



Surgeries

Many people respond positively to being provided with a small amount of time with exclusive attention from 'people in power'. Forest or woodland managers can provide that reinforcement to members of the community and get valuable insights into the wishes and needs of the people by holding occasional Surgeries in a public or neutral location. If necessary, several staff can be present on selected days so that more people can be seen. The larger the population of the area, the more frequent such Surgeries should be, though it may take several sessions before word spreads among community members that the sessions are real, and that they are being listened to. For example, in very small communities, one session per year may be enough, while in areas with very large populations one per month may be needed. Surgery date(s) need to be published throughout the locality in advance.

Resources and requirements

Skills

- Good personal communication skills are essential.
- Skills at listening and being able to keep the conversation in a productive direction are important.

Equipment

- A meeting room at a library, school, council hall or similar public site is ideal to minimise the intimidation factor.
- Facilities for waiting are useful, including written information to browse and light refreshments.

Time

- Time commitments for Surgeries vary, depending on the communities they are intended to serve.
- For a district that serves a large population, perhaps a half-day every month would be appropriate. For smaller communities once every six months or once a year would suffice.
- Surgeries should be held in the evenings or at weekends.

Level of engagement

INFORMING: ★

CONSULTING: ★★

INVOLVING: ★

PARTNERSHIP:

Strengths

- Direct, detailed information from individuals can be helpful to planners.
- Many people feel better about voicing complaints in private, one-to-one situations.

Weaknesses

- Many people will not feel comfortable enough to express their concerns directly.
- Views gathered through Surgeries may not be very representative of the population.

Useful sources of information

Books

- Public involvement in environmental permits: a reference guide. US Environmental Protection Agency (2000). Available from: www.epa.gov
- Reference manual for public involvement. J. Barker et al. (1999). 2nd edn. Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Health Authority, London.

Case study

- Fort Augustus Forest District.

This toolbox is designed to assist Forestry Commission staff when they are considering which tools they could use to involve the public in the forest and woodland planning process. For more information please visit the website at: www.forestry.gov.uk/toolbox