

PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL

Environment Committee

21 January 2015

Perth and Kinross Forest Plan 2015 - 2035

Report by Executive Director (Environment)

This report seeks approval of the Council's Forest Plan, 2015-2035.

1. BACKGROUND / MAIN ISSUES

- 1.1 At the Environment Committee on 8 June 2011 (Report No 11/310 refers), it was agreed to commence public consultation on the preparation of a Perth and Kinross Council Forest Plan (now 2015 – 2035) in line with Forestry Commission guidance for scoping, prior to the production of a Plan for Committee approval.
- 1.2 Following Environment Committee approval, an experienced consultant was engaged to write the Forest Plan and visited all 36 woodland sites in Council ownership, accompanied by members of staff from Community Greenspace. This enabled the concept maps to be produced for the public and statutory consultees to comment on. The consultation was advertised through press releases and the Council's website. In addition, information was sent to all local members, all Community Councils, stakeholders, community groups, neighbouring landowners and Council offices.
- 1.3 Public consultation events on the Forest Plan concept maps were held in May and June 2013 in Aberfeldy, Dunkeld, Pitlochry, Luncarty, Perth, Auchterarder, Abernethy, Invergowrie and Crieff, where the plans were made available and officers attended to answer any queries. Display boards with the concept plans were used at each of the consultation venues.
- 1.4 Comments on the concept maps were also sought through the Council's website. Stakeholder consultees such as Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Historic Scotland, Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) were also consulted. Generally, the comments received were positive and the public and statutory consultees were pleased to learn of the Council's plans to manage their woodlands.
- 1.5 All comments and responses have been incorporated into this final draft of the Perth and Kinross Forest Plan. This has been submitted to, and approved by, Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) as part of the process and a copy is available to view in the Members' Lounge.

1.6 A link to the Plan is shown below:

<http://www.pkc.gov.uk/article/2141/Tree-and-Woodland-Service>

2. PROPOSALS

2.1 The Council's Forest Plan is a strategic plan that describes the proposed management arrangements for our woodlands over a 20 year period and allows opportunities for external funding to be sought.

2.2 The plan also offers communities the opportunity to enjoy their local woods and participate in their management.

2.3 The plan reflects the objectives of the Scottish Government's Scottish Forestry Strategy and the Council's draft Perth and Kinross Forest and Woodland Strategy.

2.4 Some of the main proposals included in the Council's Forest Plan are:

- Managing the majority of the woodlands as continuous cover i.e. no clear felling, to maintain high landscape quality and biodiversity.
- Native trees will be encouraged and non-native trees will be gradually removed, except those providing habitat for red squirrels. The Council will work with SNH and FCS to manage deer numbers to ensure they do not damage important ground flora or the saplings of native trees (natural regeneration).
- Meadows and other open areas supporting important ground flora will be protected and enhanced while some trees may be removed to retain important views, for example at Kinnoull Hill and the Birks of Aberfeldy. Paths will be maintained and improved and regular inspections will be undertaken to identify any trees posing any unnecessary risks.
- Three of the woodlands are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); Kinnoull Hill, the Birks of Aberfeldy and the Den of Alyth. These sites will be managed sensitively to ensure their SSSI status is not compromised.
- 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 Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) funding, the Council will endeavour to manage deer numbers for the duration of the Perth & Kinross Council Forest Plan (2015 – 2035). 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. The full statement on deer management within council owned woodland can be seen in Appendix 1.

- 2.5 The Perth and Kinross Forest Plan and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) were submitted to the SEA Gateway for a 6 week consultation period to enable the statutory consultees SNH, SEPA and Historic Scotland to comment. The consultation period ended on 3 November 2014. None of the comments received have resulted in any change to the Forest Plan. There are a few minor changes required to the SEA. A post adoptive statement will be sent to the SEA Gateway to confirm these minor changes have been incorporated.
- 2.6 The SEA process has been completed with final comments incorporated into the finalised Forest Plan.
- 2.7 The Forest Plan will enable the work plans to be prioritised and the Council to apply for a new suite of grants related to the SRDP, which are expected to be announced by FCS in early 2015. The current SRDP closed on 31 December 2013 under which the FCS has fully committed the forestry grant budget of £36m in 2014/15 and around 70% of the anticipated 2015/16 budget. The new SRDP 2014-2020 will open for bids in early 2015 and the remaining 30% of the 2015/16 forestry grant budget will be available for new bids then.
- 2.8 Operations within Council woodlands which are likely to be eligible under the new SRDP 2014–2020 include restructuring of woodlands incorporating the removal of non-native trees, the management of natural regeneration, the planting of native species and deer control. SSSI sites in the Council area will be prioritised under the grant scheme. Storm damage work will not be included, nor the pruning of trees over paths or to maintain views. To date, public parks with substantial tree cover have not been eligible for funding. However, the FCS accepted their inclusion in the Perth and Kinross Forest Plan so this may change during the course of the new SRDP.
- 2.9 In addition to seeking external funding opportunities itself to implement the prioritised work plans, the Council will continue to work in partnership with interested community groups to co-ordinate and raise as much other external income as possible and, where appropriate, carry out works on site.

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 The Council's woodlands make a major and very positive contribution to the natural environment, combating climate change and enhancing the cultural and recreational opportunities in Perth and Kinross.
- 3.2 They also contribute to the area's equality and diversity, health and well-being, lifelong learning opportunities, the economy and tourism, particularly through Big Tree Country.
- 3.3 The Perth and Kinross Forest Plan provides a framework for the sustainable management of Council woodland assets over a 20 year period and allows external funding and community support to be sought to underpin this.

- 3.4 The implementation of the Forest Plan will help ensure the public's woodland asset is maintained and protected by the Council for future generations.
- 3.5 It is recommended that the Environment Committee approves the Perth and Kinross Forest Plan 2015-2035.

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1. IMPLICATIONS, ASSESSMENTS, CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Strategic Implications	Yes / None
Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement	Yes
Corporate Plan	Yes
Resource Implications	
Financial	Yes
Workforce	None
Asset Management (land, property, IST)	Yes
Assessments	
Equality Impact Assessment	Yes
Strategic Environmental Assessment	Yes
Sustainability (community, economic, environmental)	Yes
Legal and Governance	Yes
Risk	Yes
Consultation	
Internal	Yes
External	Yes
Communication	
Communications Plan	Yes

1. Strategic Implications

Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement

- 1.1 The proposals relate to the delivery of the Perth and Kinross Community Plan/Single Outcome Agreement in terms of the following priorities:

- (i) Giving every child the best start in life
- (ii) Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens
- (iii) Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy
- (iv) Supporting people to lead independent, healthy and active lives
- (v) Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations

Corporate Plan

- 1.2 The Council's Corporate Plan 2013-2018 lays out five outcome focussed strategic objectives which provide clear strategic direction, inform decisions at a corporate and service level and shape resources allocation. They are as follows:

- (i) Giving every child the best start in life;
- (ii) Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens;
- (iii) Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy;
- (iv) Supporting people to lead independent, healthy and active lives; and
- (v) Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations.

- 1.3 This report supports objective (ii), (iii), (iv) and (v)

2. Resource Implications

Financial

- 2.1 The cost of implementing the Forest Plan will be met from external funding and existing budgets within The Environment Service. The Forestry Commission's new suite of grants will be announced in early 2015. It will not be possible to implement all of the recommendations in the plan without external funding.
- 2.2 In addition to external funding and existing budgets Community Groups will be able to apply for external funding not available to the Council to contribute further towards the cost of implementation.

Workforce

- 2.3 There are no workforce implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

Asset Management (land, property, IT)

- 2.4 The Forest Plan will inform how the Councils woodland assets are managed.

3. Assessments

Equality Impact Assessment

- 3.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council is required to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between equality groups. Carrying out Equality Impact Assessments for plans and policies allows the Council to demonstrate that it is meeting these duties.
- 3.2 The policy presented in this report was considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment process (EqIA) and was assessed as relevant for the purposes of EqIA.
- (i) Assessed as relevant and the following positive outcomes expected following implementation:
- Woodlands which have received little management may benefit from improved accessibility thus providing more opportunities for a wider range of people of all abilities to visit woodland areas.
 - Restructuring parts of woodlands by thinning closely stocked stands will improve their appearance. This will make woodland areas feel more open and improve users' perception of safety.
 - Any information provided will offer translation into other formats.

(ii) Assessed as relevant and the following negative outcomes expected following implementation:

- Not all woodlands will prove accessible to all abilities, but there will be a significant improvement over their present condition.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 3.3 The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 places a duty on the Council to identify and assess the environmental consequences of its proposals.
- 3.4 The proposals have been considered under the Act and the determination was made that there were likely to be significant environmental effects and as a consequence an environmental assessment was necessary. The environmental report has been completed and has been submitted to the Consultation Authorities together with the draft PPS for their consideration.
- 3.5 The Forest Plan has potentially significant positive impacts on the Built Environment, Climate Change, Community, Consumption & Production, Culture & Recreation, Economy, Equality & Diversity, Health & Well-Being, Lifelong Learning, Natural Environment and Transport & Connectivity. The good management of the Council's woodland areas will provide attractive, bio diverse areas for people to access and enjoy and assist with off-setting adverse impact cause by pollution and built development. They also provide a resource for learning, physical exercise and contribute to a feeling of well-being in communities.

Sustainability

- 3.6 Under the provisions of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 the Council has to discharge its duties in a way which contributes to the achievement of sustainable development. In terms of the Climate Change Act, the Council has a general duty to demonstrate its commitment to sustainability and the community, environmental and economic impacts of its actions.
- 3.7 The development of a Forest Plan for the long term management of trees and woodlands will contribute positively to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the area.

Legal and Governance

- 3.8 The Head of Legal Services has been consulted in the preparation of this report.

Risk

- 3.9 This plan will reduce the risk of complaints from the public arising from lack of clarity regarding the management of council owned woodlands. The implementation of the plan will facilitate the removal of trees regarded as an unnecessary risk due to their location and condition.

4. Consultation

Internal

- 4.1 The Head of Legal Services and the Head of Planning and Regeneration have been consulted on the content of this report.

External

- 4.2 The development of this plan has been informed by an external consultation exercise which is detailed in Appendix A Scoping report

5. Communication

- 5.1 The Forest Plan will be displayed on the Council website for public information. Officers will also refer the public to the plan while explaining the management plans for council owned woodlands.

2. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (and not containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above Report;

- Scottish Forestry Strategy 2006
- Perth and Kinross Forest and Woodland Strategy 2013
- Draft Perth and Kinross Forest Plan 2012 – 2032 (Report No. 11/310)

3. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Deer Management Statement

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. It is committed to consulting and working with communities and key partners including Forestry Commission Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage. Subject to Scottish Rural Development Programme (SDRP) 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
- ensure future generations will also be able to enjoy the benefits of deer and deer management; and
- 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 predators 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. Kinnoull Hill SSSI, Birks of Aberfeldy SSSI and Den of Alyth SSSI 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. This will be subject to available funding and suitable controls in order to work towards achieving favourable status.

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.