

NATIONAL ACCESS FORUM – 20 September 2019

Scottish Rural Development Plan (SRDP) and Improving Public Access (IPA) Update

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to update the National Access Forum on the work of the IPA review group.

Background

2. Following the decision at the last NAF meeting, on 29 May 2019, to set up an IPA sub group a meeting was held on 20 August 2019, convened by SNH at the Stirling Office, see Appendix for list of attendees.
3. The purpose of the sub-group was agreed as:
 - SNH to keep the NAF informed of progress with the IPA review and the development of access related elements of agricultural and land use policy and scheme delivery following on from CAP and SRDP.
 - To enable the NAF to discuss and make informed representations as appropriate, on agricultural and land use based funding mechanisms and also the wider topic of funding for outdoor access in Scotland.

The meeting covered 3 key elements summarised below:

Scheme and Policy Update

4. With the Scottish Rural Development Programme coming to an end in 2020, along with the European Common Agricultural Policy and EU exit, the Scottish Government has proposed a programme of stability and simplicity for agriculture during the transition period. This may provide an opportunity for IPA but is subject to many variables; however in the longer term there will be new policy and programmes for agriculture, land use and rural development in Scotland, within which it is hoped public access, and the many public benefits that it offers, will be a part of. As part of the preparations for a period of new policy and programme development, SNH is reviewing the IPA scheme.

IPA Review progress

5. SNH have been collecting and reviewing the data on IPA and have started to gather stakeholder views on the scheme. The data will be added to as the remaining contracts are delivered in 2019 and further information on final payments is received from RPID.

Some examples include:

- 234 applications and 137 IPA contracts issued over 4 years
- Total value of contracts issued £8.5M for 166km of path.
- The highest number of IPA contracts issued in an access authority area was Aberdeenshire = 35 contracts with total value of £2.5M
- No contracts in Angus, West Dunbartonshire, East Dunbartonshire, Clacks and four of the city councils.

- Applicants were a mix of landowners, tenants, crofters, countryside/community trusts, NGOs, LAs and NPAs.
 - Least popular capital items include: tree safety, steel picnic tables, gabions and 1- way timber gates.
6. A survey monkey is currently running to give a snap shot of scheme awareness levels and appetite amongst landowners, agents and land managers. Some further individual stakeholder meetings are planned, including with NFUS, Access Authorities and Forestry Scotland.
 7. The draft IPA Review findings will be presented at the NAF on 29 January 2020 and final report by end March 2020.

Open discussion:

8. The sub group reflected on IPA's achievements and opportunities for the future.

Reflections on SRDP and IPA

9. The group confirmed support for continuation and development of an IPA type funding model and its importance as the largest rural based access fund in Scotland. The increased levels of demand in number and value of applications was highlighted and how well the scheme delivers on government priorities such as health and wellbeing, active travel, supporting the rural economy and communities and encouraging enjoyment and appreciation of the outdoors and nature.
10. Points were made highlighting the change in Scotland's access funding landscape since IPA was introduced in 2015, with increases in active travel funding mainly targeted at populated urban areas and a reduction in available funding (including officer time) from public agencies including local authorities and with the current removal of IPA which is the main funding stream for access in rural areas. Alongside this the other European funds such as LEADER and ERDF which also provide access funding, are coming to an end. Challenges such as finding match funding are becoming harder to meet particularly for larger scale projects.
11. The group also discussed the importance of path maintenance resourcing, for core paths and other paths, and the need to safeguard the capital investments already made in new and improved IPA paths (which only have a 5 year maintenance burden) and other capital only funded paths, all of which would benefit from a supported access management option similar to those offered in woodland grant schemes.

Options and opportunities for the future:

12. A number of points were raised to consider in future scheme design as either short term improvements to IPA or for consideration for the longer term direction, the main themes were:
 - Improved cash flow to help address the gap between initial outlay and payment.
 - Support for planning and design stages pre- application.
 - Add-in a path maintenance/access management funding element to the scheme.
 - Consider ways to ensure that funded projects are easy for the public to find out about, get to and use ie maximising public benefits.

- Consider any new scheme design as part of the wider strategic context of providing and funding for outdoor access in Scotland.

Next steps:

13. The final draft IPA review findings will be presented to the NAF on 29 January 2020 for full discussion. In the meantime SNH will keep NAF updated on any changes or updates on IPA and access funding as part of wider agricultural funding.

Bridget Jones (SNH) September 2019

Appendix 1:

Attendance –

Bridget Jones	SNH IPA Co-ordinator
Annabel Drysdale	SNH IPA Review Officer
David Henderson-Howat	NAF convenor
Janice Winning	Secretary for NAF
Jason Rust	Scottish Land and Estates
David Clyne	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Helene Mauchlen	British Horse Society Scotland
Kevin Lafferty	Scottish Forestry

Apologies:

Alan Dron	Police Scotland
Helen Todd	Ramblers Scotland
Jamie Smart	National Farmers Union Scotland