

By email to: gordon.brown@treestory.org.uk

Ms Georgie Brown
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TreeStory

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Dear Georgie

Ben Shieldaig & Couldoran Woodland Creation Consultation

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your proposals for new woodland creation at Ben Shieldaig.

Mountaineering Scotland supports activities that lead towards creating a richer and wilder environment which 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 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 the intention to extend woodland cover across the hillside through natural regeneration, where it is possible. Our preference would be for this to be achieved without deer fencing, by managing deer in the local range, but we understand the challenge of achieving this.

The biodiversity aspects are fully covered in the Consultation Document, where this initiative is intended to 'jump start' the natural regeneration of trees in the landscape, and provide a platform for carbon sequestration, and wildlife.

The Consultation Document says little about recreational access other than public access for hillwalking will need to be maintained. Facilitating recreational access is an important point for us in new woodland proposals as deer fences can be an obstruction to access. However, the concept map indicates a number of gates in the proposed fence.

It would have been helpful to indicate how the location of these pass gates were chosen, and if they reflect popular informal routes used by hillwalkers to reach the summits. You have provided detailed

justification for the biodiversity aspects of the planting proposals. Are there similar criteria for selecting where and how many pass gates you would install?

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).

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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