

## COMMUNICATION

### Stakeholder engagement

# Get it right first time to save time and money

by Amanda Bryan

Confor has been working with its members to identify what the best approaches are to stakeholder engagement, both in terms of what is effective for the sector and what works best for different stakeholder groups from neighbours and communities to statutory consultees. On the back of this the guidance reproduced here was launched earlier this year. The development of the guidance drew heavily on experience of the sector and has been supplemented by a number of good practice case studies which will be added to as new examples arise. Although developed in Scotland it is equally valid across the whole of Great Britain.

Most foresters should be familiar with the reasons for undertaking stakeholder consulta-

tion, particularly around the development of long-term forest plans and new woodland creation. However, it is just as important to consider engagement in advance of harvesting, restocking or other forest operations. Regular engagement could also address problems facing forest managers such as fly tipping or antisocial behaviour. Getting your engagement right first time can save both time and money, meaning plans are approved more quickly and that future problems are avoided.

This work drew heavily on feedback from the sector and stakeholder groups gathered through face-to-face and telephone interviews in late 2014 and through workshops with stakeholders at the Scottish Rural Parliament in 2014 and with the sector in spring 2015. We asked people about what worked and what didn't work both in terms of when and how to consult.

Experience shows that while it may take more time, having open days or site visits can be very effective in helping all parties understand the issues. Drop-in sessions allowing stakeholders to attend at a time that suits them can allow greater opportunity for one to one dialogue and more meaningful discussion. On the flip side 'town hall' style meetings, which are often the fall back option for consultation, tended to result in confrontational situations creating more heat than light.

It should also be noted that sometimes peo-

ple don't necessarily have much to say, it is just that they want to be informed about what is going on. Forest managers therefore need to think about the best way to get information out to people – it could be about using household mail drops or articles in community newsletters, it could be about using social media or it might just be about posting signs at forest gates. The method used will all depend on the specific community and the type of forest users.

The forestry sector is leading the way in the development of this type of guidance and this should inform civil servants as they consider how to implement Part 5 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 which gives Scottish Ministers authority to provide guidance for all landowners to engage communities on decisions relating to land. Over the border in England there isn't an equivalent but the greater density of population and the challenges around securing new woodland creation and landscape change makes stakeholder engagement a high priority.

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If you have an example of good practice in stakeholder engagement that you would like to share with others then please contact Amanda Bryan on [aigasassociates@aol.com](mailto:aigasassociates@aol.com)

