Making the most of our Access Forums,

28th May, Balloch

Discussion 1: Rural and Urban Outdoor Access Forums: Evolving to fit local context

Liz Dinnie, Hutton Institute has done research to see how LAFs have evolved, looking at Cairngorms since 2006 and Dundee since 2011. Key findings include:

- the relationship with access authorities is crucial

- different interests and abilities of members influences work areas

- how active they are between meetings

who is listening? Cairngorms access takers are often visitors, not necessarily familiar with the area, actively looking for information

Dundee access takers are more used to the area.

The kind of access taken makes a difference to the forum. In Dundee the local forum are the eyes and ears on the ground as they go about their daily lives in a smaller area, reporting issues to the local authority through the access officer Cairngorms much bigger area, perhaps not so familiar with individual sites and issues.

Discussion 2 Recruiting Members and the Benefits of an Effective Constitution

Alastair Stewart - Highland is a big area so we decided to have 6 LAFs, we now have 5 active forums

- all stronger and weaker at different times, down to the quality of members

- we used a press ad, also spoke directly to people we know.

- applicants fill out an application form which goes to the forum to decide, sometimes we choose

who would fill a skills gap

- we pay mileage and give guidance notes

- we no longer get agency reps

* meeting frequency reduced after Core Path Plan was adopted, but set to increase for Core Path Plan revision

Guy Keating (LLTNP) - ours came to the end of its useful life so we held a recruitment drive, used Twitter and Facebook as well as press ads to get a different audience. Existing members were invited to apply, we got 6 return members and 6 new members.

Linda Mathieson (Aberedeenshire LOAF), we had three inaugural meetings - one for community land owners, one for users, one for agencies, asked people to put their names forward if interested, so the council had no input from the very start. 10-14 people volunteered for each group, they all did a presentation and voted for each other.

Louise Kirk (North Ayrshire LAF) - similar, though we don't invite people unless we need more information. The council has a role, we check who the individuals are and we have approached groups like disability groups directly.

George McQuarrie, Scotways, we conducted a recent review and hope to have LAF space on our website soon. Of the 26 forums, more than 20 had representatives from us.

Alastair Stewart - Highland Council have LAF minutes on their website. They can invite groups to a meeting if there is a specific issue.

Alison Irvine (Fife LAF), we invite all the community councils in Fife to nominate somebody in a region and complete an application form. Members consider the breadth of interest, east-west spread. Community reps don't always come to meetings and I'm not sure how community councils feed back. We have an annual access seminar to which all are invited.

SNH was a voting member.

SNH is an advisory member in Loch Lomond.

Nick Cole (Convenor, P&K LAF) I am also on Cairngorms access forum so have seen two recruitment processes:-

- P&K big public meeting for all groups. Everyone was a voting member and part of the quorum, but

we amended that situation so we could conduct business without them.

- we have an annual meeting, three-year rotation of office bearers, people can be re-elected. We

find we have stability, the majority of us have been members since the beginning. We have a

number of returning issues and are able to get involved because we know the land owners and the

history.

Cairngorms is different, board assess you and offers you the post, they have a waiting list

P&K have difficulty recruiting and often have to persuade people to join. We need external advice, eg from SNH to have the bigger picture. Sometimes we have difficulty getting the access officers to take on what we want done. We do a lot of work then nothing happens.

Discussion 3: Work programming for LAFs/Re-inventing LAFs

Kenny (LLTNP AF) has three year programme, looked at added value rather than strategy, wanting members to be there asking questions if we are not delivering what we said we would do, look at access cases as they come up.

Second year will be core path plan review, keeping it focussed, not looking at promotion.

We can be flexible once the forum comes into being

Louise Kirk, Our forum was keen to look at core path planning. Opportunity arose to link it to sustainable development within groups, (Building Sustainable Communities).

This brought forward a programme of action that they have been looking at, exploring development on the forum, local and community funding. . Sustainable Communities provided funding for forward planning exercise.

Forward Scotland funding £1500 for training to help promote and develop the forum better within communities. Forum development and training is a standing item at every meeting.

They are actively involved in review of outdoor access strategy, which is now aligned to the single outcome

Kept engagement with health and wellbeing, I attend engagement network at the moment

An annual assessment, gives everyone the knowledge and understanding of what needs to be done, forum has a good sense of ownership of the programme. The work programme is being reviewed but I will share it when it is ready.

Forum has 15 members, plus 15 substitutes. It takes a lot of the access officer's time, but they are volunteers and need support

Jennifer Lothian, (secretariat for East Lothian). They have definitely found their role, they themselves raised strategy to think about where we are going for the next 5 years, suggested long-term aspirational paths.

I wrote 10 things - what do you think we should be doing next - for the forum to vote for their top 5, be proactive rather than reactive. They added conflict resolution. If they ask me to come and take notes I will, but they are independent, the public see them as a separate body from the council, very much THEIR forum

Kenny - when a case came to court the sheriff mentioned that the forum hadn't made a site visit

Linda Mathieson (Aberdeenshire) - sometimes the public contact the forum directly through their website. If we want forum's input they decide if they want to deal with it. They write to both parties, asking to become involved, if both parties agree they form a sub group and deal with it themselves. We may give them background information, put recommendation to the forum. Shows they are completely independent.

Fife forum has never actually got written permission from both parties

Louise Kirk - forum is encouraged to contribute to the local development plan

Andrew Mackintosh, it is difficult to generalise but you seem to have a much more proactive relationship then LAFs in England. English LAFs are not clear what they are or what they should do

Sue Hilder - we have a high profile cycling forum, but not a Local Access Forum. From the planning point of view they are very interested in what things don't happen. We have given a presentation, encouraged them to use the consultation processes available, high level strategies. Members are consultees to the local access plan, they can see what is going on even if it is not trickling down all the time.

Discussion 4: Managing People and Expectations

John Whyman, (Dundee LAF) Roles and responsibility is standing item on the agenda.

Some are members of other groups and use their links to contact the council. They realise that they can be empowered through the forum, but not as a forum.

Alison Irvine - from the start we have had an introductory process for new members, person spec, background details, your expectation, they are representing a stakeholder group, looking for balance and consensus. It guides expectations about what they forum is about, how we expect them to behave. We go through it prior to our meeting with a little introduction by the Chair and Vice Chair, have a chat about what is happening on the forum at the minute. They must declare any conflict of interest.

Alan Bannister - we co-ordinate the forum and it we didn't do that it would not exist. We have no chair, I ask one person to do it for a year at a time.

Carol Campbel l - we didn't have an access officer, membership and interest declined. Greenspace officer provided some support, but saw examples of the Chair pushing through their own agenda rather than that of the forum. A good Chair runs the meetings professionally.

Jennifer Lothian - we had a review in 2009 and the forum's role, remit, expectations, how it work is all written down. I meet a new person, or send it to them, chat through it. Roles are quite clear.

Douglas Grierson (Argyll and Bute) - Paths for All facilitated a number of meetings and were really helpful, brought the forum together, but they have not attended one since.

Jennifer Lothian - cyclists gave a presentation, then horse riders gave one so all members can understand each other's views and reach a consensus.

Overall - elected members on the forum is appreciated. Most offer expenses, though few people claim them.

Discussion 5: The Key to Creating a Sustainable LAF

Linda Mathieson (Aberdeenshire) - Chair and vice-chair have a maximum of four years in office.

We always have a pre-meeting, Chair, vice-chair and two access officers. Papers go out in advance, e-mail and snail mail.

We have £6000 allocated in our budget for the forum, covers production of leaflets and newsletter. Retired access officer takes minutes.

Realised attendance at our annual meeting was going down so now we go to the public, attending events.

Any good forum continually reviews itself. Aberdeenshire made a list of what they want to see going forward, and what is not to go forward. We will make a work programme from that. To keep the forum going does take access officer time, significant input, but benefits.

We have five meetings a year (two close together) to keep the momentum going We have a list of reserve representatives so we are quorate

Our members feel it would be good to meet other forums, perhaps regional groups as it can be a long journey to NAF/LAF

Louise looked at the forum raising its own funds. Forum can be partner in applications so can apply for money for things the forum wants to do. Ayrshire is delivering community based training with PfA, path construction, getting other groups constituted.