

Meeting of Lowland Deer Network Scotland Executive Committee

At: The Royal Ivy Hotel, Bridge of Allan

On: Wednesday 14 October 2015

Present: Richard Cooke (RC), Chairman
Dick Playfair (DP), Secretary
Anton Watson (AW), SNH
Colin Edwards (CE), FCS
Angus Corby (AC), Transport Scotland
Ian Fergusson (IF), FES
Ian Talboys (IT), Aberdeen City Council
David Bruce (DB), UPM Tilhill
Donald Muir (DM), BASC
Alex Hogg (AH), SGA
David Fyffe (DFy), SL&E
Bill Haddow (BH) for NLDG
Jim Govan (JG)
Rob Sharp (RSh)

Apologies or not present:

Ron Smith (RS), Vice Chairman
Jamie Hammond (JH)
Donald Fraser (DF), SNH
Malcolm Muir (MM), South Lanarkshire Council
John Bruce (JB), BDS
Alex Stoddart (AS) SACS
Peter Semple (PS), IDDMG
Craig Paterson (CP), NLDG
Alex Paul (AP), WLDG
David Ferguson (DF), NLDG
Andrew Treadaway, (AT)
Daye Tucker (DT), NFUS
Maggie Keegan (MK), SWT
Andy Mavin (AM), Police Scotland
George Ritchie (GR) Banff & Buchan DG
Rory Galloway (RG), Angus Deer Initiative
Mike Flynn (MF), SSPCA

1	<p>Previous minutes and matters arising</p> <p>1.1 <u>Item 8.1 – Deer Management Plans & FCS grants</u> DP to forward form of words to CE for agreement for inclusion re FCS grants and deer management plans.</p> <p>DB said that any Deer Management Plan for commercial woodland needed to consider deer populations 10 years in the future, plus the impacts of deer on the wider landscape. Existing woodlands should have a forest management plan containing statements with regard to deer, and that large commercial schemes would include a deer management element in the forest plan.</p>	DP
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	<p>1.2 <u>Woodland seminar</u> Although he had not attended, CE said that feedback showed that the seminar had been well received. DB said that the deer management grant scheme had opened in early August.</p> <p>1.3 <u>PACEC</u> 1.3.1 RC said he had sight of a draft but that there were still some amendments needed. The LDNS response had been disappointing with only 20 responses covering low ground, and that this had probably led to the anomaly in the draft report that stated that the roe deer population was falling.</p> <p>1.3.2 JG said that a number of different surveys had been going on concurrently (BASC, BDS, PACEC) and that this had possibly influenced the level of response.</p> <p>1.4 <u>Land Reform Bill</u> RC said that LDNS had made a written submission to the Bill and that this was on the website.</p> <p>1.5 <u>Native Woodland Survey of Scotland (NWSS)</u> 1.5.1 This had been referred to in the evidence sessions on the Bill and it was broadly assumed, mistakenly, by those on the RACCE Committee that the NWSS showed that deer were to blame for most damage. RC said that the default position appeared to be that if there was damage then it being done by deer.</p> <p>1.5.2 CE said there had been some correspondence with BDS on this and that was not the conclusion of the survey. Both AH and RC said however that was how it was being interpreted in political circles.</p> <p>1.5.3 AH asked whether there is a need for another study capturing more information.</p> <p>1.5.4 RC asked for FCS to produce some form of clarification that could be used from Parliamentary level downwards.</p> <p>1.6 <u>Central Belt – venison supply chain</u> RC said that this should remain on agenda, and the concept of a shared Central Belt larder had been raised with the RACCE Committee and the supply of local venison to local butchers. RSh suggested getting rid of the venison dealers' license. RC said that much of the legislation emanated from Europe.</p>	CE
2	<p>Declarations of interest There were no declarations of interest.</p>	

3	<p>Chairman's report</p> <p>3.1 RC said he had been involved in countless telephone discussions, mostly on the Land Reform Bill, with members of the LDNS Committee, SNH, Scottish Government representatives and the deer sector generally.</p> <p>3.2 He had attended the RACCE Committee evidence session at Kelso, and had given verbal evidence to the RACCE Committee at Holyrood where he said its members were appreciating more that deer management across Scotland was not as simple as it might previously have seemed, albeit some of the views expressed by those at the session regarding shortcomings of the sector had been vigorously critical.</p> <p>3.3 RC had participated in a podcast with Chris Dalton on deer issues generally (for Pace Productions).</p>	
4	<p>Financial update</p> <p>4.1 The financial report was circulated for the current financial year. This showed an opening balance of £13,837, income to date of £7317.80, expenditure to date of £15,659 and an account balance of £5495. Half of the SNH grant and the FCS grant for the year were still outstanding.</p> <p>4.2 RC reminded those on the Committee that they were entitled to submit claims for mileage if they wished.</p>	All
5	<p>Project plan</p> <p>DP has reviewed and updated the project plan and forwarded his updates to AW. AW will also review. The updated Project Plan would be circulated prior to the next meeting.</p>	AW, DP
6	<p>Political update</p> <p>6.1 RC reported that a delegation from LDNS had met with the RACCE Committee at Kelso on 28 September. One hour had been allotted and it was felt to have been a good and fair meeting.</p> <p>6.2 JG said that it had been important to demonstrate the difference between upland and lowland management, and that low ground management opened up opportunities for local people to get involved locally.</p> <p>6.3 RC said that the land management pattern was distinctly different, and that it would be very hard to design and implement a 'one size fits all' approach to deer management for upland and lowland situations.</p>	

6.4 RC had also given evidence at the RACCE Committee session on 30.09.2015 on the Land Reform Bill for ADMG and LDNS covering additional powers for SNH and the reintroduction of sporting rates.

6.5 RSh said that there were some major issues within the network. That there were still problems reaching farming and forestry sectors; that in many respects it wasn't a local resource (given the number of stalkers coming up from England at weekends); that there were issues getting local product into local butchers; and that Mike Russell, with reference to Cowal, should be addressing his questions about the perceived failure of deer management to the forestry companies.

6.6 RC said that Robbie Kernahan's input at the RACCE Committee had been excellent, and that Mike Russell's chosen example of Cowal was indeed down to forestry companies and not estates. RSh said that he would make a direct approach to meet and discuss with Mike Russell.

RSh

6.7 AH said that in his view private estates had largely 'got their house in order' but that Local Authorities (LAs), private forestry companies and FE were not making use of the available local resource – in fact to the contrary they were cutting numbers of local rangers.

6.8 RSh said that contact with LAs was still poor and in certain instances there remained no point of contact.

6.9 RC said that LAs tended to be disinterested regarding deer (with a few notable exceptions) and that Rob Gibson, Chair of the RACCE Committee, had taken this point. He said also that while concern about FE's use of contractors was shared it must be remembered that the taxpayer was paying FE to grow trees and deer management was secondary to this.

6.10 RSh said that if SNH took action against an LA that might generate some interest from others. Renfrewshire Council for example was doing nothing about DVCs. RSh said that SNH could implement a Section 7 in the Paisley area if such a step was felt to be required and that all parks in the Paisley area had deer populations.

6.11 BH said that most of issues were in peri-urban areas, but wondered if the RACCE Committee could be enthused about deer issues around Cumbernauld?

	<p>6.12 RC said that the Land Reform Bill is about giving SNH more powers of intervention and it was hard to encourage the private sector to manage deer more effectively when elements of the public sector were not keeping up.</p> <p>6.13 The proposed letter from Iain Ross to LA chief executives should be followed up.</p> <p>6.14 IF said that contact with LAs differed, and that some allowed management, but some were nervous about public perceptions particularly of culling.</p> <p>6.15 DM said that discussion needed to take place above 'ranger level' with LAs. RSh said it was all about which department and budget.</p> <p>6.16 IT said that his authority was fully engaged because of deer damage to trees in the past and having to pay back FCS grants. Subsequent conditions meant they had to manage their deer. The process started 15 years ago, and this year there will be a deer plan for the City shortly to be made public. This could be a model for elsewhere.</p>	AW, DF
7	<p>Sporting rates</p> <p>7.1 DF asked if there had been any feedback from LAs on rates. He said that there was a political will to reintroduce rates; that the assessors say they will have to assess everything amounting to some 60,000 landholdings including public bodies. The Small Business exemption could only be applied if an assessment had taken place.</p> <p>7.2 RC said that the proposal that rates relief should be available to those landholdings that were members of Deer Groups had been put forward, and this could be an incentive for owners to support DMGs. However it would be far more complex in lowland areas. It remains to be seen whether SG can be persuaded of the value of this.</p> <p>7.3 The question remained over where income from sporting rates would be spent at LA or National level, eg on community land purchases as the First Minister had said.</p>	
8	<p>SNH Report</p> <p>8.1 AW said that SNH had been engaged in LA work and casework for members of the public. One such area had been North Queensferry where deer had been displaced by work on the new Forth Crossing.</p>	

	<p>8.2 AW said that LA attention was being drawn again to the Code; that SNH was hoping to police the Code more thoroughly in coming months, and Paisley might be one area meriting such attention.</p> <p>8.3 The SNH thermal imaging/count programme was ongoing.</p> <p>8.4 RSh said that there were still issues with Police interest in one area that he was managing particularly.</p> <p>8.5 AW said that Fife Council was looking closely at the Aberdeen 'template'.</p> <p>8.6 AW said that the focus on deer management would inevitably switch to low ground and how LDGs (and others) were delivering the public interest.</p>	
9	<p>Authorisations Review</p> <p>9.1 AW said this had not progressed greatly. A 6 person panel had been assembled and a recommendation sent to the Minister where it was awaiting approval. Both urban and lowland interests had been incorporated.</p> <p>9.2 RC said that the Deer Sector Evidence Group should have a further meeting and that he would draft a response to the Panel for consideration by the Group once the review commences.</p>	RC
10	<p>Events</p> <p>10.1 <u>Deer on Your Doorstep (DOYD)</u></p> <p>10.1.1 DP said that the DOYD display was now available for use by members of LDNS, and that opportunities should be sought by the Committee for similar evenings to that held in EH10 (30 minute presentation and display to Fairmilehead Community Council) and to exhibit in libraries, city chambers etc.</p> <p>10.1.2 It was suggested that smaller (A3) printed posters should be produced, and the Dogs Chase Deer poster (pdf) circulated.</p> <p>10.1.3 RC said those on the Committee should now make use of the DOYD display as well as come up with other ideas and activities as had been requested at previous meetings.</p> <p>10.1.4 RC said that a form was being developed to standardize requests for funding for local events. This would be circulated shortly.</p> <p>10.1.5 RC said that a couple of potential future events in the SLDG area have already been brought to his</p>	<p>All</p> <p>DP</p> <p>All</p> <p>DP</p>

	<p>attention.</p> <p>10.1.6 AW said that he had had discussion with Robbie Kernahan and that SNH would be looking for 'a bit more' from LDNS for the money invested – ie more delivery. CE said that the FCS contribution was also being looked at 'very closely' and that FCS had to justify its investment in all such programmes.</p> <p>10.1.7 RC said it was important to have events for the sector (eg training) but also those that engaged with the public and raised awareness of deer management issues in a local context were needed.</p> <p>10.1.8 RC said that he would write to all members of the Committee to impress on them the need for LDNS to move towards much more practical delivery, public engagement, raising skills, and raising awareness.</p>	RC
11	<p>Best Practice</p> <p>RSh asked what was happening with Best Practice. RC said that there was some concern that Best Practice had been allowed to fade and that SNH did not have the resources it used to have to maintain Best Practice's previous high profile. He said it would be good to get it going again both for upland and lowland deer managers as there was also much new material that could be included.</p>	
12	<p>Communication</p> <p>12.1 There was discussion about heightening communications and whether LDNS would benefit from a 'closed' Facebook page.</p> <p>12.2 RC said that LDNS website was current with a linked twitter account. He questioned whether Facebook could bring anything further at this stage, plus it would require regular management and moderation.</p>	
13	<p>AGM 2015/16</p> <p>13.1 The format of the next AGM was discussed in the light of the low turn out there had been at the last event.</p> <p>13.2 It was decided that instead of a repeat event at Westerwood the AGM would piggyback on the next Committee meeting and be a very simple event for reporting on the year, both in terms of activity and finances.</p> <p>13.3 In addition however an LDNS 'corporate' event could be planned for later in the year, possibly a range day or similar.</p>	

14	Any other business DF drew the meeting's attention to the land reform fringe event at the SNP conference and asked DP to circulate details of this around the Committee.	DF, DP
15	Date of next meeting The next Executive Committee meeting coupled with the AGM will take place on Wednesday 3 February. Venue to be decided (probably Bridge of Allan).	

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