



## **FOREST RESEARCH**

“Enhancing the Forest Sector’s contribution to equal access for disabled people to recreation goods, facilities and services in Scottish Forests”

### **Task 2**

#### **Qualitative and quantitative research with forest recreation managers to collate knowledge and skills related to disability accessibility**

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Prepared for Forestry Commission Scotland

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## **Summary**

The task described in this report was to undertake qualitative and quantitative research with forest recreation managers in order to assess their knowledge and skills in relation to the provision of access to forests for disabled people. This included knowledge of the legislation, existing access standards, facility provision, information provision and access to sources of information and guidance. A scoping meeting with key figures from the forestry sector was followed by three forums with forest owners, managers and recreation managers around Scotland. Together these formed the qualitative element. This was followed by a questionnaire to a larger sample group where some quantitative analysis was possible in order to assess the magnitude of the issues raised in the forums. The results showed a relatively low level of awareness and knowledge of the relevant legislation (the Disability Discrimination Act), some awareness of the basic access standards but confusion about terminology, low levels of knowledge about disabled groups (apart from those in wheelchairs) and a wide range of perceived barriers to landowners meeting their legal obligations.

As a result, the need for training was considered to be rather urgent and a number of elements for a training course identified, focusing on legislation, landowners responsibilities, the needs of disabled people, access standards, facility design (using best practice examples), working with disabled people, information provision and access audits.

## **Contents**

- 1.0 Introduction**
- 2.0 Task 2a Scoping Meeting**
  - 2.1 Summary of Main Issues
  - 2.2 Key Issues
    - a) Information
    - b) Attitudes
  - 2.3 Suggested discussion Framework for Forums
- 3.0 Task 2b The Forums**
  - 3.1 Discussion session 1 prompt questions
  - 3.2 Post-it session A
  - 3.3 Discussion session 2 prompt questions
  - 3.4 Post-it session B
- 4.0 Forum One: Penninghame Pond - Dumfries and Galloway, 21 November 2006**
  - 4.1 Forum attendance
  - 4.2 Forum format
  - 4.3 Open discussion using the following prompts/questions
  - 4.4 Post-it Session A
  - 4.5 Discussion using the following prompts/questions
  - 4.6 Post-it Session B
  - 4.7 Concluding remarks
- 5.0 Forum Two: Greenlink Project - Hamilton Park, 28 November 2006**
  - 5.1 Forum attendance
  - 5.2 Forum Format
  - 5.3 Open discussion using the following prompts/questions
  - 5.4 Post-it Session A
  - 5.5 Discussion using the following prompts/questions
  - 5.6 Post-it Session B
- 6.0 Forum Three: Loch Garten – Highlands, 12 December 2006**
  - 6.1 Forum attendance
  - 6.2 Forum format
  - 6.3 Open discussion using the following prompts/questions
  - 6.4 Post-it Session A
  - 6.5 Discussion using the following prompts/questions
  - 6.6 Post-it Session B
- 7.0 Conclusions**

- 8.0 Task 2c Questionnaire survey**
  - 8.1 Objectives
  - 8.2 Development of the questionnaire
  - 8.3 Results of the questionnaire
    - (A) Question 1
    - (B) Question 2
    - (C) Question 3
    - (D) Question 4
    - (E) Question 5
    - (F) Question 6

- 9.0 Conclusions**

- Appendix 1.0**
  - 1.1 Email invitation
  - 1.2 Questionnaire on disabled access to Scottish forests

## 1.0 Introduction

This report summarises the findings of qualitative and quantitative research with forest recreation managers to collate knowledge and skills related to disability accessibility. It forms Task 2, part of the wider aspect of research covered by the project "Enhancing the Forest Sector's contribution to equal access for disabled people to recreation goods, facilities and services in Scottish Forests". The other tasks include a desk based analysis of the requirements of the DDA legislation; collation and review of guidance, tools and case studies of good practice; highlighting existing digests of contacts; and developing and piloting a training package. The research has been undertaken by the OPENspace research centre on behalf of Forestry Commission Scotland.

The report on Task 2 incorporates three elements:

a) A scoping meeting. For the first stage an initial scoping meeting with a small number of key people from the forestry sector was held in Edinburgh, at Silvan House. This was used to explore the issues, perceptions, expectations and organisational attitudes and to help establish the set of major issues to be explored in the next stage.

2b. Three forums with landowners, land managers and recreation managers were held where an "open space" session was used to explore the knowledge and skill base qualitatively, in the context of the issues uncovered in the first scoping session. They incorporated a site visit for the participants accompanied by the researchers, and by a disabled person who was also a trained access auditor, followed by an indoor discussion using "Post-it" sessions to collect more detailed information.

Stage 2c: Questionnaire survey of landowners, land managers and recreation managers involved in recreation provision in Scottish forests.

## 2.0 Task 2a Scoping meeting

This was held on the 2 November 2006 between 10am and 12.30pm at Forestry Commission Scotland, Silvan House in Edinburgh. Present were:

- Suzanne Martin, Forest Research (SM)
- Brent Meakin, Forestry Commission (BM)
- Richard Wallace, Highland Conservancy (RW)
- Tim Hall, Woodland Trust (TH)
- Sandy White Forest Enterprise, Galloway (SW)
  
- Simon Bell, OPENspace (SB, facilitator)
- Jenny Roe, OPENspace (note taker)

- Sally-Ann Hoyne, B-W&H (SAH), working with OPENspace

The purpose of the scoping meeting was to explore the issues, perceptions, expectations and organisational attitudes around the research topic in order to develop a discussion framework for the forums to be held in Central, South West and North Scotland. The following sections summarise the content of the discussions and the points raised in them, concluding with suggested questions for use in the forums.

## 2.1 Summary of Main Issues

Those taking part in the scoping meeting felt that:

- For a disabled user the main barriers to access are information and attitudes.
- Accessibility can be improved by information and site management rather than physical changes to a landscape (SAH).
- Within the private sector the main issues for land agents are liability and funding in relation to relevant access legislation (RW).
- Within the public/charitable sectors one of the biggest barriers to improving accessibility is changing perceptions on how to manage sites for disability. Simple, low cost strategies can be as effective as major, high cost projects.
- Other key issues are information (how to communicate these strategies to site managers), economic (how best to allocate funds in relation to demands of different users), and raising awareness of disability issues.
- Best practice approaches suggested are to design for “all abilities” and to minimise barriers on all sites (TH, SW, BM).

## 2.2 Key issues

### **Information**

- *Information for site managers:* there is a need to communicate to site managers how simple, low cost techniques can minimise barriers (TH).
- *Information for users:* disabled users need to know what to expect on arriving at a site. A disabled sign at the entrance is not sufficient. First impressions of a site are very important (SAH).
- *Communication methods:* internet/GIS/CAM tools (as used in Kent access website) which enable users to ascertain information on a site e.g. path gradient, presence of stiles, is effective but this is very costly (TH). The Woodland Trust have generated a simplified version of this.
- *Disabled users* are outside in all weathers, with all sorts of disabilities – the weather doesn’t put them off, but not knowing what to expect from a site does. Radar keys are often now required to access outdoor places (unlocking of gates etc.) (SAH).
- *Information for private land agents:* they need to know how the legislation affects them and what grant funding is available (RW).

## **Attitudes**

### *Attitudes within public agencies*

- Is there a prevalent “wait and see” ethos until case law establishes parameters? Site managers need to be proactive now rather than wait for case law to establish parameters. Promote “least restrictive access” (BM) or “all abilities” approach (SW).
- There is a need to alleviate concerns regarding the implications of the DDA and to shift perceptions of what needs to be done: simple, budget options (e.g. removing gates, painting tops of posts with white paint) as opposed to big budget projects (tarmac paths).
- There are often concerns on where to allocate funds: how to balance the demands of a group of individuals and whether this money is well spent. (TH gave example of Woodland Improvement Grant funding of 20k for development of horse trails – initially to benefit 100 users but potentially these improvements might attract many more users – how do you plan for this potential use? General guide is for funding of £1 per person per visit (Woodland Trust).

### *Attitudes of private land agents:*

- Don’t assume land agents are reluctant to improve access on estates – sea change in attitudes is already taking place. Progress is being made by SNH and Paths for All initiatives.
- Promotion of access legislation (e.g. Land Reform Act), via local authority access forums, can help to set attitude changes in motion.
- Land agents are becoming aware that improving access can have knock on tourism/economic benefits (RW).

### *General Attitudes*

- What does disability mean to different individuals? DDA sets out specific guidelines but we also need to be aware of people who may have problems getting around a site (e.g. with asthma, hay fever, arthritis etc).
- There is a lot of confusion around the DDA and what is expected of public and private agencies. The legislation is daunting for some site managers (TH). What is “reasonable” good practice? This could be demonstrating you have been through a process of assessment (RW) or putting a plan of action in place – the intention to change, even though there may be no current funds available at present (TH). The DDA can be interpreted as “objective” – we need to think of it as “access for all” (SAH), or as “subjective” (the monitoring process is open to different interpretations in the public sector) (SM).

### *Economics*

- Private sector: the key issue is funding any access improvements, and how and where to obtain funding (RW).
- Public sector: the key issue is how best to allocate funds and how to prioritise different user demands (TH).

### *Maintenance*

Maintenance is critical: an example was cited by SAH where access to a bird hide was blocked to wheelchair users owing to growth of grass on a verge. There is a need to maintain tracks free of obstacles.

### *Secondary issues*

- Planning for the experience of the landscape rather than just the walk itself (BM). Is too much emphasis put on the trail?
- Should “special” access trails be created for the disabled or should the strategy be to adapt the “everyday”?
- Generally good design for the disabled results in good design for all (SW). But is this really the case (SB)? We need to be careful not to take the challenge element away. Not all disabled people want walk on the flat (SW).
- Conflicting design issues e.g. putting in a boardwalk for wheelchair access may create a trip hazard for another user (BM).
- The urbanising effect of tarmac (or landscape “engineering”) versus the need to maintain a sense of nature/wilderness (SW). There is a need to preserve the sense of place as well as make paths accessible. Do tarmac trails conflict with people’s perception of what’s natural/wild? Does it detract from the forest experience?
- Psychological barriers/perceptual barriers – fear of spaces (SM).
- Design issues: how useful are design specifications such as those produced by the Fieldfare Trust? They can be a useful starting point, but it’s more important to work with the users – the right approach won’t necessarily fit the design criteria (BM).

### *Strategic development*

- Gather information on simple, cost effective alterations that can minimise barriers. This should be a focus of best practice mapping (SM).
- Disseminate “small step” strategies to site managers and land agents.
- Minimise anxiety about what needs to be done. Raise awareness.
- Improve information available to disabled users via websites, better signage, leaflets.
- Whilst the spirit of the DDA needs to be followed in principle, focus on user needs, the locality and what’s relevant to a community. Is there a local hospital or special needs school nearby that might benefit from improved access to a site?
- Develop a national information base: (e.g. core paths website), readily accessible to user groups. DDA doesn’t require any national strategic plan of say, accessible trails in Scotland. Map “all abilities” routes, and share this information with the public, (BM). (Current Walkers Welcome initiative is insufficient - TH). SEERAD have a monitoring role and are collating data but this is not being shared (RW).
- Take an “all abilities” approach to improving facilities. Every action should be a “least restrictive action” (BM).
- Convey sense of experience on offer at sites.
- Embed the principles of the DDA in all staff (BM) - operational staff as well as site managers (BM).



### **2.3 Suggested Discussion Framework for Forums**

This list emerged from the notes of the scoping meeting as a useful set of prompting questions for the forums:

- Awareness of DDA definitions of disability, plus other interpretations.
- Barriers to access (prompts: information, attitudes, economics, maintenance, perceptual).
- Is design for “all abilities” the right approach? Or is there a case for specialist trails? Does this interfere with the forest experience?
- What is the best means for disseminating information to both users and managers of estates? What type of training on DDA issues would be helpful?
- Evidence of best/worst practice? Examples.

### **3.0 Task 2b The Forums**

The forums were arranged for three different locations where different issues were likely to be raised, as well as representing different landscapes, forests and different experiences. These were as follows:

- The first forum on 20 November took place at Penninghame Pond near Newton Stewart followed by discussion at the Forestry Commission Galloway Forest Park visitor centre. This represented a managed public forest with a special trail already laid out specifically for all-ability access. The users are a mix of local people and visitors.
- The second forum, on 28 November, was held at an urban forest park location, the Green Link at Motherwell in central Scotland where it was possible to focus on the more urban type of forestry and local authority ownership. This area has a large population and the park is mainly used by local people. The path was mainly asphalt with some gravel sections also available. The meeting then took place in the Strathclyde Conservancy office at Hamilton.
- The third forum took place near Boat of Garten, in the Highlands, starting with a walk which was not specifically arranged for disabled or all-ability access on the RSPB Reserve at Loch Garten. The path was rather rugged and difficult for wheelchair access. The discussion then followed in the Boat of Garten Hotel.

The format of the day was to start with the walk around the trail by all the participants accompanied by the OPENspace facilitators and the disabled, qualified access auditor. Sally-Ann Hoyne was the disabled auditor present at Penninghame Pond and Motherwell. She uses a normal hand-propelled wheelchair. At Boat of Garten Amanda Beech Will was present. She uses a powered wheelchair that proved capable of coping with a route that would have been impossible for Sally-Ann. The discussions and observations that took place during the walk around each trail proved valuable for setting the

scene and prompting the range of issues to be discussed in the more formal part of the meeting held indoors.

The indoor meeting was arranged so that the open discussions were interspersed with “Post-it” sessions. Simon Bell facilitated and led the discussions with open-ended questions and prompted the group when necessary. Penny Travlou took notes and the discussions were also recorded using a digital recorder. Sally-Ann Hoyne/Amanda Beech Will interjected comments or observations into the discussions where and when they felt it appropriate. The structure of the discussion, including the prompt questions was as follows:

### **3.1 Discussion session 1 prompt questions**

1. What do you think of when you hear the terms “disabled access”, “inclusive access” or “all-ability access”. Are these terms the same?
2. Do you think that everywhere in the forest should be equally accessible to everyone? Is design for “all abilities” the right approach? Is there a case for special trails? Does this interfere with the forest experience?
3. Who has heard of the Disability Discrimination Act (before the invitation to this forum)? Who has started to implement its requirements? How have you found the process so far?
4. How do you distinguish between recreation goods, facilities and services in the forest? What is easiest to deal with in relation to the DDA?

### **3.2 Post-it session A**

The attendees were asked to stick a post-it note on each of three sheets in response to the following questions:

1. How do you rate your current level of awareness of the DDA (high, medium or low)? At what level do you think your knowledge/awareness needs to be for you to do your work?
2. What do you think are the main barriers to providing access to forests (eg. information, economics, terrain, attitudes, maintenance/management, perceptions)?
3. What types of training on DDA issues would be helpful to you?

### **3.3 Discussion session 2 prompt questions**

The questions were as follows:

1. What are the best means for disseminating information to users of forests about accessibility?
2. What are the best means of disseminating information to landowners and managers about the requirements of the DDA?

3. Has anyone engaged with the disabled community regarding access provision?
4. Who knows the "Countryside for All" package? Has anyone been involved in access auditing of their area? How helpful has this been?

#### **3.4 Post-it session B**

Participants were asked to place sticky dots (they were given 6) on the comments from the first post-it session as a form of voting for the aspects that they thought were most important. Then participants were asked to put a note of any example of good practice of access for disabled people, whether goods, facilities or services with some contact information.

### **4.0 Forum One; Penninghame Pond - Dumfries and Galloway, 21 November 2006**

#### **4.1 Forum attendance**

12 people attended the forum representing various public and private organisations. Simon Bell facilitated the meeting, assisted by Penny Travlou and Sally-Ann Hoyne.

#### **4.2 Forum format**

All participants met first at Penninghame Pond trail near Newton Stewart to walk the trail with Sally-Ann Hoyne, a wheelchair user and accessibility auditor (she had a helper to push her round). The walk lasted for about an hour during which participants had the opportunity to see first hand the obstacles and obtrusions the design of the trail have to people with physical disabilities. Some of Sally-Ann's remarks corresponded to the design of the trail: it was very long with few benches for someone who uses a wheelchair. Regarding the material of the trail surface, Sally-Ann pointed out that despite the expectation that tarmac would be the most suitable material for wheelchair users, compact gravel or crushed stone proved to be very easy and safe to drive a wheelchair on.

After the walk, all participants together with the OPENspace team met at the Galloway Forestry Commission Visitors Centre to participate at the forum. Simon Bell made a ten minute presentation of the aims of both the project and the forum. At the end of the presentation, the attendants introduced themselves.

The discussion was divided into 5 sessions as described above. The following section summarises the main findings in relation to the prompt questions. Occasionally there are extra questions asked by the facilitator that arose from the discussion and sometimes not all the prompt questions were asked because the discussion naturally developed to cover the necessary ground.

#### 4.3 Open discussion using the following prompts/questions:

##### What do you think of when you hear the term “disabled access”?

- This term is not widely used – “all ability access” and “access for all” are terms that are commonly used in organisations such as SNH to describe disabled access.

##### What do you think of when you hear the term “inclusive access”?

- Types of activity rather than people’s ability to use particular facilities (e.g. horse-riders, mountain-bikers).
- Some people claimed that they had never heard this term before
- Synonym with “all ability” and “access for all”.
- Synonym with “social inclusion” (e.g. easy access to transport).
- A rather confusing and ambiguous term.

##### Could you identify the people who are under the category “all ability users”?

- Elderly, wheelchair users, mothers with toddlers etc.
- Those identified by “The BT Countryside for All” typology of all ability users.

##### Do you think that everywhere in the forest should be equally accessible to everyone?

- Most people don’t want to move too far from their vehicle, therefore you need to offer the most accessible information about various sites as possible.
- As you don’t know exactly who your visitor will be, you need to try to be as accessible as possible.
- If there is no information about accessible areas that meet the DDA requirements, how could people with disabilities visit those places? How could you make this information accessible to the public?
- There is no standard mechanism to publicise all inclusive areas.
- There is not much money/funding to create promotional material for different sites.
- There are no resources to create a network of all inclusive sites (i.e. internet sites).
- There are problems with maintenance – there are very few resources to manage and maintain accessible facilities and sites.

##### How would you create balance between the forest experience and building all inclusive facilities?

- It is very difficult to achieve a safe experience.
- Site managers sometimes *over-manage* the sites to meet the DDA requirements.
- Physical limitations, staff shortage and lack of financial support limit the good maintenance of sites as well as the good provision of all inclusive design and facilities.

- Demand is the key: if there is no demand what is the point to provide all inclusive facilities?
- Proper consultation is necessary.

**Has anyone heard of the DDA before? Is anyone implementing its requirements?**

- Most participants had heard of the DDA before the meeting
- Some people have been involved in auditing in order to comply with it
- The Fairfield Trust representative mentioned that the implementation of the DDA is not as easy as it seems: although his organisation supports the use of DDA they have to face opposition from other organisations like Historic Scotland.

**How easy was to implement the DDA?**

- It was very helpful but difficult and complicated to implement it.
- It is very difficult to employ someone to work exclusively on the implementation of the DDA due to lack of financial resources.

**4.4 Post-it Session A**

<b>How do you rate your current awareness of the DDA?</b>	<b>Response</b>		
	<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>
	2	5	6

<b>What level of awareness you need for your work?</b>	<b>Response</b>		
	<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>
	9	3	0

**What are the main barriers to providing access to forests?**

- Financial and staff resources
- Topography and physical limitations of sites
- Maintenance liabilities
- Management of sites
- Lack of political support
- Low budget to construct and maintain
- Ignorance of users' needs
- Lack of awareness of demand level

**What type of training of DDA issues would be helpful?**

- Guidance on making interpretation accessible to all
- Guidance on the DDA implementation for 'access professionals'
- Guidance for land managers (national workshops on the DDA)
- Increase awareness of users' expectations
- Workshops including best practice examples of problems, gaps, barriers and possible solutions

- Highlighting relevant parts of the DDA for outdoor access
- Specific training to countryside access – practical advice
- Training on legal requirements for landowners and managers

#### **4.5 Discussion using the following prompts/questions:**

##### **What are the best means for disseminating information to users of forests about accessibility?**

- Publicity leaflet
- Consulting local media
- Through the local access forums

##### **What are the best means for disseminating information to landowners/managers about the requirements of the DDA?**

- Through their local representative – someone landowners and farmers trust
- Local newspapers
- Scottish Executive contacts

##### **Who knows of the “Countryside for All” package?**

- It is very widespread
- Most forest managers know about it – some often consult it
- It is very difficult to achieve its standards
- It needs to be more instructive and informative for managers to use it
- New publications similar to BTCA are very difficult to get hold of – they get to know about them by word of mouth (there is little publicity/circulation)

#### **4.6 Post-it Session B**

##### **Part 1: Participants’ voting on the most important issues of the implementation of the DDA in Scottish forests as raised in the previous post-it session (A)**

##### **What are the main barriers to providing access to forests?**

1. Financial and staff resources
2. Topography and physical limitations of sites

##### **What type of training of DDA issues would be helpful?**

1. Specific training on countryside access – practical advice
2. Training on legal requirements for landowners and managers
3. Workshops including best practice examples of problems, gaps, barriers and possible solutions

##### **Part 2: Examples of Good Practice**

1. Centre Parks (for double buggies)
2. Mabie Forest (“all abilities” trail)

3. Dalbeattie Forest (the Town Wood)
4. Lake District (assisted walks for visually impaired walkers)
5. RFAP website (publications/ guidance)
6. Kingsmoor Country Park, Carlisle
7. WWT
8. Merseyhead Reserve RSPB (access to visitor centre and bird hides)
9. Threave Estate

Comment [11]: Again, will all readers know what this is?

#### **4.7 Concluding remarks**

One of the participants mentioned four disabled scooter-users who told him that they would like information about all sites, not only about places for people with disabilities.

Another participant asked whether he should work on sites which bring lots of visitors but are not all inclusive, or on those for all inclusive access but which are not very popular. Sally-Ann replied that we shouldn't forget the experience of being in a place is that which makes the visit special. You don't need to think always of the DDA, particularly, in cases where the physical character of the site doesn't allow much interference or change. For example, the Grand Canyon is considered one of the most popular and visit-worthy sites in the world, but due to its geomorphology neither very accessible nor easy to change its physical character.

## **5.0 Forum Two: Greenlink Project - Hamilton Park, 28 November 2006**

### **5.1 Forum attendance**

8 people attended the forum representing various public and private organisations. Simon Bell facilitated the meeting, assisted by Penny Travlou and Sally-Ann Hoyne.

### **5.2 Forum Format**

All participants met first at Hamilton Park to walk the trail with Sally-Ann Hoyne, who had a helper as before. The walk lasted for about an hour, during which participants had the opportunity to see first hand the obstacles and obtrusions the design of the trail poses to people with physical disabilities. Some of Sally-Ann's remarks corresponded to the design of the park and its trail. She found the trail in some parts very slippery and thus unsafe. One possible reason for this was the material (tarmac) used for the trail surface. She also found that some other parts of the trail were not very accessible for a wheelchair user (i.e. steep downhill, narrow curve of the trail). It was also noticed that there were very few benches (only one) along the trail.

After the walk, all participants, together with the OPENspace team, met at the Forestry Commission conservancy office at Hamilton Business Park to participate in the forum. Simon Bell made a ten minute presentation of the aims of both the project and the forum. At the end of the presentation, the attendants introduced themselves.

The discussion was divided into 5 sessions as before. The questions also varied from the original list for the same reasons as in the previous forum.

### **5.3 Open discussion using the following prompts/questions:**

#### **What do you think of when you hear the terms “disabled access”, all-ability access and “inclusive access”?**

- Inclusive access is a term with social and mental connotations.
- a) easy access is related to: physical access.  
b) disabled access is related to: people with disabilities.  
c) all-ability access is a misinterpreted and misused term.
- It depends on which context someone uses these terms – there is no clear definition of “all ability” and “inclusive” access.

#### **How do the above terms interfere with the forest experience?**

- It is very complicated.
- There is a cultural barrier with access/inclusion (e.g. what about people who haven't always had access to forests?).
- There are safety issues.
- Local communities need to feel comfortable in using community forests.
- Local facilities should be for everyone.
- The access agenda should be related to the health agenda – the forest experience is about people's health and well-being.

#### **When does the term “disabled” start and finish?**

- A debatable term - it depends on how people perceive their disability.
- A complicated term – too many definitions (health professionals' language of disability is very different than that of people with disabilities).
- A relative term - It depends on how a disability affects the quality of a person's life .

#### **Do you think that all forests should be accessible to people with disabilities?**

Mixed answers: some of the participants said “yes” and some others “no”

- It depends on how much a person needs disabled access in a forest site.
- Each forest should have at least some standard/basic disability access and facilities.
- It is about demand: if there is no demand for disability access how could a forest manager know about the forest's use by people with disabilities?

#### **Do you think that it is good to have separate disabled access trails?**

Mixed answers



- A lot of forest designs and materials are not planned with disabled access in mind.
- There are quite often financial restrictions for changing outdoor places to more accessible ones – forest managers need to make decisions and choices.

**Who has started to implement the DDA requirements in the outdoors?**

Only one response on question 5.

- Falkirk Council designed areas for people with disabilities – auditing on public access

**What do you understand as good services for people with disabilities in Scottish forests?**

- A good outdoor experience.
- Information provided through leaflets.
- Different channels to advertise for people with people with disabilities.

**How did you find the visit today?**

- There is more to be done.
- More information for the Greenlink Project is needed to those who haven't heard about the park so far.
- More signage.
- More promotional material.
- Better transport service.

**5.4 Post-it Session A**

<b>Question 1a: How do you rate your current awareness of the DDA?</b>	<b>Response</b>		
	<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>
	0	6	2

<b>Question 1b: What level of awareness you need for your work?</b>	<b>Response</b>		
	<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>
	3	5	0

**What are the main barriers to providing access to forests?**

- Unconscious ignorance
- Potential users unaware of what is there for them and why they should visit woods and forests in Scotland
- Lack of positive design and provision
- Topography and physical characteristics of sites
- Capital costs – financial restraints
- Lack of information on what visitors could do when they arrive in the forest (lack of information on how easy or difficult access is to those places)

- Entrance points to specific locations/sites are not accessible
- Carers' negative attitudes/beliefs
- Cultural barriers
- Safety issues
- Lack of site specific information
- Lack of understanding of different disabilities' needs
- Lack of transport facilities

**What type of training in DDA issues would be helpful?**

- Guidelines for design standards.
- Feedback from people with a whole range of abilities.
- Information on the range of materials and facilities that extend access opportunities.
- Site-specific access audits.
- Training on forest managers' responsibilities and duties.
- Training on auditing skills, awareness and perceptions.
- Training on designing and building accessible trails.
- Workshop/seminar on practical examples of accessible design.
- Training on needs of users with different physical and mental disabilities.

**5.5 Discussion using the following prompts/questions:**

**What are the best means for disseminating information to users of forests about accessibility?**

- Providing information to community, voluntary and health/hospital groups.
- "Knocking-on-doors" strategy: get personally involved.
- Trying to make locals using the nearby woods and green spaces.
- Contacting carers to inform them about possibilities/opportunities for outdoor activities for people with disabilities.

**What are the best ways for disseminating information to landowners and managers about the requirements of the DDA?**

- Connecting community with landowners
- Contacting access officers to promote the DDA to landowners
- Inviting private owners to auditing activities for the DDA implementation
- Landowners have now started feeling more comfortable with footpath access, but it will take extra effort to convince them for the necessity to implement other kinds of access like the DDA.
- Forestry Commission officers should educate landowners and managers about the benefits and the necessity of the DDA implementation

**Who knows of the "Countryside for All" package?**

All participants said they knew of the package, but found it difficult to implement it as it is very detailed and sometimes complicated.

### **Has anyone been involved in access auditing of their area?**

Only one person responded to this question:

- Sometimes access auditing may be useful/applicable for a certain area even if the DDA standards are not strictly followed.

## **5.6 Post-it Session B**

### **Participant's voting on the most important issues of the implementation of the DDA in Scottish forests as raised in the previous post-it session (A).**

#### **What are the main barriers to providing access to forests?**

1. Lack of site specific information.
2. Lack of information on what visitors could do when they arrive in the forest (lack of information on how easy or difficult is access to those places)

#### **What type of training of DDA issues would be helpful?**

1. Site-specific access audits .
2. Guidelines for design standards.
3. Feedback from people with a whole range of abilities.

#### **Examples of Good Practice**

1. Glasgow City Health Walks
2. Inclusive Fitness Initiative
3. Access to the Past for Future Generations (Antonine Wall)
4. Access on Rough Castle and the Falkirk Wheel
5. Forth S. Lanarkshire – Holmesyke Reedbed (all ability trails)
6. Access on Callander Estates
7. Consultation exercise in Glasgow on physical activity strategy and key organisations/groups

## **6.0 Forum Three: Loch Garten – Highlands, 12 December 2006**

### **6.1 Forum attendance**

12 people attended the forum representing various public and private organisations. Simon Bell facilitated the meeting, assisted by Penny Travlou and Amanda Beech Will.

### **6.2 Forum format**

All participants met first at the trail at the Loch Garten reserve to walk the trail with Amanda Beech Will, a wheelchair user and access auditor. The walk lasted for about 75 minutes during which participants had the opportunity to see first hand the obstacles and obtrusions the design of the trail presented to people with physical disabilities. Amanda used a motor wheelchair with wider tires than those of push wheelchairs. This made access easier in most parts of the trail. However she faced a major problem when the group approached a flooded area with trees lying across the path and many roots. Had she been

alone this obstacle would have been the end of her journey in the forest. On this occasion, Amanda agreed to be carried across the obstacle by other members of the group. Reflecting on the incident, some participants said that although they could see the difficulty of getting across such physical obstacles they thought that any changes on the trail would compromise the natural beauty of the forest.

After the walk, all participants together with the OPENspace team met at the Boat of Garten Hotel to participate in the forum. Simon Bell made a ten minute presentation of the aims of both the project and the forum. At the end of the presentation, the attendants introduced themselves.

The discussion was divided into 5 sessions as before, the questions also varying slightly as described above. The discussion lasted overall for 2½ hours including coffee.

### **6.3 Open discussion using the following prompts/questions:**

#### **What do you think of when you hear the terms “disabled access”, “all ability access” and “inclusive access”?**

- All these terms are synonymous.
- “Disabled access” refers to wheelchair users.
- “Inclusive access” is a broader term referring also to social barriers.
- In private estates, it is very difficult to implement all ability access due to lack of funding.
- A wheelchair user is more visible than someone with hearing or visual impairment – one participant said that he had never thought of the DDA in relation to a visually-impaired person before.
- Sometimes it is very difficult to make every trail and forest accessible for all and even if you do it, there may be people who would complain that the place is not very ‘natural’ anymore.
- The term “all ability access” is very complicated – “sometimes we support more the rights of horses than those of other people”

#### **Do you think that everywhere in the forest should be equally accessible to everyone?**

All participants replied that although the ideal answer is “yes”, you cannot change every site according to the DDA requirements because it would lose its character and beauty.

One of the participants developed the argument further by saying that if the car park in front of the forest is given wheelchair access, then it would restrict the access of other users. Amanda replied to this argument by pointing out that the group focused their discussion only on wheelchair users whereas the DDA identifies many more types of disabilities and users with different needs and requirements. She added that the wheelchair user is used quite often as the icon of people with disabilities. The participants’ responses in this question showed that they had limited knowledge of the DDA and its implementation.

### Have you applied the DDA? What was your experience?

The responses to this question varied according to the organisation the participants represented:

- a. SNH: (not much experience of using the DDA)
  - a long process to carry out the audits and make the DDA implementations
  - there is a problem with providing information to the public
  - a very useful experience but complicated
  - SNH made a commitment to meet by 2008 the basic requirements for all ability users
- b. Private estates: (no experience of using the DDA)

### Have you heard of the DDA before?

The answers varied according to the organisation the participants represented. Those representing private estates said that they had never heard of the DDA requirements prior to the forum. Most people however agreed that there is a lack of information on the DDA and its use and implementation.

There is also a problem with how to make the public aware of the DDA, disability access issues and definitions of terms such as “all ability” and “assisted ability”.

Finally, there were concerns amongst participants on how to maintain the balance between the needs of different stakeholders and forest users: how could you ensure that all different users groups (mountain bikers and wheelchair users) would enjoy their journey in the forest without destroying each other’s experience?

## 6.4 Post-it Session A

How do you rate your current awareness of the DDA?	Response		
	High	Medium	Low
	3	2	7

What level of awareness you need for your work?	Response		
	High	Medium	Low
	6	5	1

**Note:** Most private landowners/managers responded that they needed medium level of awareness of the DDA.

### What are the main barriers to providing access to forests?

- Lack of information about the DDA requirements.
- Lack of public transport.
- Concern over cost/liabilities over and above initial capital cost.

- Conflict of different user groups' needs (some users dislike manicured paths – they would not like to see man-made paths and any other interference to the natural character of a forest).
- Topography of landscape/site.
- Difficulty in managing a wide range of users.
- Lack of budget to deal with potential solutions.
- Lack of understanding of the subject of inclusive access.
- Financial barriers.
- Lack of maintenance and management funding (private estates).

**What type of training in DDA issues would be helpful?**

- Directors/forest managers need to know the DDA requirements and how this is interpreted as best practice for woodlands.
- Training on issues relating to the implementation and requirements of the DDA with regard to woodlands and forests.
- Basic outline of the DDA requirements and obligations – locally delivered workshops (private estates).
- Access audit training.

**6.5 Discussion using the following prompts/questions:**

**What are the best means for disseminating information to both users and landowners/managers about the requirements of the DDA?**

- If you have a trail for all abilities, you should make this information available.
- Information available in visitors' centres.
- In landowners magazines.

*Note:* Some of the private estate managers argued that there is also lack of knowledge by users about forest operations and maintenance. They also said that they find it very difficult to satisfy everyone's needs and demands.

**Has anyone engaged with the disabled community regarding access provision? Has this been useful?**

- Not all agencies and organisations have the DDA top of their priorities.
- It is very difficult for private landowners to get funding from SNH for access auditing – Some said that as there is not enough money to support the DDA implementation in private estates, landowners won't commit to the provision of accessible paths/trails.
- No advice has been given to private landowners by funding agencies so far.
- There are not enough trained staff in funding agencies to work on the DDA implementations.

NOTE: Amanda said that the Scottish Executive provides free auditing training.

## 6.6 Post-it Session B

**Participants' voting on the most important issues of the implementation of the DDA in Scottish forests as raised in the previous post-it session**

**(A).**

**What are the main barriers to providing access to forests?**

1. Financial barriers (public sector).
2. Lack of maintenance and management funding (private estates).
3. Lack of public transport.

**What type of training in DDA issues would be helpful?**

1. Training on issues related to the implementation and requirements of the DDA in regard to woodlands and forests (public sector).
2. Basic outline of the DDA requirements and obligations – locally delivered workshops (private estates).

**Examples of Good Practice**

1. Abriachan Woods
2. Anagach Woods
3. Culag Woods, Lochinver
4. Crathie Opportunity Holidays (all ability trails)
5. Brahan Estate, Conon Bridge

## 7.0 Conclusions

The following conclusions emerged from the three forums :

1. There is confusion about the meanings of terms often used in the field by different people: disabled access, all-ability access, inclusive access. Therefore more clarification about terminology is needed – it must be established which are the preferred terms of use by the disabled and countryside access communities, and their respective definitions..
2. There was broad agreement that it is impractical to make everywhere equally accessible. There is an understanding that disabled users wanted the same nature and quality of the forest experience as other users and that this might be compromised if there were extensive modification of the site. Therefore good consultation with disabled groups would be useful for ensuring that the practical issues are recognised and that an appropriate balance between the provision of access and modification of the site is achieved. It is often the case that simple, low cost strategies can be as effective as major, high cost projects.
3. It is clear that most people focus on the physical accessibility of trails, especially surfacing and gradients, to make them wheelchair accessible. There is widespread ignorance of the kinds of surfaces that are most suitable. There is little awareness of the needs of other disabled people,

therefore improving the level of awareness and knowledge about the wide range of disabilities which exist, and their access implications, is necessary. It is worth ensuring more widespread knowledge of the sources of relevant inclusive recreation and access guidance, and case studies. Additional research by Strathclyde Centre for Disability Research and commissioned by Forestry Commission is underway to better understand the needs of other disabled users, this and existing work should be made more widely available.

4. Few managers had given thought to the information available for the recreation facility or service and the concept that disabled people could use this to decide for themselves whether somewhere was worth visiting. Therefore there is a need to demonstrate to recreation site managers/owners how to and what type of information disabled users need, and how to present it in suitable forms.
5. The level of awareness and knowledge of the DDA appears to be quite low, especially among owners and managers of private estates, while people working in other organisations such as FC, SNH or local authorities were more familiar. Those working in more urban areas where there are larger populations and high levels of recreational use were more knowledgeable than those from more remote areas. Most people rated their need for knowledge of the DDA for their work as medium to high. There is a training need to overcome this problem.
6. Few people apart from access officers, recreation managers and others with a specific recreation responsibility had been involved in trying to apply the requirements of the DDA. As it is the responsibility of all there is a need to increase recreation site managers' and owners' understanding of the Act and what is required of them.
7. Access auditing can be a helpful but complex and time consuming process. Therefore, while it is not a requirement for most sites, it does help define whether a site has met an acknowledged physical access standard.
8. The main barriers to providing access to forests were seen as:
  - resources – both money and people
  - physical limitations of sites – topography, slopes etc
  - lack of information for potential visitors
  - lack of resources to maintain access
  - lack of public transport to get to places

The relative importance of these varies from place to place: terrain and public transport was seen as more of a problem in the remoter areas, while information was seen as more of a barrier in the urban fringe.

Therefore, it would be useful to explore the extent to which these are real barriers and provide guidance to address and help managers overcome these barriers.



9. Many people, knew of or were to some degree familiar with the BT "Countryside for All" package. The private estates had not heard of it. Those who had tried to use it found it difficult to apply and quite confusing. The site visits and feedback sessions with auditors Sally-Ann Hoyne and Amanda Beech Will gave a different perspective, focussing more on the provision of information and less on meeting specific physical access standards. Thus, while standard access audit tools may help to assess whether a site meets DDA access requirements, there are also simple base level processes which could be undertaken first, to take into account a broader range of disabled needs, and not only access.
10. Given the generally low level of awareness of the DDA the need for training was recognised by all participants. The type and content of training should include:
- The legal aspects of the DDA and duties on landowners
  - Understanding of the requirements of different disabled groups (possibly with direct information and discussion with different people on a course)
  - Guidelines for design standards
  - Site specific access auditing
  - Examples of good practice, problems, gaps, barriers and solutions.

## 8.0 Task 2c Questionnaire survey

### 8.1 Objectives

The questionnaire survey was used to gain a wider sample of the awareness and requirements of forest owners, managers and recreation managers than was obtained from the forums. This also allowed a more quantitative analysis of the issues to be obtained which was of use in developing the rest of the project.

A secondary, but still important, objective was to obtain information about good practice examples.

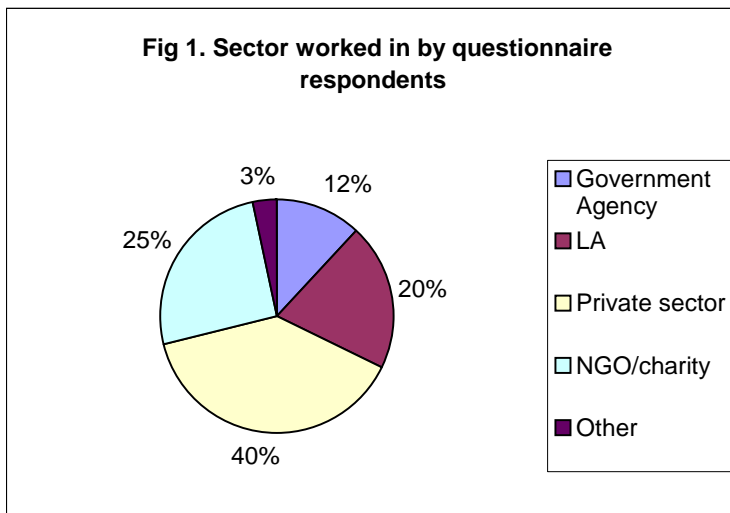
### 8.2 Development of the questionnaire

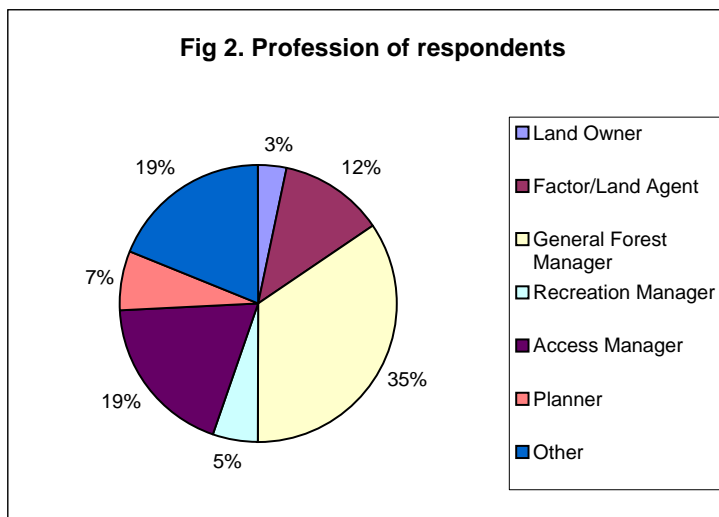
The content of the questionnaire was developed directly from the findings of the forums previously described. In this sense the issues raised by those concerned in the subject were reflected in the rest of the research. The questionnaire was designed to be filled in on-line and the data to go directly into a database for analysis. The respondents were selected from lists of people covered by the objectives of the research, supplied by each FC conservancy in Scotland. These people were invited to fill in the questionnaire by email and were given the URL so that no one else was able to access it.

The questions used in the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1.

The questionnaire was sent out to 258 addresses from a range of organisations within the forestry and outdoor access sector, including government agencies, local authorities, private estates, forestry management companies and NGOs. Of these around 20 email addresses failed and the response rate, after a reminder was sent out, was 25% or 58 respondees. This rate looks low but is actually fairly normal for such questionnaires.

The range of respondents is as follows:





### 8.3 Results of the questionnaire

#### (A) Question1

This question is in three parts and the respondents were asked to fill out a text box. A wide range of answers emerged. **NOTE: all the graphs refer to numbers of the sample.**

#### Question 1a: “What do you think is meant by “disabled access”?”

The most general definition (28%) was in facilitating access for the disabled but “disabled” was not defined in many cases. Where it was defined, 10% of participants perceived “disabled access” as providing access for those with some physical disability or “restricted mobility”. Providing wheelchair access was mentioned by 28% in their response. 16% referred to “disabled access” as being for those “not fully able”, “less able”, “less able bodied”, or as access for “all abilities”. Mental as well as physical disability was mentioned by 11 (19%) with some commentary referring to the “partially sighted, less able – wheel chair bound” and “people with respiratory problems, heart problems, arthritis”. One participant mentioned “intellectual access, making interpretation accessible to those with special learning needs”. “Barrier free” access was mentioned by two participants. Two participants referred to physical solutions such as suitable surfacing, appropriate gates, ramps and gradients.

#### Question 1b: What do you think is meant by “inclusive access”?

62% defined this as being “all ability access” or “access for all” or “access for both disabled and able bodied” or providing “same opportunities for all”. 7% had no idea what it meant and a further 10% found the term meaningless or unclear. 9% imagined it meant special provision for disabled access. One participant defined it as “access that is restrictive in some means”, another that “people will not be physically denied access”. Several participants referred to their previous answer on “disabled access”.

**Question 1c: What do you think is meant by “all ability access”?**

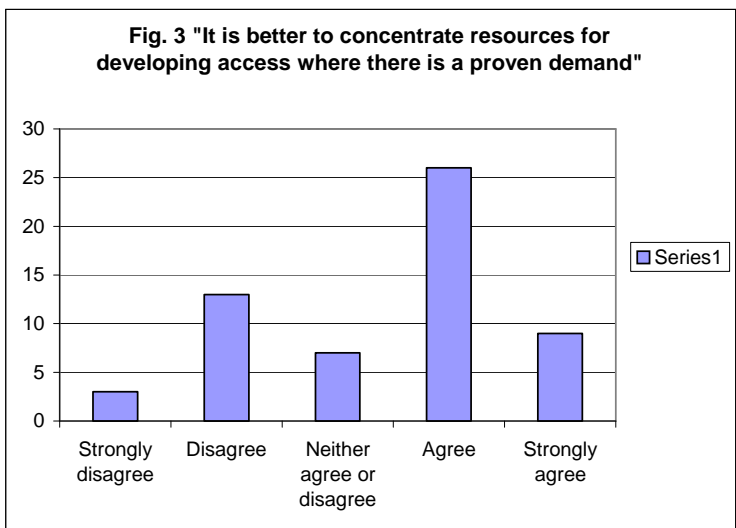
53% defined this as “access for all” i.e. accessible to everyone, able bodied and disabled, from very young and old as well as disabled, and any level of disability, be it physical, mental or sensory. 19% could not see the difference between this and the previous question, and 7% did not know. Some participants were unclear as to whether this term included wheelchair access (16%). One respondent said this was “the standard term within the Scottish access profession – it is used to refer to paths/routes which are barrier free, and meet the old BT access standards ... this would be my preferred terminology – and is the one which is better understood within the access/countryside profession”.

The results of this question show that understanding of the terminology varies, with some participants demonstrating a clearer understanding than others. Those whose jobs included access provision tended to have a better understanding or interpretation of the terminology and expressed a preference for the term “all ability access”. Levels of understanding therefore need to be increased through training, and the use of materials which comply with the DDA.

**(B) Question 2**

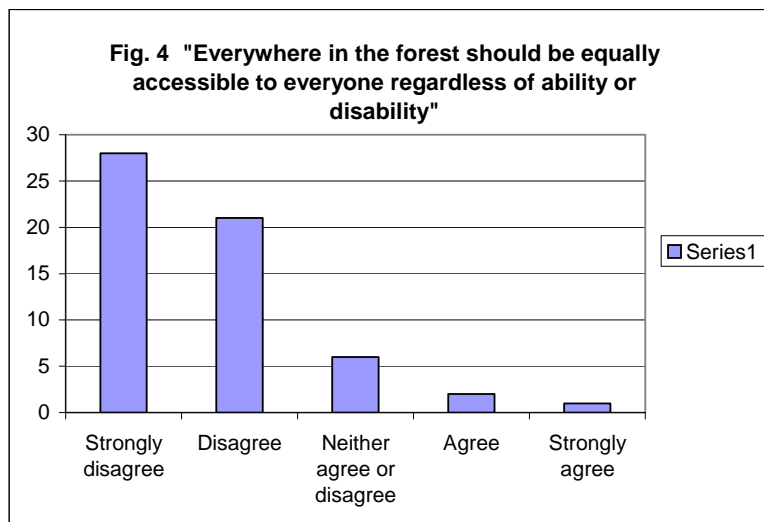
This question was in several parts with a scale of levels of agreement or disagreement. The results are presented for the sample as a whole and then split into the different sectors. However, since the sample sizes for some sectors are very small, much less confidence can be placed on these results. Nevertheless, some interesting pictures emerge from the comparisons.

**Question 2a: “It is better to concentrate resources for developing access where there is a proven demand”**



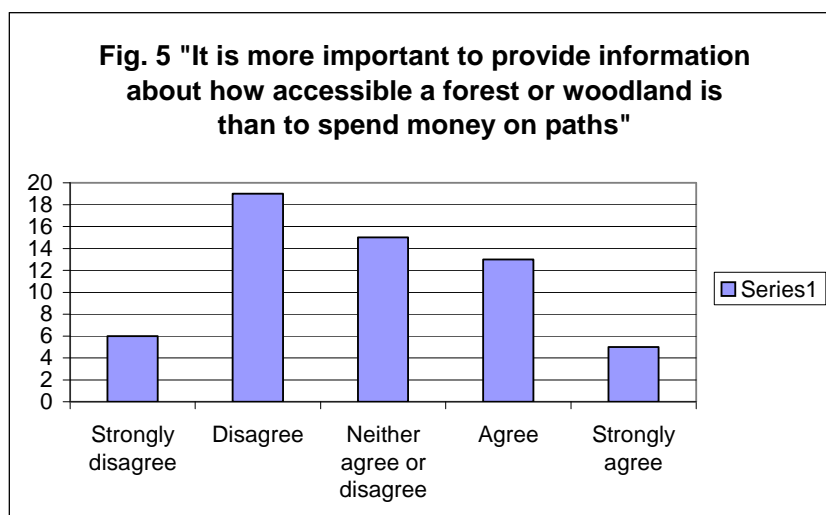
There is a difference of opinion between a group comprising landowners, forest managers and recreation managers and another group of access managers and planners (not shown graphically due to small sample sizes for some classes). The former prefer to see resources concentrated where there is a demand while the latter are split, some disagreeing with this comment – they clearly see that demand should not be the key issue. This difference may be explained by the nature of each group’s work: the former group actually manage land and recreation, while the latter do not.

**Question 2b: “Everywhere in the forest should be equally accessible to everyone regardless of ability or disability”**



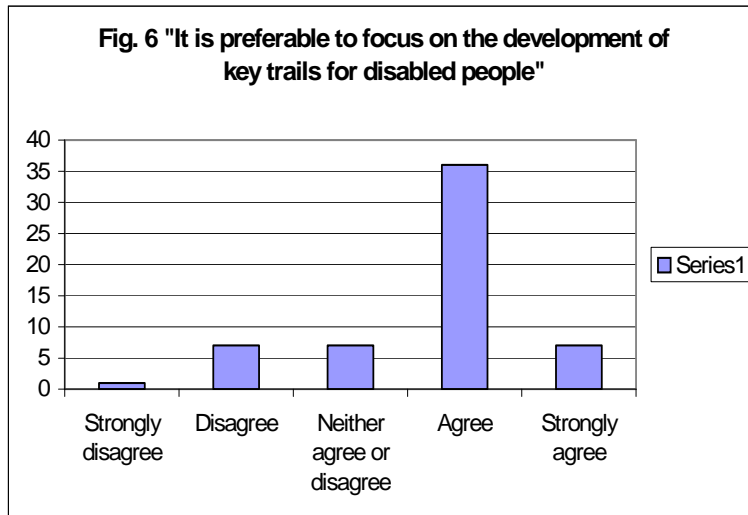
There is general agreement amongst all groups except for one planner and one land agent who disagree. The result is clear and sensible.

**Question 2c: “it is more important to provide information about how accessible a forest or woodland is than to spend money on paths”**



The results of this question show some differences. While the overall picture is of disagreement, tending to suggest that people are not aware of the importance of information given by disabled people themselves, some of the respondents do recognise that information is important. The emphasis placed on physical provision is repeated elsewhere in the results.

**Question 2d: "It is preferable to focus on the development of key trails for disabled people"**

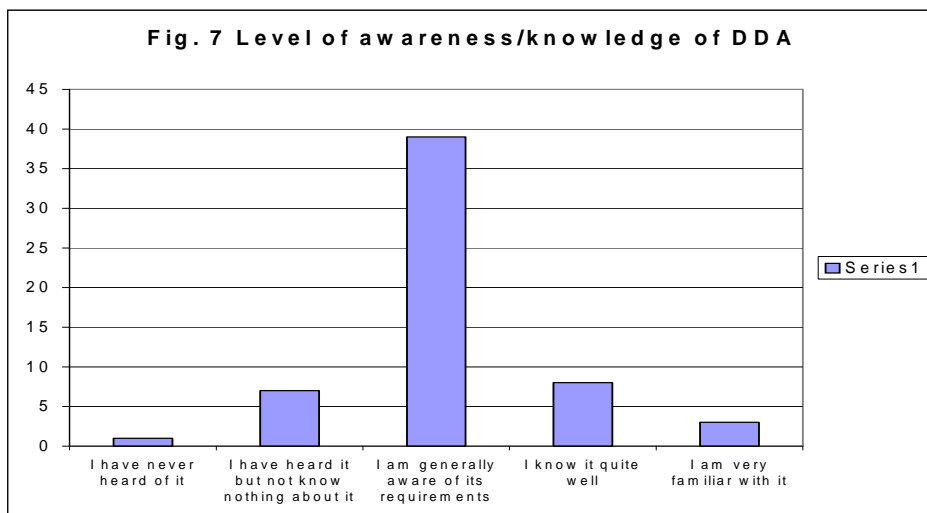


The results of this question are generally in agreement except for a couple of people, a planner and an access manager.

**(C) Question 3**

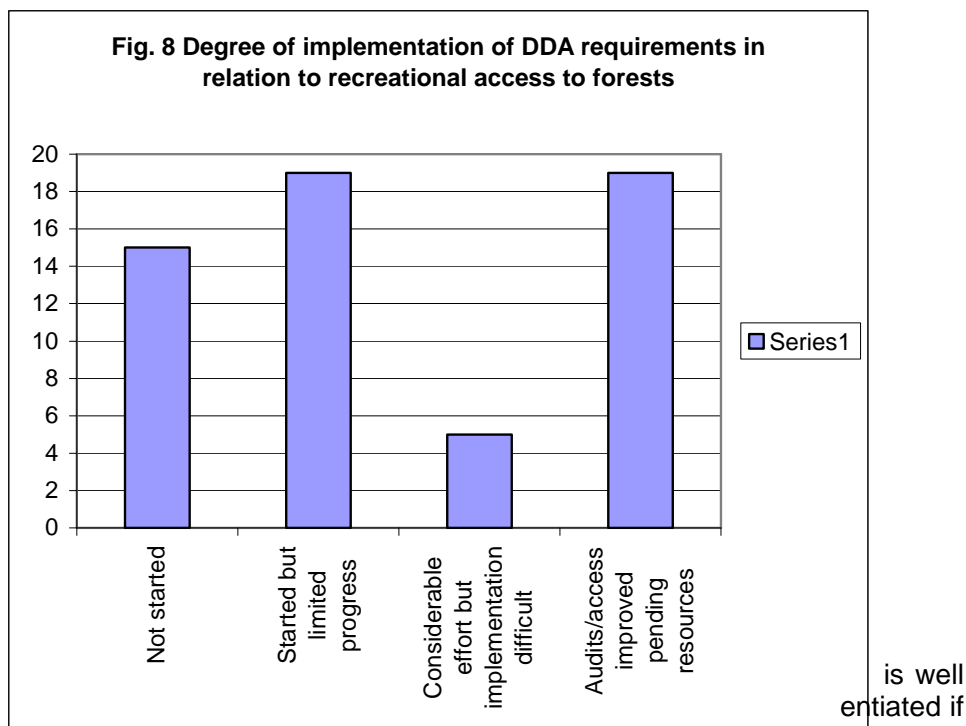
This question is in two parts, the first to find out what the general level of awareness of the DDA amongst the sample, the second part to find out the level of implementation required by forest owners and managers.

**Question 3a “What is your level of awareness of the Disability Discrimination Act?”**



The results of the question for the whole sample show that most people have heard of it and are generally aware of its requirements. There are minorities at both ends of the scale, some who are very familiar with the Act and some who know nothing of it. This suggests that there is progress to be made before everyone in the sector knows enough to take the DDA seriously and give some thought to its implementation.

**Question 3b “What is the degree of implementation of DDA requirements in relation to recreational access to forests?”**

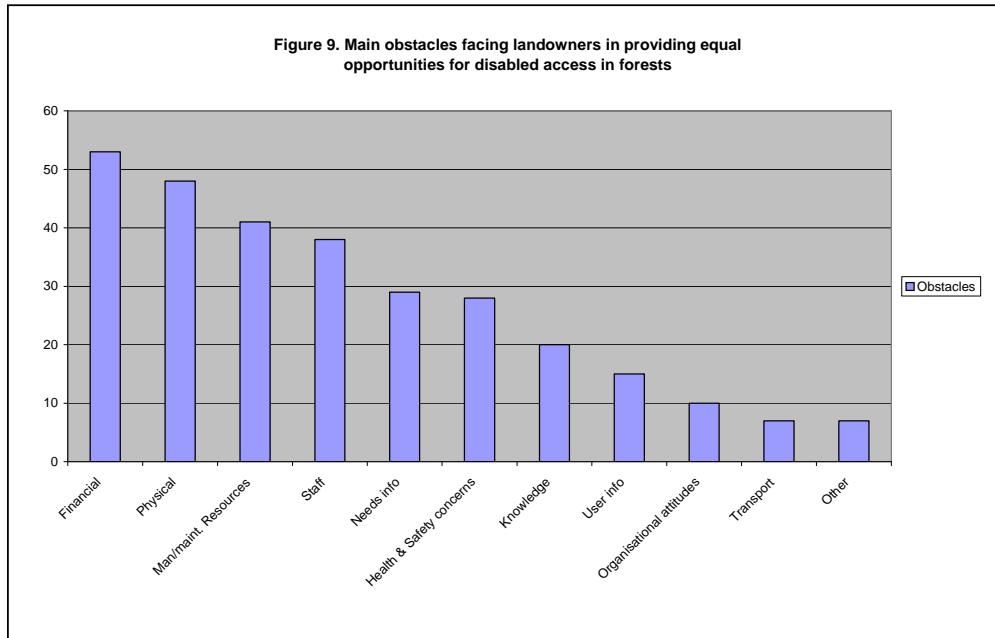


The private sector has made the least progress, local authorities and government agencies have started and in some cases made good progress, and the charitable/NGO sector is at all stages depending on location. This shows that there is progress to be made in terms of implementing the requirements, and that the private sector has the furthest to go.



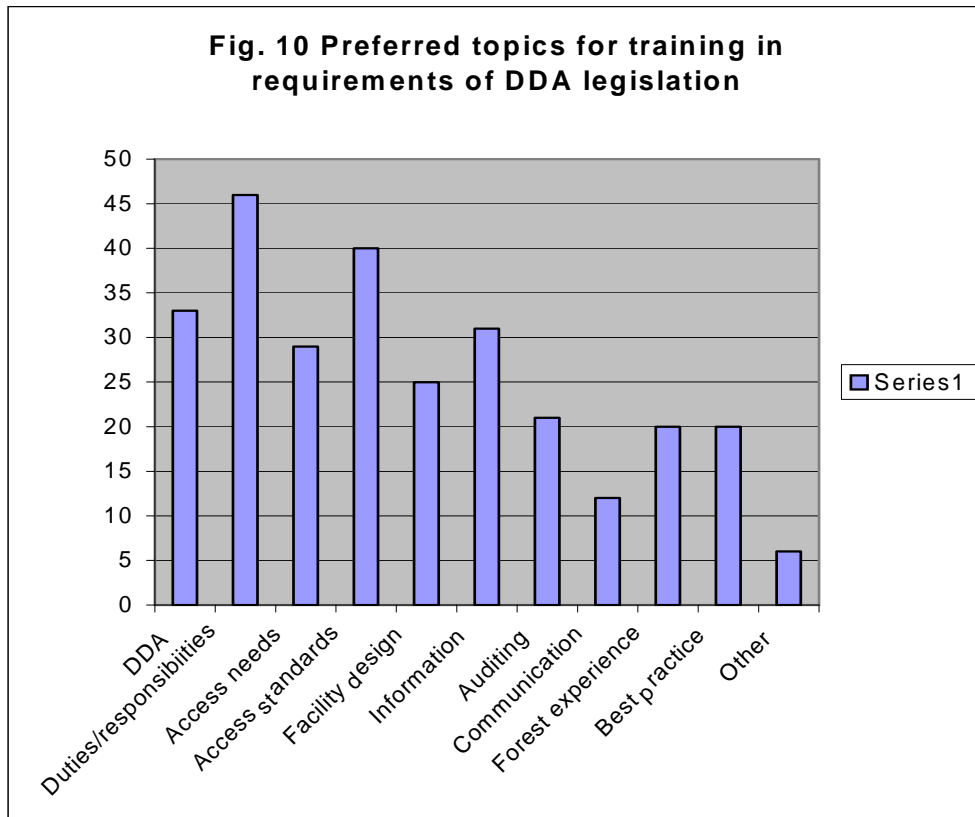
**(D) Question 4: “What are the main obstacles facing landowners in providing equal access in forests?”**

This question concerns the barriers people perceive to be present. Originally there was a follow-up question to identify the most important of those selected but this could not be carried out using the software for the on-line system. Therefore all barriers which were identified are shown.



**(E) Question 5: “What are your preferred topics for training in the requirements of the DDA legislation?”**

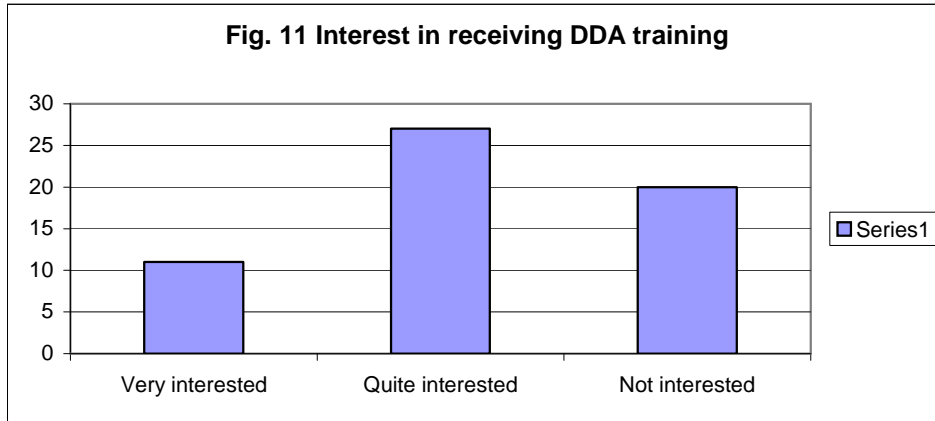
This question examines the training that might be provided and the topics that are seen as most important.



All subjects need attention but those that stand out are the duties and responsibilities, access standards, the DDA and information provision. Access needs and facility design are the next level of importance.

**(F) Question 6: “What is your level of interest in receiving training on the DDA?”**

This question looks at the demand for training, with three levels of interest to choose from: The first chart is the result from the whole sample and then by sector.



The results show most sectors are interested or very interested, with some access managers not interested, possibly because they are already trained. It shows that if training were to be provided there is sufficient interest for courses to be viable.

## 9.0 Conclusions

The survey analysed a relatively small proportion of the whole population. However, it reinforces the findings of the forums.

### Key findings were:

Understanding of the terminology surrounding accessibility is poor and confusing. It needs to be clarified and simplified for land owners, managers and users, especially if more information is to be provided.

Respondents generally prefer to see limited access to parts of the forest where there is a demand rather than trying to make all places accessible or putting in access where there is no obvious demand. It is only the access officers and planners who are not as strong in these views, however they do not manage land.

Overall knowledge of the DDA is not high, with some people claiming never to have heard of it. There is clearly a need and a demand for training to improve this.

The obstacles to providing access are overwhelmingly seen as financial and staff resources, and the physical limitations to the land. It would be useful to explore the extent to which these are real barriers and provide guidance to address and help managers overcome these barriers.

Three main points recurred during analysis of the survey: the focus on making areas accessible; the lack of awareness of the importance of information; and the accessibility of many places without the need to lay out paths suitable for wheelchairs (wheelchair use seems to be the standard definition of disability for most people, given the results of the survey). Therefore, training and guidance need to make it clear that it is often the case that simple, low cost strategies can be as effective as major, high cost projects. This can be done during routine maintenance and DDA work needs to be embedded in much the same way as health and safety is.

The main components of a training course are given in the list selected by the respondents – everything needs implementing with the responsibilities of landowners, and the DDA requirements and standards coming top. However, given the lack of awareness of the needs of disabled people and the importance they attach to information, this will need to be a key area. A proposed training course should include, in this order:

- An explanation of the DDA in simple terms
- Discussion of the responsibilities of landowners and the relationship with the Land Reform Act
- Discussion of the need of different disabled groups (presented with a disabled person on the tuition team)
- Description of the standards/ requirements for access for different groups
- Facility design, using case studies and best practice examples
- Information provision for different disabilities
- Communication and participation with disabled groups
- Auditing as a process.

## Appendix 1.0

### 1.1 Email invitation

Dear X

I am contacting you from the OPENspace Research Centre at Edinburgh College of Art on behalf of the Forestry Commission to ask if you are willing to complete a questionnaire survey on equal access by disabled people to recreation goods, facilities and services in Scottish forests. The questionnaire is available on-line using the url at the bottom of this message. The results will be completely anonymous – we do not require any personal details from you and there will be no way of us knowing who filled in the questionnaire. Completing it should take no more than 10 minutes.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation

Simon Bell  
OPENspace Research Centre  
Edinburgh College of Art

### 1.2 Questionnaire on disabled access to Scottish forests

Please answer the questions either by clicking on the relevant button or by filling the text box as necessary. Some questions need a single answer, some have a preference scale and others allow you to choose as many items from a list as you want.

**Q1** When you think is meant by each of the following terms? Please write in the box next to each.

Disabled access

Inclusive access

All-ability access

**Q2** Please indicate, using the following scale, your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

1 = strongly disagree

2 = disagree

3 = neither agree nor disagree  
4 = agree  
5 = strongly agree

“Everywhere in the forest should be equally accessible to everyone, regardless of ability or disability”

“It is preferable to focus on the development of key trails for disabled people”

“It is more important to provide information about how accessible a forest or woodland is than to spend money on paths”

“It is better to concentrate resources for developing access where there is a proven demand”

**Q3a** Which of the following statements best describes your level of awareness/knowledge of the Disability Discrimination Act?

1. I have never heard of it
2. I have heard of it but know nothing about it
3. I am generally aware of its requirements
4. I know it quite well
5. I am very familiar with it

**Q3b** Which of the following statements best describes your degree of implementation of the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act in relation to recreational access to forests?

1. My organisation has not started to implement it
2. I and my organisation have made a start but we have not progressed very far
3. I and my organisation have been involved in considerable effort to implement it but we are finding it difficult
4. I and my organisation have a programme of auditing our facilities and improving access where resources permit

**Q4** What do you think are the main obstacles facing landowners when providing equal opportunities for disabled access forests? (select all that apply)

- Financial resources to develop access
- Staff resources to develop access
- Physical site limitations

- Lack of information to potential users
- Lack of knowledge of how to provide access
- Lack of resources for management and maintenance
- Organisational attitudes
- Health and safety concerns
- Lack of knowledge of disabled peoples' needs
- Lack of transport to sites
- Other (please specify)

**Q5** Of the barriers that you selected in Q4 please indicate the three that you consider to be most important ( a list will appear of those selected with buttons to vote 1,2 or 3)

**Q6** If training was to be provided about how to meet the requirements of the DDA legislation, what topics would you like to be included? (select all that apply)

- The DDA legislation
- Forest managers' responsibilities and duties
- The access needs of different disabled groups
- Physical site access standards
- Facility design
- How to provide information aimed at different disabled groups
- Access auditing
- How to communicate and engage with the disabled community
- Improving the forest experience for disabled people
- Examples of best practice
- Other (please specify)

**Q7** How interested are you in receiving training on the DDA?

1. Very interested
2. Quite interested
3. Not interested

**Q8** Please tell us a little about yourself

In which sector do you work?

- Government agency
- Local authority
- Private sector
- NGO/charity sector
- Other (please specify)

Are you

- Land owner
- Factor/land agent
- General forest manager
- Recreation manager
- Access manager/officer
- Planner
- Other (please specify)

**Q9** How should information on the DDA be made available to landowners and professionals?

**Q10** We would like to find out about examples of good practice in access provision, information provision, facility design and interpretation for disabled visitors to the forest/countryside. Please name any examples you can think of and, if possible, provide some contact information.

**Thank you very much for your help**