

Meeting of Lowland Deer Network Scotland Executive Committee

At: The Leapark Hotel, Grangemouth
On: 31 August 2017

Present: Richard Cooke, Chairman
Dick Playfair, Secretary
Jamie Hammond, SNH
Kevin McCulloch, SNH
Roisin McLaren, SNH
Colin Shedden, BASC
Jamie Farquhar, Confor
David Bruce, UPM Tilhill
Glen Heggs, SWSDG
Andy Mavin, Police Scotland
Mark Telfer, EELDG
Maitland Rankin, SSDG
Jim Paxton, WLDG (part)
Jim Govan
James Simpson
Tom McNeilly, Moredun

Apologies or not present:

Donald Fraser, SNH
Colin Edwards, FCS
Angus Corby, Transport Scotland
Alex Hogg, SGA
John Bruce, BDS
Mike Flynn, SSPCA
David Fyffe, SL&E
Lisa Roberts, NFUS
Iain Robertson, MOD
George Ritchie, BBDG
Andrew Treadaway, SE Scotland DG/Barony College
Peter Baxter, BDG
David Quarrell, SLDG
Hugh O'Neill, IDDMG
Ron Smith, Fife
Ian Talboys, City of Aberdeen
Daye Tucker
Rob Sharp

1.	Welcome, previous minutes and matters arising 1.1 RC welcomed those attending the meeting. 1.2 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 28 April 2017 were approved, proposed by Jim Govan, seconded by David Bruce. 1.3 There were no matters arising that would not be covered elsewhere on the meeting agenda.

2.

Chairman's report

2.1 RC recapped briefly on the proposal prior to the LDNS AGM for a different approach for Committee meetings.

2.2 He said that LDNS was evolving anyway and that sub-groups were a sensible way forward. He recognized that there was frustration particularly in relation to access to public land for deer managers as this could potentially provide the most cost effective solution.

2.3 He said that he had received a strong mandate for the Chair and Secretary to continue, and to maintain momentum, particularly in the light of new challenges emerging from the Review of Deer Management.

2.4 An interesting evening meeting had been held at Airth, combining LDNS business with presentations on ballistics and that more of these type of meetings would be developed.

2.5 Roseanna Cunningham, Cabinet Secretary, had given her response to the Deer Review at the end of June, and had proposed no legislative change, but acknowledged progress made, and distinct differences between management in Highland and Lowland areas. Politicians should now have grasped that the deer sector is complex and needs a subtle approach. This in itself is an achievement. There will be another review in 2019 as SNH is now required to review the Code of Practice three yearly.

2.6 Two new bodies are to be set up. One is a limited duration working group to review the system of deer management in Scotland covering both the uplands and low ground, and SNH is also setting up a separate panel to consider deer management in the lowlands.

2.7 The deer health survey has been launched (see later in minutes under item).

2.8 A meeting had taken place in East Kilbride with Linda Fabiani MSP, Jamie Hammond and Donald Fraser (SNH), and Richard Cooke (LDNS), attending. This had been a meeting initially promoted by David Quarrell to consider the development of a deer larder to serve deer managers in the South Lanarkshire area. Linda Fabiani has a good understanding, and is also receptive to new information and ideas.

2.9 Outcomes of this meeting included the organisation of an evening event at the Scottish Parliament (29 November) focusing on low ground deer management as an education exercise for MSPs and their staff - the first time that LDNS will have staged an event at the Parliament.

2.10 The SNH Sharing Good Practice event was also discussed and it was suggested that a similar event could be repeated in 2018 but broadening scope of attendance to include elected members of Local Authorities.

2.11 LF understands that deer groups do not provide the only solution and that, in a lot of areas, deer management is undertaken by individual stalkers.

2.12 An initiative to capture the 'geographical footprint' of lowland deer management would be helpful, with a number of different organisations holding relevant information – Regional Assessors, Police, membership organisations, databases of DSC1 and 2 qualified stalkers etc. A data set showing who manages what and where would be valuable although challenging to achieve.

2.13 RC and DP had met with the CE of Forest Enterprise Scotland, Simon Hodge, and had discussed the issue of enabling LDGs access to FE land for deer management. There are already mechanisms and procedures, leases and permissions, and strict culling targets but no reason why an LDG should not tender.

2.14 RC had suggested that FE should repeat training days for those bidding for FE contracts as the process is difficult, and there were strong arguments to have local deer management undertaken by a local resource if it is available, and that the tendering process could be simplified. There was some impatience in certain quarters with lack of progress, and this had been flagged up at a political level too.

2.15 Sporting rates valuations were shortly to be issued. Everyone should have been contacted and either returned their questionnaire or been reminded by the Assessors. RC had met with Regional Assessors and established that rates would be assessed on a range of different scales on a per hectare basis and not on numbers of deer culled. Rateable values where there are several business streams on one property would be aggregated although many are still likely to be zero rated under the small business bonus exemption.

2.16 JF said that there remained concern about the extension of business rates to farmland and forestry and the retention of the small business bonus scheme in the future. There was also an anomaly where deer larders were rated if 'individual' to a deer forest, but zero-rated if shared.

2.17 RC said that where there were any concerns then the valuation should be appealed as unquestioned agreement of a rateable value could create a precedent.

2.18 There was discussion about access to Local Authority ground, and RC said that there remained confusion about which Local Authority's department took responsibility. Deer could come under parks and green space, cleansing, or safety and it remained difficult to reach the right people. While some discussion had taken place with local stalkers, locality was not necessarily scored as a positive in terms of trying to get 'onto the list' to provide a deer management service.

	<p>2.19 The suggestion about an index of stalkers with DSC 1 and 2 by post code was raised again, with the proviso that a lot of stalkers do not manage deer in their own immediate locality.</p> <p>2.20 CS said that there was no reason why DMQ could not provide this information, except that it was a small organisation with few resources and he would enquire.</p>
3.	<p>SNH Report</p> <p>3.1 Jamie Hammond gave a report for SNH. He said that SNH had written to all upland DMG Chairs and Secretaries highlighting how SNH would operate in future and support those Groups that were under-performing foremost. There was also increasing focus on upland 'shoulder areas' and effort being made to introduce collaborative structures to these (East Sutherland, Jura and Strathdon cited as examples).</p> <p>3.2 He said that SNH had worked hard to make the distinction between upland and lowland management, It was hoped that the event planned for the Scottish Parliament in November would help to reinforce this further.</p> <p>3.3 One outcome from the Deer Review was to be the setting up of a Lowland Deer Panel under Section 4 of the Deer Act to look at deer management in lowland areas. The short term working group was also to be established shortly. SNH is proposing names and drafting terms of reference for both.</p> <p>3.4 The Panel would look at areas such as existing collaborative management; current effective practices; availability of data and information; public perceptions, and SNH's own powers and how they work. The Panel will consist of 6 members drawn from a broad representation.</p> <p><u>3.6 Pilot Project</u></p> <p>3.6.1 The SNH pilot project is soon to be let as an external contract, and should allow the sector and SNH to determine how the public interest is being delivered across lowland areas. One main focus will be on data gathering over an area of 8000 acres north of the M8 corridor and typical of a lowland location. A whole range of factors to be assessed: ownership; management; DVCs; number of stalkers and stalking visits; how stalkers operate etc.</p> <p>3.6.2 More information will be available following the next steering meeting.</p> <p>3.6.3 RC asked for JH to make a presentation on the pilot project at the next meeting. Phase 1 of the project is due to be completed by March 2018. RC urged SNH to move the project forward swiftly so that lessons from it could be applied elsewhere saying that the deer sector generally needed more urgency in its delivery.</p>

4.	<p>Financial Report to 31 July 2017</p> <p>The financial report showed that grant funding from Forestry Commission and Transport Scotland was yet to be received for the year. Bank balance as at 31 July stood at just under £14,000 with further grant support to be received.</p>
5.	<p>Events sub group report</p> <p>DP reported that the events sub group had met on 14 August and that the following had been discussed.</p> <p><u>5.1 Seven Lochs Project</u></p> <p>There is a major opportunity to develop this as a prototype to be followed by other local authorities. An information event to be planned on site.</p> <p><u>5.2 Central Scotland Green Network Forum</u></p> <p>DP will approach organisers of this to see if a presentation can be included in the forum programme for 2018.</p> <p><u>5.3 Event at Scottish Parliament</u></p> <p>This is going ahead on 28 November and is being progressed by LDNS (DP) and SNH (JH). Representatives of LDGs and Committee will be invited.</p> <p><u>5.4 Sharing Good Practice</u></p> <p>A follow-up event in 2018 is to be investigated – this was one of the conclusions from the meeting with Linda Fabiani MSP.</p> <p><u>5.5 Engagement with farmers and NFUS</u></p> <p>A number of action points had arisen from DP's meeting with NFUS including 'selling in' the idea of low ground deer management to farmers; an article in NFUS Leader; information on deer management on the NFUS website; and a draft business guide covering sustainable deer management and responsibilities, damage, DVCs, opportunities arising, sporting rates, selecting a deer manager, selling venison etc.</p> <p><u>5.6 Deer Dog day SW Scotland</u></p> <p>This is being progressed by SWSDG (Glen Heggs with Jim Govan) and engaging UKSHA to do the demonstrations.</p> <p><u>5.7 Possible range day in 2018</u></p> <p>This idea to be explored further.</p> <p><u>5.8 Peri-urban deer management training</u></p> <p>Following the East Kilbride event in the Spring it was agreed not to continue this at this time.</p> <p><u>5.9 Thermal Imaging event</u></p> <p>This is potentially planned for 21 November and the theme for an evening meeting at the Auldhouse Inn, East Kilbride.</p> <p><u>5.10 Roadside Dispatch</u></p> <p>Protocols for this to be discussed with BDS and Police Scotland.</p>

	<p><u>5.11 Low ground food safety film</u> DP advised that this had been filmed at West Calder and would be available online in the Autumn.</p> <p><u>5.12 WLDG First Aid Course</u> This is fully subscribed and taking place on 2 September.</p> <p><u>5.13 NLDG – DSC 1 days</u> These scheduled for 16 and 17 September?</p> <p>5.14 Thermal imaging and following up wounded deer were discussed.</p> <p>5.15 Roadside dispatch remained a grey area. AM to check if a Police Scotland protocol exists and if so to make this available. It was suggested that the current BDS course on roadside dispatch in England could be made available in Scotland.</p> <p>5.16 JG said that he understood that regular BASC insurance cover did not cover roadside dispatch, but it was available as an add-on.</p> <p>5.17 JH said that SNH was considering helping to organise a training day at Flanders Moss - possibly a joint LDNS/BDS day on HIA.</p> <p>5.18 RC said he was keen to see more local projects coming forward.</p>
6.	<p>LDNS Sub-Groups</p> <p>6.1 The events sub group was functioning, but RC said that there was a need to set up additional groups to take forward other aspects of LDNS work.</p> <p><u>6.2 Training</u> RC suggested that BASC, BDS and others could possibly come together to form a Group to oversee or streamline training.</p> <p><u>6.3 Communications</u> The following were suggested as possible members to form a communications group: Jim Paxton, WLDG; Lisa Roberts, NFUS; Kevin McCulloch, SNH, Dick Playfair.</p>
7.	<p>Scottish Deer Health Survey</p> <p>Tom McNeilly from Moredun gave a short presentation on the deer health survey and the sampling procedure which is now underway. Sampling packs were made available to those deer managers and deer groups present. A follow-up presentation and distribution of packs will be made at the next meeting.</p>
8.	<p>Date of next meeting</p> <p>Tuesday 21 November at the Auldhouse Inn, East Kilbride. Timing, agenda and presentation topics to be advised nearer the time.</p>