
CAIRNGORMS LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM

Title: Reviewing the Forum – the results

Prepared by: Fran Pothecary, Outdoor Access Officer

Purpose: To present the Forum with the results and analysis of the 2 year review of the Forum's work March 2005-April 2007

Advice sought

That the Forum note the results of the review and support the proposals for change below(see last paragraph)

Background

1. a. When the Forum was established, it was agreed that two years into the life of the Forum there would be a review to assess how it was functioning and whether it was meeting its aims and objectives. At the March meeting Forum members were presented with a questionnaire to complete. **Eleven** members responded and the paper outlines the comments made, and draws out the significant points.

Representation and Involvement

2. a. **Do you think all relevant access interests are adequately represented on the Forum? If not, what interests are either missing or under-represented?**
 - **Seven** members answered that interests were adequately represented, with **two** identifying the need for disabled interests representation, and **one** mentioning the need to a representative of visitors to the Park. One suggested occasional representation from minority access interests e.g. geo-caching.
- b. **Do we need more skills or experience in the Forum? If so, what are they?**
 - As above, media skills and representation of disabled interests were mentioned
- c. **Are you satisfied that the Forum is made up of a committed membership and does everyone participate equally in meetings? If not, what suggestions would you wish to make to improve the current position?**
 - All responses were positive about the commitment and participation of members. The level of good natured debate was commented on and one respondent noted that land management voices are strong but not to the detriment of the forum ("far from it"). It was suggested by one member that a facilitated review in the Forum could be done – using the H' diagram as a tool for self assessment

Analysis of Representation and involvement

3. Overall a very high degree of satisfaction was achieved and many comments received attesting to the commitment and participation of Forum members in meetings. There appears to be a concern which was highlighted at the last meeting that disabled interests are not well represented on the Forum, partly because of the standing down of Ken

Macmillan who previously chaired the All-Abilities Group. This group has been re-established as Inclusive Cairngorms, is supported by the Park Authority and brings in a wider range of interests from excluded groups. As an aside it is worth noting that the appointment of Paul Corrigan, the recent Forum recruitee was partially made on the extent of his experience of working in the field of all-abilities and disabled access.

Operational Matters

4. a. **Is a minimum of four meetings a year, plus an annual open event, adequate to cover Forum business? If not, what would you view as the optimum number of meetings each year?**
 - All **eleven** respondents concluded yes, with two comments that 4 meetings a year was a minimum
- a. **Meetings alternate generally between the east and west of the Park – does this work in practice?**
 - Again a **conclusive yes** with two comments that Angus Glens are hard for people to get to and that the east side is inconvenient to travel to from the Central Belt.
- b. **Papers are sent by post to arrive 5 working days before the meeting – does this give you enough time for reading etc?**
 - **Nine** people responded in the affirmative with **two** comments that it was not long enough (10 working days rather than 5 was suggested by one respondent). There was a comment that it gave enough time for personal reading but not enough if consultation with others was required. Two respondents mentioned using email to send out papers, and one that the website papers aren't always up in time.
- c. **Do you believe there are sufficient resources directed towards the Forum's activities?**
 - A **conclusive yes** with one comment that there will never be enough resources!

Analysis of Operational matters

5. Overall people were happy with the timings, locations and numbers of meetings. There was an indication that there might not be enough time to read papers. The preparation of papers will often start several weeks in advance of a meeting and there is a fine balance between giving sufficient time for members to read papers, but ensuring that information is as up to date as possible.
6. Papers were originally sent out by email as well as hard copy and this was stopped due to technical problems encountered in sending lots of documents to a large number of people. One alternative would be to encourage members, or those who want, to download electronic copies of papers from the website, in addition to receiving hard copies from the Authority.

Role and Remit

7. a. **Is there a clear understanding amongst Forum members of the relationship between the Forum and the Park Authority?**
 - All **eleven** respondents felt there was a good understanding of the relationship between the Forum and the Board, although two mentioned the need to be reminded from time

to time and how this would be helpful for new members. One respondent was not entirely happy with the relationship.

b. Are the pre-Forum meeting training events worthwhile and how could they be improved?

- **Ten** respondents felt that the event were worthwhile with **one** member suggesting it was too soon to evaluate their usefulness, and another querying the costs v. benefits. One respondent suggested visits to Glenmore Lodge; the Park HQ; Inchroy Estate and Mar Lodge Estate – and another suggested bringing in more outside experts. There was a comment that the events shouldn't be called *training* events to avoid confusion with Continuing Professional Development objectives

c. Should the Park Authority make more use of Forum members' skills, outwith meetings and if so, how?

- **Seven** respondents felt that more use could be made of Forum members' skills particularly regarding local access issues and local opinions. However **three** respondents also acknowledged that this already happens and that the decision of whether to involve Forum members should be at the discretion of access staff. It was recognised that CPP consultation meetings offered opportunity for members to help, and that there was good attendance of Forum members at wider meetings e.g. the NAF/LAF Liaison events; good practice events and the SPRBA/NFUS organised events.

d. Are there areas of work you would like to see the Forum address, and if so what are they?

- The following suggestions were made by individuals: the work of other Forums; more issues and less strategy; local promotion of SOAC; an assessment of access legislation and help with path work. Other comments included that there was a full enough work programme and the Forum remit was at capacity.

e. What are the strengths of the Forum?

- All **eleven** respondents attested to the breadth, diversity, experience and commitment of Forum members. The Convenor and Vice Convenor were commended as was the internal working relationships between Authority and Forum. There were several accolades for how well the Forum functions as a team and listens to each others views.

f. What are the areas for improvement in the Forum (if any)?

- Respondents would like to see the following: more case studies; how other Forums operate; reduced and more succinct paperwork; reduced focus on processes and more on access experiences and provision; a closer relationship between Board and Forum; more dynamism

Analysis of Role and Remit

8. There was a clear understanding of the relationship between the Park Authority and Forum although it was recommended that reminders could be given from time to time!
9. The training events were applauded but it was recommended that the name be changed to avoid confusion with CPD objectives. More suggestions were given for places to visit.

10. The majority of respondents felt more use could be made of Forum members skills' but also several respondents acknowledged that this is already happens, which leads to a conclusion that there may not be a clear picture of Forum members involvement outside the meetings. Certainly Forum members are active beyond the confines of Forum meetings e.g. those that attend national events and other Forum; core path planning events and sub-groups set up by the Authority. Some members have also given advice on individual access issues - however they are often responding as locals or specialists 'in the know' about specific issues - that is, they are not speaking on behalf of the Forum.
11. There is a thirst for more case studies, less paperwork and more of a look at on the ground practical issues. To date the outdoor access caseload has not thrown up many issues which have required the intervention and advice of the Forum. It is hoped that this can be met in some way by the afternoon workshop sessions, coupled with further presentation of 'key issues' thrown up by casework and the occasional access issue itself.

Communication

12. a. **Do you think that the Forum should have a more independent role in communicating with the public? If so, how could it be achieved?**
 - **Eight** respondents said that the Forum should **not** have a more independent role in communicating with the public – two of those respondents citing possible confusion for the public over the role of the Forum, and the clarity of there being a single point of contact for all information about outdoor access – that being through the Park Authority itself. **One** respondent thought that the Forum **was** fully independent as it was. **One** respondent suggested communicating through a Park newsletter (although it was not clear whether this was a suggestion for a *Forum* newsletter or more publicity through *Parklife* itself)

Analysis of Communication

15. Overall it was agreed that the Forum should not have a more independent role, although the fact that one respondent thought that the Forum **was** fully independent may be indicative that different people will have a different understanding what "independence" means. Certainly the fact that the main point of contact about outdoor access issues are the Authority staff, and that the Forum is heavily supported by Authority resources means that it is not operationally independent and it is unlikely and undesirable to change this status. The question of the newsletter has been raised before but it is clear at present that the Authority staff lack resources and time to commit to, or support, this initiative. Use is made of Park Life, the Park Authority's twice yearly magazine, in communicating the Forum's news.

Objectives and functions

14. a. **On a scale of 1-5, how well do you think the Forum meets its objectives and performs its' functions? (1 = not at all, 5 = fully)**
 - **Three** respondents scored 5; **seven** scored 4 and **one** scored 3 – that is **46 out of 55**.

Summary

15. Overall there is a high degree of satisfaction in the way the Forum is functioning. It is suggested that the staff will:

- Ensure that papers are placed timeously on the website;
- Examine the suggestions for pre-meeting workshop events, including the need to examine the relationship between the Authority and the Forum on a regular basis; and
- Consider the role and potential involvement of Forum members in access matters outwith the meetings.

The Forum is asked to note the results of the review and support the proposals for change above.

Fran Potheary
Outdoor Access Officer
franpotheary@cairngorms.co.uk