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By email to Siobhan.Thompson@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

For the attention of the Chief Executive

Simon Hodge
Chief Executive
Forest Enterprise Scotland
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11 April 2017

Dear Simon

Forest Enterprise Scotland Corporate Plan 2017-2019

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Corporate Plan 2017-19 which is of significant interest.

As you may be aware, Mountaineering Scotland represents the interests of mountaineers and hill walkers in Scotland and has over 14,000 members. We also represent the interests of more than 80,000 members of the BMC (British Mountaineering Council) and that organisation provides financial and policy support for our work on issues affecting access and Scotland's landscape.

Access

The Plan highlights a number of high level areas of relevance, namely:

1) The importance of forestry to access

The opening statements note that Scotland's National Forest Estate occupies 8 % of Scotland's land area.

Forestry is therefore a significant land use in Scotland and with much forestry in upland areas, appropriate management of Scotland's forestry with respect to access is vital for those seeking to exercise their right of responsible access.

The Plan also recognises that the National Forest Estate (the "Estate") is "Scotland's main recreation provider, offering unparalleled walking, cycling and wildlife watching".

2) Purposes of the Estate

The second purpose of the Estate is to "Deliver economic, forestry for people and community benefits". Access for recreation clearly fits into this purpose with direct application to the Scottish Government's policy on the need to increase levels of physical activity for health and wellbeing.

We suggest that in this context one of the Purposes (on p.5) should relate to health, recreation and tourism as there are several mentions of these topics elsewhere. Therefore a statement such as "to promote physical activity and the tourism economy by facilitating access and encouraging informal and formal recreation" would be appropriate.

We note that the biodiversity purpose is printed twice.

3) Contribution of the Estate to National Outcomes

One of the six objectives of the Estate is to be "accessible", mapping directly to the Scottish Government's National Outcome of "healthier lives". Specifically, the objective is to have accessible local woodlands and national treasures that are well promoted, welcoming, inclusive and open for all. The associated delivery goal is to "Encourage use of the Estate for health benefits and outdoor learning".

It is welcomed that FES clearly intends to provide accessible forests, and that they are committed to responsible behaviour as a land manager. The commitment to providing and managing informative operational site signage is noted, together with the intention to provide alternative routes around operational sites.

However, noting the points above, and in conjunction with Forestry Commission Scotland's own advice with respect to camping <http://scotland.forestry.gov.uk/activities/camping>, we wish to strongly register our disappointment that the Plan does not address a current lack of parking provision for overnight campers.

This is particularly relevant for those wishing to access the hills for multi-day trips, for example for the purpose of wild camping in the hills or staying out overnight in a bothy. Many such trips are most conveniently accessed from Forestry Commission car parks; therefore any lack of overnight parking provision by the Forestry Commission is a serious barrier to those wishing to exercise their right of responsible wild camping in accordance with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

Landscape

As an organisation, Mountaineering Scotland supports the commitment to well-designed and appropriately located productive forests and conservation woodlands. Therefore we recognise and welcome the progress made in remedying some of the design and species composition mistakes of the past and welcome this plan as continuing that trend.

We also note that there is an intention to "develop and implement a landscape scale spatial planning approach". We believe it would be helpful if the plan included details concerning the timing for consultation with stakeholders relating to this commitment.

In closing, we hope that these comments are of some assistance.

Kind regards,

Yours sincerely

David Gibson
Chief Executive Officer