

Highland Environment Forum

Notes from the meeting held on 14 03 16
Highland Council HQ, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness

Attendees

Name	organisation
Alison Craig	Changeworks
Alistair Duff	SEPA
Archie Prentice	Practically Green
Ashley Gould	Highland Council
Aubrey Carradice	SNH
Caroline Vawdrey	HEN
Claire Stewart	NHS Highland
Cllr Audrey Sinclair	Highland Council
Cllr George Farlow	Highland Council
Cllr Matthew Reiss	Highland Council
Colin Gough	Police Scotland
Dan Sutherland	Police Scotland
Daniel Johns	RES
Don o'Driscoll	JMT
Drew McFarlane-Slack	SLE
Fiona Cameron	LEADER
Gemma Cassells	Highland Council
George Hogg	SNH
Giles Brockman	FCS
Ian Wilson	National Farmers Union (Scotland)
James Merryweather	Skye and Lochalsh Environment Forum
Janet Bromham	Highland Council
John Risby	FCS
Jonathan Willet	Highland Council
Kamilla Daroczi	HIE
Keith Duncan	SNH
Kenna Chisholm	RSPB
Kenny Taylor	SWT
Leah Hendry	NHS Highland
Marian Brown	SNH
Mary Ann Schurei	HIE

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Leah Hendry	NHS Highland
Marian Brown	SNH
Mary Ann Schurei	HIE
Mhairi Wylie	HTSI
Michael Middlehurst	Police Scotland
Nicole Wallace	Highland Council

Name	organisation
Paul Copestake	SEPA
Rebecca Fretwell	Energy Saving Scotland (transport specialist)
Ro Scott	Highland Biological Recording Group
Roger Cottis	Skye and Lochalsh Environment Forum
Stephen Carr	Highland Council
Stewart Sandison	SNH
Sue Engstrand	UHI
Susan Carstairs	LEG
Suzann Barr	Abriachan Forest Trust
Vanessa Halhead	HEN

Apologies

Carol Mackintosh
Diana Gilbert
Jenny Wares
John Macdonald

1) Welcome and introduction

George Hogg welcomed Forum members, and updated them on a number of issues:

1. Webcasting of the meeting has proven too expensive. Suggestions of alternative, straight forward means of broadcasting the Forum will be welcomed.
2. Local democratisation requirements from Scottish Government, the Community Empowerment Act and the budget restrictions placed on agencies who will deliver these, serve to emphasise the importance of communication and knowledge exchange through media such as the Highland Environment Forum.
3. Public sector cuts will have implications for how the forum will operate. Highland Council biodiversity staff will be going and the Carbon CLEVER team reduced to a single staff member.
4. The reduction in support staff will mean that it is even more important for Forum members to get involved in taking forward the work of the Forum. In addition to the working groups forum members can also share information with other members by emailing Caroline Vawdrey, who will circulate it.

2) Working group updates

a) **Land use strategy**, Nicole Wallace, Highland Council

(update paper previously circulated and available [here](#))

The working group is waiting for decisions from Scottish Government on the Scottish Land Use Strategy, and whether this will be accompanied by any additional resources, before taking forward and further development work in the Highlands. This new strategy should be in place by 1st April 2016. In the meantime, the partnership has agreed to meet informally and consider land use strategy issues as they arise. The first plan that will be considered by the group will be the Highland Indicative Forestry Strategy, which is to be refreshed, through a Highland Council contract. The review is timetabled to begin in the next 2 months.

Drew McFarlane-Slack drew attention to SLE Wildlife Estates public events to be held on 14th May in Glen Muick and Allargue As part of the Cairngorms Nature Festival. Places must be booked in advance.

The Scottish Land Use Strategy paper has been published since the Forum meeting, and is available [here](#).

b) **Biodiversity**, Janet Bromham, Highland Council

(update paper previously circulated and available [here](#))

The Highland Biodiversity plan, launched at the Sept 2015 Forum meeting, relies on HEF partners working together to deliver the actions identified in the plan. Progress on these is shown in the update table.

The Biodiversity Working Group met on 24th February to identify priority areas of work, in the light of agency budget cuts, and with the loss of Highland Council biodiversity staff. Examples of the priorities identified are: the lonesome pine and marine heritage projects, sustainable urban drainage (SUDS) and natural flood management, volunteering collaboration, data hub development.

The Working Group is looking for new members and volunteers are requested from Forum members. The intention is to meet perhaps once a year, with email correspondence used to conduct most of the business.

c) **Volunteering Collaboration**, Jonathan Willet, Highland Council

(update paper previously circulated and available [here](#))

- The volunteering collaboration group has agreed to be very pragmatic about what it can deliver. The focus of the work will be to meet and exchange information and views (this has already proven valuable in identifying local links and mechanisms) and to promote volunteering through press releases. These will go out at Easter, June volunteering week, October tattie holidays, with Jonathan Willet to do the first press release through the Highland Council.
- Stephen Wiseman will chair the group in future.
- The group will continue to report to the Forum, and there may be future opportunities to link with area community planning partnerships as they develop.

Drew McFarlane-Slack drew attention to work on volunteering that is being carried out within the Cairngorms National Park and the potential to learn from their experience.

All Forum members gave many thanks to Janet and Jonathan for all their hard work and support over many years.

3) Carbon CLEVER citizens panel survey, Stephen Carr, Highland Council

PDF of slide presentation available [here](#).

Carbon CLEVER report to Council resources committee, showing survey results, available [here](#).

The Carbon CLEVER Citizens' Panel Survey contained more than 40 questions and went out to more than 2000 people, over 1000 of whom responded. These were split roughly 50/50 male and female, 44% of whom were retired. The respondents lived across the Highland region.

Stephen drew Forum members attention to the fact that Carbon CLEVER is happy to share the data gathered for further analysis.

Some survey highlights:

- The number of people recognising that climate change is an urgent problem has risen since a previous survey in 2011, but so also has the number who think that climate change is happening. This suggests that the subject may be becoming more polarised.
- Results suggested that there is still room to improve home energy efficiency and a need to tackle fuel poverty, with 73% of respondents stating they were unable to heat their homes to a comfortable level.
- Cars remain the most popular form of travel, with convenience and speed cited as the main reasons for this. More and cheaper services were identified as actions that would make use of public transport more popular.
- Many of the factors that inhibit the use of electric vehicles - the upfront cost, a lack of charging points, and the distance that can be travelled on one charge are beginning to be addressed.
- Having greenspace near to where respondents live was seen as important or very important to 75% of respondents. There was a correspondingly high support for habitat restoration and tree planting.
- Nearly all respondents stated that they carry out recycling.
- There was increased support for renewable energy where community benefit and small scale.
- 45% of respondents said that they would consider investing in community energy.

Ali Craig noted that the Scottish Government will be consulting on how to distribute funds from fines to power companies to reduce fuel poverty. She will send this link to Forum members.

4) Agriculture forestry and other land use greenhouse gas emissions, Susan Carstairs, researcher with Edinburgh University

PDF of slide presentation available [here](#).

Susan has been working with Edinburgh University for the past four years to try and understand what local carbon accounting means in practice, and using Lochaber as her case study area.

Susan provided a breakdown of land use in Lochaber, and preliminary indications of what this means in terms of CO₂ emissions and capture. The calculations are based on a common framework established by the IPCC and used by the UK inventory since 1992.

The June 2012 agricultural census has provided the most recent data for analysis.

Some data:

- Lochaber land use includes 14% forest, 10% improved grassland, 21% acid grassland, 40% heathland
- 72% of the soils are organo-mineral, most of them being peaty gleys. The Lochaber soils store 131.5 million tonnes CO₂
- Of the 54,000 tonnes of agricultural CO₂ emissions, 72% are from animal enteric emissions (belching). This is higher than the UK average, but Lochaber is an livestock-based agricultural economy
- Lochaber holds c. 84,000 ha of forestry. There are a complex array of factors that will need to be considered in calculating if there is a net CO₂ capture from forestry. Factors to take into account include: land preparation, species chosen, tree biomass (captures nearly 700,000 tonnes CO₂), end use for timber (60 per cent for saw mills, 40 per cent to Dalcross wood processing), CO₂ held in the forest litter. There is further analysis to be undertaken in this area.
- Changes in land use can lead to changes in the CO₂ held. For e.g. Grassland to forest land increases CO₂ storage by 47tC/ha whereas grassland to settlement loses CO₂ storage by 187tC/ha

In response to questions Susan provide the following additional information:

- Deep peat holds a third to half of the terrestrial CO₂ stored
- Deer - are regarded by the IPCC as wild, and so they are not counted in official figures. However, there are 41,000 of them in Lochaber producing 18,600 enteric CO₂ emissions.
- Deer have less CO₂ emissions per head 22 cf 88 from cattle - so eating more deer is recommended!
- Land abandonment - with no current agricultural activity can lead to carbon storage gain as a result of heather and tree growth. This can also be impacted on by deer.
- Forestry - the final report will take into account CO₂ emissions during preparation for forestry planting and harvesting. For maximum CO₂ storage hardwood trees would be planted and never harvested. Susan understands that Sitka spruce is the best plantation tree for CO₂ uptake, but audience comment suggested that a recent scientific paper showed a net CO₂ emission from monoculture forestry

There currently no other studies looking at local carbon accounting, but perhaps this may become possible during the development of land use strategies.

5) **SRDP**, Stewart Sandison, SNH

PDF of slide presentation available [here](#)

The new SRDP schemes were launched in early 2015 and includes the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) this replaces the RDC Rural Priorities Scheme.

AECS is intended to:

1. Deliver the 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity by:
 - supporting appropriate management for vulnerable and iconic species and habitats, strengthening ecological networks, controlling invasive nonnative species and enhancing the condition of protected nature sites
2. Contribute to Scotland's world-leading climate change targets by:
 - reducing greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture and securing carbon stores in peatlands and other organic soils
3. Meet obligations to improve water quality under the EU Water Framework Directive by:
 - reducing diffuse pollution
 - control flooding through natural flood risk management
4. Support organic farming
5. Preserve the historic environment
6. Improve public access

The current round of the European Cooperation Action Fund (ECAAF) is open until 15th April. This is for funding to undertake feasibility studies for joint working between two or more partners (these can include land managers, companies and local authorities), that will deliver area based benefits - eg deer reduction, flood management, peatland management, woodland creation, improving public access.

The programme has £10 million available, is delivered jointly by SRIPD and SNH and is available to all rural areas and settlements of under 3000 people.

During questions it was noted that:

- SEPA has a Water Environment Fund.
- The current croft wood is not very user friendly. For example it stipulates that a shelter belt must be 15 m wide, which is unrealistic for many crofting areas.
- Three croft woodland forest support officers have been employed to try and help address any issues.

6) **LEADER**, Fiona Cameron, Highland Council

PDF of slide presentation available [here](#).

This Highland LEADER round has a budget of £8.8 million (of which £2.2 million is earmarked for administration). Decisions will be made by 7 local area partnership group (LAG), and 1 strategic partnership group.

This round of LEADER is working to 2 strategic aims, 4 key themes, 5 cross cutting themes and 10 outcomes (see PDF for details). It is hoped that the scheme will be open for applications in April, although the IT system will not be ready until August.

Strategic Vision and Aim

- Stronger communities leading to improved quality of life for those who
- live in them
- Growth and diversification of the local economy

Underpinning this vision are 4 themes

Themes

- Stronger and more resilient communities
- A growing and diversified economy that promotes sustainability
- Increased and sustained local services and activities
- Enhanced cultural, natural and heritage assets

To apply, you should first fill in an expression of interest form on the [Scottish Rural Network website](#).

Each LEADER LAG will set its own intervention rate, but it is likely to be c. 50% in most instances.

During questions attention was drawn to the potential to use ward discretionary funding and local participatory budgeting to match fund LEADER.

7) **The Community Empowerment Act**, Mhairi Wylie, Highland Third Sector Interface

PDF of slide presentation available [here](#).

Further information can also be found on the Scottish Government [website](#).

In the Act:

- The communities covered are those both of place and of shared interest.
- **National Outcomes** will be set by the Scottish Government.
- **Community planning** (under the heading of which the Highland Environment Forum is funded) will have a legislative framework as a result of the act. This will include expanding the number of agencies involved in community planning and sharing responsibilities across more agencies.
- The act includes **Participation requests**, to which agencies are expected to respond positively, and which could lead to communities taking over a service - as long as they can show that they can deliver a better service. At present there is no right of appeal to public body decision on a participation request.
- **Community right to buy** will be extended to allowing communities to purchase neglected and abandoned land without agreement from the owner.
- **Asset transfer requests** will have to a community controlled body, who will need to show how the community can use it better than its current use. If these conditions are met, the the presumption is that the public body should say yes. There will be the right to appeal transfer decisions.
- **Common good property** - There will be a statutory duty to make common good asset information publicly available.
- **Participatory budgeting** - encouraging citizen involvement in how public authorities spend.

In response to questions Mhairi made it clear that there would be no additional resources to deliver the act.

It was noted that community planning requires the emphasis to be placed on reducing inequalities, but that extra resources (not available) are required to do this

8) **The work of a Wildlife Crime Officer**, Dan Sutherland, Police Scotland

PDF of slide presentation available [here](#).

Some elements of a Wildlife Crime Officer's work

- A wildlife crime officer provides a single point of contact within the police service and has a varied remit that includes carrying out searches, obtaining warrants and community engagement. The post also covers Rural Watch which assists with reducing rural crime.
- The post is a requirement of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, and the wildlife crime officer can advise the police service of their powers, direct them to where to find help, and will review and coordinate action on incidents.
- Community outreach includes attending public events with the Police Scotland wildlife crime trailer and using social edit in order to provide up to date information.

9) Launch of the Highland Partnership Against Wildlife Crime (HPAW), Colin Gough, Police Scotland, Area commander South Highland

The Highland Partnership Against Wildlife Crime has been developed as a result of joint working between Police Scotland and a number of partner bodies, representing conservation and land management interests.

Police Scotland's involvement in HPAW is led by Mike Middlehurst, previously working on wildlife crime in Grampian.

The Police Scotland commitment to tackling wildlife crime is shown by the fact that there are now 20 wildlife crime officers (up from 8 in 2014). There are currently c.100 investigations taking place, though these may not all turnout to be wildlife crimes.

The HPAWS will be managed by a relatively small steering group chaired by Ian Wilson, NFUS, with Keith Duncan, SNH as vice-chair and the secretariat provided by Police Scotland. However Colin also emphasised the valuable role that the Highland Environment Forum can play in formulating ideas and assessing progress.

The HPAW will now be moving into its action phase. Dan Sutherland post is now permanent and he and the HPAW and will be working together over the next few years to make sure that it is widely understood what wildlife crime is, and that it is not acceptable.

10) Feedback

Forum members are invited to let Caroline know what they think of the Forum and what ideas they have for future meetings.

11) Next meeting

September 2016