

Meeting of Lowland Deer Network Scotland Executive Committee

At: The Royal Hotel, Bridge of Allan

On: Tuesday 16 August 2016

Present: Richard Cooke, Chairman
Dick Playfair, Secretary
Jamie Hammond, SNH
Holly Deary, SNH
Colin Edwards, FCS
Ian Fergusson, FES
Andy Mavin, Police Scotland
John Bruce, BDS
Colin Shedden, BASC
Daye Tucker, NFUS
Andrew Treadaway, Barony College
Ian Talboys, City of Aberdeen
Richard Knight, SLDG
Robert Tenant, SLDG
David Quarrell, SLDG
Peter Semple, I&DDMG
Ron Smith
Glen Heggs
James Govan

Apologies or not present:

Angus Corby, Transport Scotland
Donald Fraser, SNH
Anton Watson, SNH
David Bruce, UPM Tillhill
David Fyffe, SL&E
Alex Hogg, SGA
David Ferguson, NLDG
Alex Paul, WLDG
George Ritchie, BBDG
Rob Sharp
Malcolm Muir, S Lanarkshire Council
Mike Flynn, SSPCA
Maggie Keegan, SWT

1.	<p>Previous minutes and matters arising</p> <p>1.1 The previous minutes (Exec Committee meeting, 27 April 2016) were approved following one amendment from PS.</p> <p><u>1.2 Matters arising</u></p> <p>1.2.1 Under previous minutes item 3.3 DP explained that the discrepancy had arisen because the costs for two AGMs had been billed in the same year with only some expenses from the later AGM billed in the second year, hence why one figure was larger than the other.</p> <p>1.2.2 RC said that the Forestry Commission was granting a further £5K for training and events, with an additional £3K from Transport Scotland specifically for road related deer management activity.</p>
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	<p>1.2.3 RC mentioned the current Scottish Government review of deer management and said he had meeting fixed with both Cabinet Secretaries with rural responsibility in September.</p> <p>1.2.4 RC said that the Meeting of Minds event organized by DQ had been extremely successful with an excellent political component. DQ said that the follow-up event which was being planned would be aimed at <i>custodians of greenspace and environmental groups</i>. Speakers included RC, CE and Rory Puttman, and Roseanna Cunningham, Cabinet Secretary, had been invited. The proposed date is Friday 31 March.</p> <p><u>1.3 CWD update</u></p> <p>1.3.1 JB gave an update on the situation regarding CWD following two reported cases in Norway earlier this year and that the risks to the UK were strong particularly given the import of 1600 reindeer in the last 6 years. JB said that the chances of further infection in Norway were high, and that the country was to fund the testing of 20,000 deer. They were currently in a period of 'wait and see' although it is anticipated that further cases will emerge. CWD cannot however be tested for on live animals and can have a two year incubation period, so continuing to import deer from Scandinavia remains a highly contentious issue.</p> <p>1.3.2 JB said that a further advice note was available from BDS.</p>
2.	<p>Financial report</p> <p>2.1 RC said LDNS was still in the early period of its 2016/17 financial year. Grant funding had been received from SNH (£10,000), FCS (£10,000) and Transport Scotland (increased to £10,000) with the further £5000 offered from FCS to be received later in the year.</p> <p>2.2 Income to date this year was £30,091 against outgoings of £11,560.</p> <p>2.3 All figures were in line with budget. All events were now being itemised separately on the financial report.</p>
3.	<p>Chairman's Report</p> <p>RC updated the meeting on his activity over the period for LDNS, specifically in relation to events (Caddonfoot and Scottish Game Fair), and input into the deer management review (see 6 below).</p>
4.	<p>Elections and appointments to Committee</p> <p>4.1 It was agreed that all LDGs should be invited to send a representative to attend the Committee meetings as this would be the best way to disseminate information back to the Groups. Mark Telfer (EELD) and Peter Baxter (Borders DG) to be invited to future meetings.</p> <p>4.2 Mark Lazzeri had been appointed to Vice Chair. However he had had to immediately step down following his new appointment with Islay Estates. RC said he would welcome any suggestions or nominations for the Vice Chair role.</p>

5.

Project Plan

5.1 AW and DP have met to discuss the Project Plan and, given the new approach to delivery of LDNS Aims and Objectives, agreed that the plan now required a substantial re-write along the following lines with LDNS activity now majoring on two main areas:

- Agency role - gathering and use of data, landscape scale demo project
- LDNS – communications, events, local activity, training, Groups

5.2 AW had prepared an outline for the scope of the a Project Plan as follows:

5.2.1 To improve understanding of deer population dynamics

- More clearly understand the population dynamics of lowland deer, in particular the rate of expansion in relation to increasing habitat networks.

5.2.2 To develop a range of options for lowland and urban deer management planning

- Ensure that local authorities where there are high deer impacts and all LDGs have an adopted DMP
- Implement a training and education programme through LDNS for low ground practitioners
- Explore options for effective low ground deer management
- Identify and assess the effectiveness of different management models in and around towns.

5.2.3 To coordinate, make available and use current data on lowland and urban deer

- Improve the coordination of data sets to facilitate analysis and gain a better understanding of deer impacts.
- Develop an understanding of the impact of deer on expanding woodland and forestry in urban areas.

5.2.4 To understand public perception of urban and lowland deer

- Support delivery of wider community education on deer and deer management in the low ground.
- Promote understanding and articulate the benefits of deer in and around towns.

6.

Review of deer management – report to Scottish Government

6.1 RC said that he had met with SNH staff who were compiling the report and, whereas the upland aspect of it was subject to intense scrutiny, the lowlands review would be covered by narrative.

6.2 This was the first of what are expected to be three-yearly reviews, and it is anticipated that the report will say that lowland deer management is moving in the right direction but that more will be expected for the future in terms of more deer groups, a reduction in RTAs, less damage to woodland and sites, more education etc.

6.3 JH said that the lowland review was an observation of the state of play currently, and three different types of lowland group had been identified – stalker-led, commercial forestry, and a hybrid of these.

6.4 JH said that there was not an expectation that the LDGs should provide full cover, and recognised that they were dealing with a different formula from the upland DMGs. There were continuing concerns over Local Authority engagement (or lack of it), and that a lot of perceived negativity had been directed at the lowlands.

6.5 The review paper has an end-October deadline to go to the Cabinet Secretary, and would need to be approved by the SNH Board ahead of that.

6.6 RC said that if the report was to go to Committee this would be unlikely to be before 2017. He said that he hoped that a good news story would emerge about the deer sector overall from the process, and that those who had worked hard to get up to speed would not be disheartened; also that a true and factual account of progress was not watered down for political intentions.

6.7 JB said that compliance with the Habitats Directive was important, but focusing on deer numbers was not, and that grazing impacts were what really mattered.

6.8 The direction of travel towards re-wilding was also noted, although RC said that Norway, often quoted, was not the ultimate model. The forthcoming meeting on the proposed Kielder Lynx Project was flagged up. JH said that an SNH lynx sub group had been set up, and that an application was at some point extremely likely. Lynx range across extensive territories with roe deer as a significant part of their prey. Sheep farmers had major concerns, although the sheep farming model in Europe where there were lynx was very different from Scotland.

7. **Report from Events Sub Group**

7.1 DP gave the report from the events sub group that had met on 18 July. The group now comprised Colin Edwards, Glen Heggs, Jim Govan and Dick Playfair.

7.2 A Walk and Talk event was to be developed with Scottish Land & Estates for SW Scotland. Simon Craufurd is the SL&E contact.

7.3 A second Meeting of Minds event on the subject of *Management of Greenspace* to be held at the Lost Lamb on 31 March 2017 was being developed by DQ. An approved funding proposal was necessary before support for the event could be confirmed.

7.4 The group had discussed the proposed Urban Deer Management Training Course as proposed by AT and DQ. It had been agreed that LDNS should be completely happy with all content of the course before it could be endorsed. It was still uncertain whether the course would provide a qualification or just a certificate of attendance. The course could be used as a trial with certificate of attendance only (see item 8 Below).

	<p>7.5 Transport Scotland had offered additional funding to stage an event or events focusing specifically on deer and road safety issues. The sub group had agreed that this should be run by LDNS in conjunction with an LDG, or just by LDNS and not aligned with any deer group. It was suggested that Peter Green or Rodney Day could speak. Topics could include deer management planning, DVCs and hotspots, reporting accidents/incidents, humane dispatch etc. CE had said that a suitable venue on the National Forest Estate could be found.</p> <p>7.6 Noted also that the new Edinburgh & East Lothian DG (EELDG) is proposing to run an awareness campaign through car repair bodyshops in East Lothian to encourage drivers to report DVCs and to gather data, and this could tie in to the above.</p> <p>7.7 It was noted that the Deer on Your Doorstep display had been used at two Aberdeen events in August and that a second more portable set of display banners was now available through FCS.</p> <p>7.8 SLDG had run a first aid event in East Kilbride in May.</p> <p>7.9 Two events on training and scent hounds were taking place on 30 September (Dalkeith) and 2 October (Strathdon) with an E News was to be circulated promoting these.</p> <p>7.10 The Tilhill forestry event planned for June had been postponed.</p> <p>7.11 LDNS is supporting the BDS Activity Day at Lockerbie on 21 August.</p> <p>7.12 LDNS is supporting a South Ayrshire DG (SADG) First Aid course at Straiton on 5 November.</p> <p>7.13 DP is to assess possible involvement with Borders DG for the Tweed Valley Forest Festival from 21 to 30 October.</p> <p>7.14 Looking ahead, a rifle target/scope zeroing day had been suggested as an LDNS event for 2017, possibly demonstrating different types of ammunition. An indoor range at Livingston had been proposed as a possible suitable venue.</p> <p>7.15 It was decided to distribute the <i>Dogs Chase Deer</i> poster electronically to vet practices if a suitable database could be sourced. DP also to look at the option to print and post.</p>
8.	<p>Urban deer management course</p> <p>8.1 AT gave an update on the proposed Urban Deer Management Course (MDIAT) and had worked up a programme covering a 1.5 day course plus half day assessment. AT said that the course should promote and assist with DSC uptake and that discussions had taken place and were continuing with DMQ.</p>

8.2 The assessment element proposed is essay-type questions and multiple choice, 3 requiring an extended written response, with the shooting aspect comprising 5 elements requiring a pass at the first attempt.

8.3 There had been discussion with SNH and others about how this fits with current training provision and CPD, and it was still not clear whether this should result in an award or a certificate of attendance.

8.4 RC said it was important that it fitted well with what already exists and that it was accepted by the sector.

8.5 PS said there was widespread interest in a course but that a formal exam was possibly a step too far.

8.6 CE said that open discussion with DMQ was vital, and that care should be taken not to confuse the current, established training process.

8.7 DQ said that this approach would give local authorities confidence that risks of managing urban deer were being minimised.

8.8 JB said that BDS would like to see the whole of the course content in advance, and that LDNS should also be consulted before giving it its endorsement.

8.9 RC said he saw there was a need for such a course and that LDNS should be leading. DP said that he was aware that a similar course was being run by an English-based business for practitioners in Scotland.

8.10 CE said he was worried that such a course/qualification might dilute the current available management resource. However, DQ said that as far as he was aware most practitioners would welcome extra training, and that it would give confidence to those outside the sector also.

8.11 RC said that he thought the best route forward would be for the course not to deliver a qualification, but that a certificate of attendance should be the first step.

8.12 JB said that the course and the skills should be transferable and urban deer management should not be thought of exclusively as a Scottish issue. DT asked whether the course could be integrated into the Rural Skills Modern Apprenticeship scheme.

8.13 Concluding the discussion, RC said that the proposal was noted with interest, and that it was acknowledged that additional skills were required for those managing deer in an urban environment. However, more detail was required. JH asked to be kept updated on discussions with DMQ.

9.	<p>Authorisations review</p> <p>9.1 PS reported that the Review Group had concluded its work and that its draft paper for approval would go to the SNH management team. It would then be for SNH to decide what happens next. It was noted that this was a review by SNH and did not require a report to the Minister.</p> <p>9.2 Only 13 organisations had submitted input, and the feeling that the Panel was 'deer management light' had been intimated to PS. Accordingly he had carried out very extensive consultation with individuals in the deer management sector, 31 in total, assimilating their evidence and presenting it to the panel. RC said he hoped that everyone felt that the panel had conducted itself in a reasonable way and that the Committee looked forward to its conclusions.</p>
10.	<p>Sporting rates</p> <p>10.1 RC said that the approach of the Assessors was to be consistent and that a single form is to go to everyone, potentially 55,000 – 60,000 recipients, public and private interests. He understood the Small Business Rates Relief Scheme would apply so this was a huge exercise arguably for just a small number to pay sporting rates. Introduction would be in 2017 with the business rates revaluation.</p> <p>10.2 The Assessors work independently from local authorities but closely with them and he had been assured that there was one set of rules for all landholdings with a potential sporting value.</p>
11.	<p>Low ground chill/larder project</p> <p>DP gave background to the proposed way forward for this and that a separate meeting would take place following the Committee meeting to gain input into a draft questionnaire and then set the information gathering process in motion. This was needed to support a business case to address one or more options to improve routes to market for venison from lowland areas.</p>
12.	<p>Any other business</p> <p><u>12.1 E Coli</u> DP mentioned the proposed research project to screen for <i>Cryptosporidium Parvum</i> and <i>E Coli O157</i> in upland and lowland deer so that a baseline assessment of how prevalent these were could be made.</p> <p><u>12.2 NFUS National Land Use and Environment Committee</u> DT said that there was increasing opportunity to engage with the farming community through a change in internal NFUS structure, and she was optimistic that greater interest going forward could be encouraged.</p> <p><u>12.3 SNH letter to Local Authority Chief Executives</u></p> <p>12.3.1 IT asked what feedback there had been from the letter sent by Ian Ross, SNH Chairman, to the Chief Executives of Local Authorities.</p> <p>12.3.2 JH said that SNH had written to all 32 local authorities in January asking for a response to specific questions and drawing their attention to Chapter 6 of the Deer Code, and whether they had a deer management plan.</p>

	<p>16 responses had been received with some notable exceptions which were being followed up, and those where there were specific issues would be targeted. The exercise currently is work in progress.</p> <p><u>12.4 Firearms Licensing</u> CS said that the Committee should be aware of changes to the firearms licensing process from 1 April 2016, and that medical practitioners (where some practices were charging between £15 and £60 to sign a form) could refuse to sign off an application/renewal. Police Scotland would be reluctant to renew a license without the necessary medical endorsement. It was noted however that 96 per cent of renewals were going through on time.</p>
13	<p>Date of next meeting The date of the next meeting is Tuesday 29 November, 10.00 for 10.30am start at the Royal Hotel, Bridge of Allan (venue now the Hotel Colessio, Spittal Street, Stirling, starting 09.45.</p>

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