

By email to: claire.wightman@treestory.org.uk

Ms Claire Wightman
Forestry Consultant
TreeStory
6th December 2021

Dear Claire

Balavil Estate LTFP Consultation

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your proposals for the Long Term Forest Plan at Balavil Estate, Kingussie.

Mountaineering Scotland supports activities that lead towards creating a richer and wilder environment that address both the climate crisis and biodiversity crisis, and for the benefit of people.

This includes native woodland management and expansion, and especially the regeneration of native woodlands and scrub where the land can naturally support them.

Our interests lie generally with the effect of proposals on mountain landscapes, especially in National Parks, National Scenic Areas and Wild Land Areas, and along routes to mountain summits and climbing crags.

We advocate that infrastructure used for land management in the uplands, specifically fencing and tracks, be avoided where possible and be kept to a minimum where it is demonstrated to be necessary.

Specific comments

We welcome your intention to manage the woodland cover on the estate through thinning and natural regeneration where possible, and with planting up the hillside to augment woodland coverage.

You state that a deer fence has been erected around the majority of the existing native woodland and plantation woods, and with no immediate plans to increase the deer cull on the estate. However, the success of natural regeneration will be used to assess future cull levels.

Our preference would be for this to be achieved without deer fencing, by managing deer in the local range, as extensive tall deer fencing can be an obstruction to recreational access and has a visual impact in the landscape. Fencing also can displace deer to neighbouring areas, thereby increasing browsing pressure on those areas. You will be aware that the generally accepted deer density that encourages natural seedling regeneration and tree growth is around 5 red deer per square kilometre.

We are disappointed that the Consultation Document says little about recreational access other than that use of forest roads for recreational purposes (including hillwalking, mountain biking and horse

riding) is seen as a site constraint. We regard it as an opportunity rather than a constraint, to encourage the health and well-being benefits of informal recreational access in woodlands and open hillside.

Public access for hillwalking will need to be maintained, and we suggest that the Management Objectives would better reflect this through a stated intention to facilitate recreational access.

Facilitating recreational access is an important point for us in new woodland proposals, as deer fences can be an obstruction to access. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code advises that putting up a high fence over long stretches of open country without providing gates, gaps or other access points might be considered unreasonable (section 4.9, bullet point 4).

You have provided information for the biodiversity aspects of the planting proposals, but the Concept Map merely indicates a limited number of defined access routes. We assume that you intend to install pass gates where these tracks meet the deer fence, but you will be aware that the statutory rights of access do not restrict access to paths. The Strava heat map gives an indication of where people are currently taking access: <https://www.strava.com/heatmap#13.53/-4.02596/57.10361/hot/run>

Do you have criteria for selecting where and how many crossing points you would install along the length of the fence so that it does not become an obstruction to recreational access?

Mountaineering Scotland suggests the following general guidance: -

Gates should be provided where the fence crosses paths or tracks, or informal routes used to walk or cycle to summits and tops.

Crossing points need to be provided at places where people are likely to need to cross the fence, such as hilltops, ridgelines, side ridges where they meet the main ridge, and places where the fence changes direction.

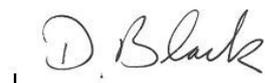
Away from paths or tracks stiles would be adequate for crossing, especially where the terrain is rough or remote.

Crossings should be provided at regular intervals so that the public do not have to make unreasonable detours. Where use is relatively infrequent it would be reasonable to provide crossings every kilometre.

Crossing points should be clearly visible to the public. Arrows on the fence, indicating the direction to the nearest crossing would make it easier for them to be located, and especially in poor visibility.

I hope that these comments are useful to you as you develop your proposals, and please do get in touch if there is anything further you wish to discuss.

Yours sincerely



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