

Draft statement on deer management within council owned woodland

Perth and Kinross Council has 36 woodland sites totalling 256 ha. The woodlands range in size from less than 1 ha to 76 ha with the majority of the woodlands bounding with settlements with a high level of public access. The Council recognises the importance of sustainable deer management and is committed to consulting and working with communities and key partners including Forestry Commission Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage. Subject to SRDP funding the Council will endeavour to manage deer numbers for the duration of the Perth & Kinross Council Forest Plan (2014 – 2034). This will apply particularly on the designated sites to achieve a sustainable deer population that has a positive impact on the woodlands as a whole. Following monitoring by SNH the 3 SSSI woodlands (Kinnoull Hill, Birks of Aberfeldy and Den of Alyth) are currently in an unfavourable condition partly due to overgrazing by deer. In developing a deer management plan the Council will seek to:

- deliver the best combination of benefits for the economy, environment, people and communities
- take other land users into account
- adapt to changing circumstances
- safeguard deer welfare and
- ensure future generations will also be able to enjoy the benefits of deer and deer management
- comply with the Deer (Scotland Act) 1996, the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, the Conservation of Natural Habitats &c. Regulations 1994 and the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011

Scotland has two native deer species, the red and roe deer of which the roe is the predominant species found within woodlands owned and managed by the council. These species of deer are an important part of our natural heritage, not only in themselves as iconic mammals, but also because of the important role they play in browsing and habitat management. It is recognised that in the absence of natural predator's deer populations often require sustainable management through culling. In addition to the native Red and Roe Deer there are 2 non-native deer species found in Scotland the Sika and Fallow deer although neither species has a strong presence in Council woodlands.

In some places deer cause significant damage to important habitats, including native woodlands. There is evidence to also support the case that excessive deer browsing in native woodlands can reduce tree and shrub diversity with impacts on the populations of some declining bird species. Whereas residents and visitors enjoy seeing the deer in the woodlands and in some cases they have a positive influence, deer population densities need to be controlled where there is evidence of excessive browsing resulting in a negative impact on habitats and species.

On Perth & Kinross Council owned land this is particularly the case for the designated sites i.e. Kinnoull Hill SSSI, Birks of Aberfeldy SSSI and Den of Alyth SSSI which have all been classified as being in unfavourable condition following recent monitoring by SNH. The Council recognises that achieving favourable status on SSSI sites is a priority for the Scottish Government. Accordingly the Council will consider carrying out deer control as part of the management of these sites subject to available funding and suitable controls in order to work towards achieving favourable status. Currently the density of Roe Deer at Kinnoull Hill for example is estimated to be between 15 to 20 head per square kilometre with a target figure of 4 to 8 head per square kilometre. Kinnoull Hill woodland covers an area of 305.4 ha, with Perth and Kinross Council owning 76.2 ha and Forestry Commission Scotland owning the remaining 229.2 ha

Once the new SRDP grants have been announced in early 2015 for managing woodlands a programme of deer control will be produced based on priority sites (SSSI), deer populations, their impact on the woodlands involved and the resources available to implement it. The Code of Practice on Deer Management produced by SNH would need to be followed at all times.

