
CAIRNGORMS LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM

Title: Evaluation of LOAF Annual Event April 22nd 2006

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Purpose

The purpose of the paper is to feedback the comments received from the public on the success of the Annual Event and reflect on how the event might be structured in future.

Recommendations

The Forum are invited to consider the comments made and advise how the event could be structured in future years.

Background

1. Approximately 60 people attended the event, of which 20 were Forum members. Members of the public were issued with evaluation forms - twenty six evaluation forms were received and another three respondents came back via email.
2. Eighteen of the twenty six people came from the north and east of the Park – Tomintoul, Donside, Deeside and also from Aberdeen. The remainder came from Badenoch, Strathspey, and as far north as Inverness, and three forms were filled in anonymously. It is felt that where people came from was a reflection of where the event was located (Donside).
3. Comments from people are grouped under the following headings:

3.1 *Reasons for attending*

The primary reasons for attending were:

- To find out more about the Forum and meet the members
- To find out about core path planning

A slightly lesser number of people included 'networking' and 'listening to presentations' as additional reasons for attending

3.2 *Venue and location*

- Good venue
- Poor acoustics (lots of comments)
- Better use of microphone (lots of comments)
- Face audience away from windows
- Horse-shoe seating didn't work
- Suggestion to try and get speakers physically closer to audience
- Location not supported by some people – correlated with those who had further to travel

3.3 *Event timing*

- Might attract more younger people if event was held on mid summer evening
- Difficult time for land managers due to lambing
- Event should have finished earlier

3.4 *Presentations and speakers*

- Better introduction to speakers and explanation of links between speakers
- Provide water for speakers and a surface area e.g. desk for laying notes on
- Crown Estate has lots of money therefore is not necessarily a good model for communities developing path networks!
- The use of PowerPoint and photos worked
- Use discussion of a local issue to attract locals
- Ensure effective use of microphones

3.5 *Comments on opportunity for discussion and Q&A's*

- Very positive feedback on the time for discussion and Q&A sessions – several people commented that there wasn't enough time built in for this
- More focus for discussion e.g. use signage and notices as a basis for topical discussion
- Be more interactive e.g. use the expertise and advice of people in the audience – not on processes but substance
- Have some outdoor visits or practical sessions to engage people and draw in attendance

3.6 *Highlights of the Day*

- Dick Balharry's energy and enthusiasm
- Sandra Middleton's practical and local approach
- Chance to meet colleagues
- Opportunity to discuss maintenance funding for paths
- Chance to informally network
- Receiving information
- Better understanding of core path process
- The Glenlivet and Newtonmore presentations

Conclusion from Evaluation Forms

4. Overall people scored themselves either *very satisfied* or *satisfied* with the location and venue; the presentations and the opportunity for Q&A's'. The biggest criticism was levelled at the *timing* of the event (although people acknowledged that it was hard to please all) and the *acoustics* of the hall. It is recognised however that these comments were only received from a relatively small sample as only just over one third of attendees filled in evaluation forms.

Feedback from post-it sessions

5. As part of the post-it session, people were invited to identify the kinds of issues they would like the Forum to address. These fell into three broad categories and often took the form of questions for the Forum/Park Authority:

5.1 Role of the Forum

- Does the Forum have a role to play in responding to national consultations e.g. Rural Development Plan; the National Community Support for Action?
- What is the constitutional status of the Forum?
- Can the public attend Forum meetings?
- Can the Forum address the potential conflict between promotion and development of access and the conservation of the natural heritage qualities of the Park?
- Could more local people be involved in the Forum?

5.2 Funding and maintenance

- Could 'tourist authorities' help with maintenance?
- Could we avoid 'manicured' paths in upland areas?
- Whose responsibility is it to repair of damage to paths post-forestry works?
- How can the Forum ensure that communities' diverse ideas are addressed, as well as CNPA priorities (such as setting up a Trust)?

5.3 Outdoor access issues

- A number of issues were raised including dealing with prohibitory and intimidating notices; gates that bar cyclists and horses; car parking and specifically access at Glen Muick, Abergeldie and Loch Kinord

Overall Reflections of Event

6. The range of people's interest and questions went wider than simply on the role and activity of the Forum. Forum members did an excellent job of fielding and contributing to questions from members of the audience but on many occasions queries were more specifically directed at, and responded to by, Park Authority staff.
7. There is clearly still a lack of understanding about the role of the Forum and its status (for example the perception of the Forum as a 'lobbying' body; or its constitutional status); and also a concern that the Forum doesn't reflect 'local' enough interests.
8. There was, to some degree, a view from some quarters in the audience that the Forum had not achieved a great deal as yet and had only advised the Park Authority on a couple of issues. Whilst this is true, it does underplay the locus that the Forum has had in steering the Park Authority on best means of fulfilling its access remit. There is however the possibility that the number of cases that are dealt with by the Forum continues to remain relatively low. Responses to questions from the public in this area would therefore give the impression that the Forum does very little. A means of overcoming this perception might be to consider making the annual event a showcase for the work of the CNPA in outdoor access and visitor services. The progress and function of the LOAF would then come under scrutiny as part of this Annual Event.

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