

National Access Forum Update – June 2020

Summary of main topics - National Access Forum virtual meeting 5 June 2020

Access during Coronavirus and the easing of lockdown -

Forum members gave their views on access during the coronavirus emergency and the easing of lockdown. There had been very good engagement between Forum members, SNH and SG in promoting messages during the coronavirus emergency. Joint messaging across the different agencies had proved to be very effective on the ground. The Forum identified the many positive aspects of increased access during the Coronavirus crisis, including new access takers and the opportunity to sustain responsible outdoor activity in the future.

The picture for the National Parks was that generally there had been good compliance with the restrictions during lock down and subsequent easing in phase one. Some local problems were identified included; informal camping, littering and human waste with other localised issues from BBQs, littering and illegal parking. Some antisocial behaviour; fires and building of unauthorised mountain bike trails were also reported by Woodland Trust Scotland but in general there were less problems than those in England. More advice for the public would be required in relation to wild camping in particular the need to discourage roadside camping.

However, particular problems for land managers were reported in the Central belt resulting in livestock deaths and financial losses. It was suggested that these had been exacerbated because access officers and Police Scotland resources were spread thinly and unable to assist, especially during the early weeks. There were also examples cited of challenges on farmland with some farmers preventing access on paths and alleged aggressive behaviour. The Forum agreed that there was a lack of awareness of the Code including access with dogs especially for new access takers. There was therefore a need to continue to promote basic messages on responsible access but also the need to maintain underlying access rights.

SNH had recognised the large number of new outdoor access users and its SOAC promotional activity therefore included high level messages about the existence of the Code and the need for responsible behaviour. In terms of on-going SOAC and Covid communications; there had been 427,000 views on Facebook, 19 traditional media articles, 15,000 visits to SOAC Covid message pages and 75,000 to the wider SOAC web site. The Forum also raised a number of potential issues for future access communications including; protecting ground nesting birds susceptible to disturbance, promoting the Code with the golf sector to facilitate better access in line with the Code, and the need to provide more responsible access messages in a novel way.

Concerns were expressed by the Forum about the number of rangers being furloughed and potential job losses in the voluntary sector e.g. NTS countryside staff. The importance of the work that rangers do in relation to engagement with the public and raising awareness of the Code, maintenance and management of the extensive trail network and contractors was highlighted. The importance of access in a greener future and the role of the education sector, including opportunities to include the Code in the school curriculum under learning for sustainability was also raised.

Going forward through lock down easing, the Forum recommended the need to join up access thinking with Transport Scotland, Active Scotland and Public Health Scotland and

others involved in linking 'places for people'. There was a need to co-ordinate the reopening of sites and facilities and it was important to ensure that the messaging is appropriate for all Scotland.

The Forum agreed there were potential opportunities to translate the current increase in local outdoor exercise to a legacy of increased responsible outdoor recreation and active travel. However this needed to be supported with adequate resourcing of outdoor access including; access officers, rangers as well as the development of networks and greenspaces and recommendations were made to approach Ministers. The Convenor welcomed the wide ranging discussion and encouraged on-going bilateral discussion between NAF members during the different phases of the lockdown easing. He agreed with the suggestion to write to Ministers to highlight the value of access to the outdoors and the need for future investment.

Mediation -

Forum members reviewed and endorsed the final draft of the NAF Guidance Note on Mediation. The mediation sub group were invited to consider the next steps including the Exchange of ideas on promoting the Guidance Note, and related matters (e.g. how to take forward the ideas about building skills in mediation for access cases). An update would be provided at the next NAF meeting in September.

NAF/LAF Joint meeting 20 March 2020 –

The joint NAF/LAF meeting planned for the 20 March 2020 had been postponed until the autumn of 2020 due to the Coronavirus outbreak. With the continuing need to maintain physical distancing it is looking unlikely that the meeting will be feasible this year. Forum members agreed to further postpone the joint NAF/LAF meeting until the spring of 2021. The current programme would be revised later in 2020 with input from the LAFs.

Future NAF meetings –

The next Forum meetings are; NAF: meeting on **Wednesday 16th September 2020** at Battleby, NAF: **Wednesday 27th January 2021** at Battleby, NAF/LAF Joint meeting **Friday 26 March 2021** at Battleby, NAF **Wednesday 2 June 2021** at Battleby.

For more information or comment on any of the above topics, please contact the NAF Secretary – Janice Winning (NAFsec@nature.scot ; 0131 316 2639). Further information can be found on the National Access Forum pages at <http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/access-forum/>.