also worked hard behind the scenes to update and streamline our systems and website, so a big thank you goes to them as well. All 5 of us as Office Bearers are able to continue in our current roles for the remaining 18 months of our 3-year terms. This provides a good base for future consolidation, but the door is always open and we are keen to welcome fresh blood and new ideas!

We now have **237 members** (an increase of 20 from last year) and we hope to continue to grow the membership and encourage more activity, both in terms of events and online participation. So, if you know of colleagues who would benefit from SOAN membership, please encourage them to sign up via the website.

All in all, the value of networking, and public access and active travel in general, seems to have been thrust into the limelight this year and hopefully we can continue to deliver for our members over the coming year, whatever that brings.

Thanks,

Kenny Auld
SOAN Co-Convenor