

NATIONAL ACCESS FORUM – JANUARY 2019

PAPER ON EXTERNAL FUNDING CHALLENGES FOR PUBLIC ACCESS POST BREXIT.

Background

1. At its September 2018 meeting, NAF members requested a discussion paper on external funding challenges for public access post Brexit. Given the many uncertainties, writing it has proved difficult and so this should be regarded as a discussion paper, which can be redefined in the light of further input from NAF members and other sources.

Rationale for funding public access

2. The rationale for seeking public money for access is that many of the benefits from access are “public benefits”. As highlighted at the NAF meeting on 7 February 2018, these benefits include health and well-being; in addition, improved access creates opportunities for tourism and recreation businesses, as well as active travel and safer routes to school, providing a wide range of economic benefits and helping to mitigate climate change.

3. Public money is needed (i) to help create and maintain the physical infrastructure on the ground such as paths, gates, way marking etc.(there are particular, long-standing challenges in supporting the maintenance of access infrastructure) and (ii) to provide the capacity necessary to promote public access and to address problems/promote messages about responsible access.

Current sources of funding

4. The main sources of funding include (i) public funding, by local authorities and National Parks Authorities (NPA), the Scottish Government (SG) and other public bodies, and the EU; (ii) lottery and voluntary sector funding and (iii) private funding, including income from charges (e.g. parking). In practice, there can be overlap, with particular projects receiving funding from a variety of sources.

Public funding

- Local authority/NPA expenditure. There is no comprehensive data about local authority/NPA expenditure on public access. In general, however, this has been falling over recent years due to other pressures on local authorities. (As noted at the September 2016 NAF meeting, the SG allocates £8.1 million per year to local authorities for land access as Grant Aided Expenditure; in effect this goes into a general funding pot which local authorities can use as they wish.) The number of Access Officer posts has fallen from 67 in 2006 to 50 in 2016¹; this has knock-on effects for the effectiveness of the access legislation as it is often Access Officers who are able to “nip problems in the bud” and help identify pragmatic solutions to local problems.
- SNH expenditure on promoting access. When the access legislation was first launched in 2005 the Scottish Government gave it a three-year budget of over £2 million to publicise and promote the Code². In the early days, SNH also provided

¹ See Annex 1 to paper on Paper on the activity of Local Access For a, considered at NAF meeting in September 2018.

²

significant grant funding to local authorities for core path network development, but this has now been transferred to the SG Grant Aided Expenditure budget settlements for local authorities referred to above. Currently, SNH supports the work of NAF, maintains the SOAC website, develops guidance and educational material, and runs communication programmes relating to responsible access.

- SNH is the lead organisation responsible for over-seeing the delivery of the National Walking and Cycling Network (NWCN) in partnership with Sustrans and Scottish Canals. The NWCN is a national strategic development under the National Planning Framework (NPF3) which runs from 2015 – 2020, with £25 million identified for improvements and developments over the initial 5 years. The longer term vision is for the network to extend to 8,000 km by 2035. As part of NWCN SNH is supporting the improvement, development and promotion of Scotland's Great Trails (SGT).
- In 2017/18 Forest Enterprise Scotland spent £13.9 million on its “communities, recreation and tourism” programme³ on the National Forest Estate. This was partially offset by income from these activities of £3.5 million.
- Scottish Canals funds public access on the estate it manages - it manages its assets for tourism and general recreation as well as navigation and regeneration⁴.
- The SRDP Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) forms part of the overall EU Common Agricultural Policy support for rural Scotland and is co-financed by the EU and includes the Improving Public Access scheme (IPA) Over the last 4 years £8.4M has been allocated to IPA schemes across Scotland's rural areas, with a final allocation of £3.5M made for the 2018 applications. The IPA scheme has now ended as funds have been fully committed, following a record number of high quality applications.
- Elements of the Forestry Grant Scheme (also co-financed by the EU as part of the SRDP) include payments for improved public access in (e.g.) privately owned forests and woodlands that are not managed by Forest Enterprise.
- Natural and Cultural Heritage Fund for the Highlands and Islands⁵. This Challenge Fund of £5 million of EU European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) money, administered by SNH, is being made available through a single competitive funding round opening in January 2019 and closing in April 2019. It aims to support around 10 major projects (eligible costs of approx. £360 k) to be delivered by 2022. The type of projects (which include elements of public access) sought are:
 - Interpretive media to promote natural and cultural heritage assets consistent with sensitive management and sustainable use
 - Infrastructure investment to expand the provision of tourist facilities

OST%20JUNE%202017/David/other%20service/NAF/OLAF/Motions,%20Questions%20and%20Answers%20Search%20-%20Parliamentary%20Business%20_%20%20C2%A0Scottish%20Parliament.html

³ <https://scotland.forestry.gov.uk/images/corporate/pdf/Forest-Enterprise-Scotland-Annual-Report-and-Accounts-2017-2018.pdf>, page 61

⁴ <https://www.scottishcanals.co.uk/corporate/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/08/Scottish-Canals-Annual-Report-Accounts-2017-18-.pdf>, page 8.

⁵ Further details at: <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/funding/natural-and-cultural-heritage-fund-nchf>.

- Improved accessibility, interpretation and quality of visitor experiences
 - New products or services based on the region's natural and cultural resources, particularly for the tourism sector.
- Green Infrastructure fund (2014- 2020)⁶. SNH also manages an EU ERDF fund of £15 million which aims to improve Scotland's urban environment by increasing and enhancing greenspaces, including access to them. Improved accessibility is only one of the criteria for improving greenspaces but nevertheless this an important fund for improving access in the urban context.
 - Transport Scotland offers a number of funding opportunities for active travel by allocating funding to partner organisations that are responsible for delivering walking and cycling infrastructure and behaviour change projects across Scotland⁷. These include:
 - Community Links (Sustrans): this funding is for walking and cycling infrastructure projects such as paths, junctions and routes.
 - Community Links PLUS (Sustrans) supports larger, innovative, segregated paths that take away road space from cars.
 - Safer Routes to Schools (Sustrans). This funding is for walking and cycling infrastructure projects around schools, colleges and universities.
 - National Cycle Network improvements and signage (Sustrans), to deliver physical improvements to the National Cycle Network.
 - Regional Transport Partnerships support and Strategic Partnerships (Sustrans), to support delivery of active travel infrastructure.
 - Smarter Choices, Smarter Places (Paths for All). This funding is for projects that work to make walking and cycling a transport mode of choice for short local journeys.
 - Community Paths Grants (Paths for All), to create, improve, maintain and promote community paths.
 - Low Carbon Travel and Transport Challenge Fund. This is a ERDF capital fund available to support the delivery of active travel and low carbon hubs and paths.
 - Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund⁸. This is managed by Visit Scotland and was created in response to the increasing popularity of outstanding scenic areas leading to pressures on infrastructure and negative impacts on some local communities. The First Minister announced a £6 million for this fund in October 2017 to support sustainable, well planned, inspiring, and collaborative infrastructure projects that focus on improving the visitor experience and enable more visitors to enjoy Scotland's rural communities.

Some of these funding sources are also applicable to upland paths, although these tend to raise particular challenges because of the relatively high cost and specialised nature of upland pathwork.

⁶ Further information is available at: <https://www.greeninfrastructurescotland.scot/>.

⁷ Further details are available at: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/our-approach/active-travel/active-travel-funding-opportunities/>.

⁸ <https://www.visitscotland.org/supporting-your-business/funding/rural-tourism-infrastructure-fund>.

Lottery and voluntary sector funding

- Lottery Funds can be suitable for large scale projects. One example (presented at the NAF meeting in February 2018) is the Heritage Lottery Fund *Mountains and the People Project*, which is run by the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland and is upgrading upland paths in Scotland's National Parks⁹.
- Voluntary bodies, such as Woodland Trust Scotland, NTS and JMT, raise and spend considerable sums of money for improving public access, especially on the properties that they own/manage. They also make use of grants, such as AECS and the Forestry Grant Scheme.
- The Single Use Carrier Bag Charge Fund. SG encourages retailers to donate the net proceeds of this charge to good causes, such as community access projects.
- There are large numbers of local groups around Scotland that are very active in supporting local initiatives by raising funds and undertaking practical work.

Private/hybrid funding

- In addition to private funding (e.g. by philanthropic landowners) there is also hybrid funding where income is used to leverage public money and lottery money. For example, the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland, referred to above, uses car park income as match funding.
- Transient visitor levy (tourist tax) and voluntary visitor giving could provide significant funding opportunities in the future. For example, the Perth and Kinross Countryside Trust raises funds for its Big Tree Country project through supporter hotels who collect voluntary donations from their guests.

Brexit

5. Brexit is most likely to have an adverse impact on the elements of public funding that are currently co-financed by the EU (such as the SRDP and ERDF), but if it also leads to a period of economic downturn this will clearly affect the general funding climate.

6. As a first step towards preparing for post Brexit funding in rural Scotland the SG published a consultation paper on "Stability and Simplicity: proposals for a rural funding transition period" in June 2018¹⁰. This included the statement that:

"In Scotland, we are fortunate to have world-class rights of public access to the countryside. AECS provides support for new and improved paths and will encourage responsible public outdoor access for the full range of users, and help to integrate access and recreational use with good land management. This support provides sustainable resources for local communities and visitors, and helps to provide opportunities for increasing physical activity and improving health."

⁹ See <http://themountainsandthepeople.org.uk/>.

¹⁰ https://consult.gov.scot/agriculture-and-rural-communities/economy-post-brexit-transition/user_uploads/00537221.pdf

7. In its response, NAF emphasised that realising these benefits depends upon adequate funding to provide and maintain the physical and social infrastructure necessary to facilitate and underpin responsible outdoor access; NAF also stated that the Forestry Grant Scheme should continue to provide adequate funding to support the costs of providing woodland access, including special provision for recreation facilities in woods in and around towns ¹¹. The overall summary of responses published by the SG in November 2018 briefly referred to access, stating that “There was strong support for the purpose of AECS overall ... Broad themes that came through [included] ... ensuring there was sufficient focus on all key priorities for rural Scotland (e.g. historic environment, access and organics)...” ¹².

8. SNH is currently recruiting for a temporary post to help with the Brexit transition by reviewing the IPA and preparing recommendations for future funding options. The post-holder will work with NAF (and other stakeholder groups) in reviewing IPA - its successes, lessons learnt and what might be good for the future. SNH will also look at the other EU structural funds such as ERDF that have funded access infrastructure.

Conclusion and points for discussion

9. Clearly, there is complex funding environment, not least because access helps meet a range of objectives and the funding is derived from different sources. Challenges faced by access authorities, and others looking for funding, can include: the resourcing of multiple funding applications with different reporting procedures; funding maintenance activities; managing multi-year developments with annual project budgets; and the problem of getting “match-funding” for projects.

10. NAF members may wish to discuss the following:

- Is this a useful framework within which to consider funding for public access?
- Is there anything missing, or inaccurately presented?
- What will be the impact of changes to the SRDP/ERDF?
- What is the current role of advocacy in making the case for funding public access?
How Can this be developed?
- What can Forum members do to help facilitate funding for access after Brexit?

January 2019

¹¹ <file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/National%20Access%20Forum%20Scotland%20-%20Consultation%20Response.pdf>.

¹² <https://consult.gov.scot/agriculture-and-rural-communities/economy-post-brexit-transition/>, page 14.