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Locals take a look at the Lookout

New Flow Country viewing facility opens officially to visitors

Last Saturday saw a celebration of the completion of the Flows Lookout, the new viewing tower on the peatlands at Forsinard in the Flow Country. Local people from Strathalladale and beyond were invited by the Peatlands Partnership and RSPB Scotland to an open day. Visitors took guided walks along the trail, saw for themselves the impressive view from the Lookout, and consumed lots of tea and cake!

Caroline Eccles, Flows to the Future project manager, said, “Even those who know the area well were surprised by the view of the pool system, as only from above can the intricate patterning of the many bog pools be really appreciated. Pool systems are one the special features of the Flow Country but cannot easily be seen by most visitors. The timing was perfect, as beautiful bogbean flowers are just coming into flower in the pools.”

Ms Eccles reported that visitors also enjoyed using the new boardwalk to the tower. “The boardwalk complements the existing flagstone trail, but is designed to enable people of all abilities to get out into the peatland. It is pushchair and wheelchair friendly. The tower and boardwalk are open to the public free of charge at all times and are close to the RSPB’s visitor centre at Forsinard.”

Councillor Linda Munro, who was visiting on the open day commented “I was incredibly impressed with the project. The quality of local workmanship is second to none and has been done with great sensitivity to the environment. The project will attract many new visitors to our area, but I also urge those who live here in Caithness and Sutherland, young and old, to come to Forsinard and see for themselves a unique view of our spectacular landscape. I’m going to bring my grandson to experience this during his summer holidays in Bettyhill. The added opportunity for world-class research will raise the profile of the north of Scotland to a new international audience”.

The Flows Lookout and boardwalk have been funded by the European Regional Development Fund, Scottish Natural Heritage, RSPB Scotland and the Highland Council, as part of the Heritage Lottery Funded Flows to the Future Project.

The Flows Lookout was designed by Icosis Architects in Edinburgh and built by local company O’Brien Construction. Project Manager Caroline Eccles commented, “We are extremely impressed at how O’Briens have been able to complete this job on such a challenging site with minimal impact on the peatland. Prior to construction there were some initial concerns from local people as to how the tower would fit into the landscape, but feedback so far shows that people have been pleasantly surprised. Whilst the larch cladding, grown by Forestry Commission Scotland near Ullapool, is currently golden, this will weather to a silvery colour.”

The Flows to the Future project gratefully acknowledges funding support from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the European Regional Development Fund.



PHOTOGRAPHS

1. **Brian Hart, Valerie Bradford (both from Strathalladale), Councillor Linda Munro, Tony Bradford (Strathalladale) and Caroline Eccles (Project Manager Flows to the Future Project) at the start of the new boardwalk, with the Flows Lookout in the distance.**
2. **Looking out from the top deck of the Flows Lookout.**
3. **Looking down from the Flows Lookout onto the new boardwalk.**
4. **The Flows Lookout.**

NOTES TO EDITORS

The Peatlands Partnership includes Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission (Scotland), Highland Council, RSPB Scotland, Plantlife Scotland, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, The Highland Third Sector Interface, The Flow Country Rivers Trust, The Northern Deer Management Group and The Environmental Research Institute. It liaises with local community groups, , the Scottish Government's Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate and the North Sutherland Community Forest Trust. It is independently chaired by John Henderson of Scrabster Farm, Caithness.

RSPB Scotland is the lead partner in The Flows to the Future project, a Peatlands Partnership project, which gratefully acknowledges funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and from the following funders and supporters; Environmental Research Institute, European Regional Development Fund, Forestry Commission (Scotland), Peatland Action, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, The Highland Council, RSPB, WREN, Scotland Rural Development Programme, Scottish Government, Scottish Natural Heritage and The Tubney Trust.

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