

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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COMMITTEE	Communities Housing and Infrastructure
DATE	27 October 2015
DIRECTOR	Pete Leonard
TITLE OF REPORT	Deer Management Plan for Aberdeen City
REPORT NUMBER	CHI/15/288
CHECKLIST COMPLETED	Yes

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report answers the recommendations from the Petitions Committee of 21<sup>st</sup> April 2015 regarding the petition "A Tree For Every Citizen / Deer Cull Disclosure Request". The report also outlines the proposed long term deer management plan across all City Council owned land where deer are present; and how the plan can be rolled out in partnership with neighbouring landowners.

Aberdeen City Council has a statutory duty under the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 (WANE Act) to manage deer on its land at sustainable levels. The Deer Management Plan for Aberdeen City will demonstrate how Aberdeen City Council, as a responsible landowner and manager will implement the requirements of the WANE Act and associated Deer Management Code of Practice to maintain a sustainable population of deer on its land. All deer management will be undertaken using the most humane techniques, complying with the established best practice procedures and by skilled and fully trained operatives to nationally accredited standards.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the committee:

- i) Notes the contents of the report.
- ii) Agrees to the implementation of the Deer Management Plan.
- iii) Requests that an update on progress of the Plan be reported to the Communities Housing and Infrastructure Committee in 12 months' time.

### 3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The costs of delivering this plan will be met from existing budgets and where applicable from grant funding available from Aberdeen's woodlands, as a part of their ongoing establishment and management. Any costs associated with managing deer on land not owned or managed by Aberdeen City Council will not be borne by the Council but by the relevant landowner.

The main cost will be for staff time to develop the network of land managers who are prepared to act in a collaborative manner, to survey and collect data on deer impacts to habitats etc and to recruit and manage volunteers who can assist with this, the cost of which is met from existing budgets.

### 4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The main pieces of legislation relating to deer management in Scotland are the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996 and the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 (WANE Act).

The Management Plan for Deer in Aberdeen City supports the implementation of the **ACC Nature Conservation Strategy 2010-2015** objectives as follows:-

**Objective 1.** Protect, preserve and enhance Aberdeen's natural heritage.

Action is required to stop the decline in biodiversity through the protection and restoration of habitats and species important to the City of Aberdeen on Council owned land.

**Objective 2.** Sustainably manage Aberdeen's natural heritage.

The Council needs to plan and manage the use of its own land in a way that assists in reversing the decline in biodiversity. The Council should also take up opportunities to encourage private land owners to do the same.

**Objective 3.** Involve communities in caring for Aberdeen's natural heritage.

To make people aware of the importance and benefits of nature conservation, the Council needs to engage with everyone and get them involved at a local level.

**Objective 4.** Promote a greater understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of Aberdeen's natural heritage.

Being informed will improve knowledge and enhance people's experience of nature while at the same time help promote awareness and respect for the City's natural heritage.

The Deer Management Plan for Aberdeen City complies with the requirements of the **Aberdeen City Council Animal Policy** which states:-

“Wildlife

Reference should be made to The Nature Conservation Strategy for Aberdeen 2010 -15 that details how Aberdeen City Council is committed to protecting and conserving our natural environment for the benefit of biodiversity and for the citizens of Aberdeen now and into the future.

When it becomes necessary for a particular species to be controlled on Council land minimum distress must be caused to the animals. Only trained personnel using acceptable methods and equipment will be employed. Killing should be avoided where appropriate alternative methods are available. Shooting on Council land will be allowed only within the context of species control and the use of lead gunshot is discouraged. Prior permission of the Council will be required for any proposed control measures.

## 5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

Wild deer in Scotland are a shared resource for the people of Scotland. They are not owned by anyone but land managers have a responsibility to manage deer numbers on their land at a sustainable level.

Where unsustainable deer populations remain unmanaged, grant funding for woodland creation and woodland management is unlikely to be awarded. This would directly impact on the Aberdeen City Council owned woodlands and potentially on neighbouring land.

Where deer management is not being undertaken at appropriate levels, the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996 (as amended) states that Scottish Natural Heritage can intervene to address damage to the different public interests identified in the following areas:

- Damage to woodland;
- Damage to agricultural production;
- Damage to welfare of deer;
- Damage to the natural heritage;
- Damage to public interests: Social, Economic, or Environmental.
- Injury to livestock by overgrazing or competition for feeding;
- Danger to public safety.

Initially Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) will help the land manager develop an action plan to manage the deer on their land. If necessary SNH can formalise these actions through a Section 7 Control Agreement. If the land manager continues to fail to deliver the actions then SNH can use its regulatory powers under the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996 (as Amended) to bring about the changes in deer management required. This could result in additional costs to Aberdeen City Council in the event of these regulatory powers being implemented.

By managing deer at sustainable levels the natural woodland regeneration processes will help to maintain a good age structure in the woodlands. This improves their biodiversity value, ensures the next and future generations of trees develop so that the woodlands have a long and healthy future which in turn provides a good habitat for deer and other species.

Scottish Natural Heritage are keen to see local authorities across Scotland develop a collaborative approach to deer management and have offered advice and support to all Local Authorities in the development of their plans.

For full details of the Deer Management Plan for Aberdeen City, see Appendix A.

## 6. IMPACT

### **Improving Customer Experience –**

Managing the deer numbers at sustainable levels across the City will reduce the damage done to private gardens, allotments and parks, improving the quality of these areas. Sustainable deer populations will impact less on agricultural crops and woodlands. Road accidents involving deer will also be reduced.

### **Improving Staff Experience –**

This Plan contributes to staff development and knowledge regarding deer management at a local and national level. It will increase collaborative working with other land managers and encourage information and knowledge sharing to contribute to deer management regionally and nationally.

### **Improving our use of Resources –**

Managing deer at sustainable levels will contribute to the overall sustainable habitat management within the natural areas of the city to support biodiversity. This will be particularly valuable where increased natural woodland regeneration will contribute to creating a good woodland age structure without the need for additional tree planting.

### **Corporate -**

The Deer Management Plan for Aberdeen City will contribute to the delivery of Aberdeen – the Smarter City vision as part of the smarter environment theme to provide a clean, safe and attractive streetscape and promote bio-diversity and nature conservation.

This plan offers many opportunities for joint working with agencies, businesses, landowners and voluntary groups to maximise the effectiveness of the delivery of a sustainable deer population in Aberdeen resulting in a more sustainable future for our woodlands and other natural habitats.

### **Public –**

This report will be of interest to the public as it has come about as a result of a public petition to Aberdeen City Council. The consensus of scientific research shows that deer management is necessary to maintain a healthy population in the absence of natural predators. The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 requires land managers to assess the impact of deer populations on their land, other habitats, features, deer welfare and public safety and take action to reduce population densities where necessary.

## 7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

By not developing a planned and collaborative approach to deer management in Aberdeen there is the risk that the deer population will continue to grow in numbers, cause more damage to existing and new woodlands, increase damage to crops and woodlands on other neighbouring land and increase the risk of injury to people as a result of deer vehicle collisions. Where deer numbers are at high levels the condition of the deer is substantially reduced by the lack of available habitat which can result in welfare issues for the deer, ultimately leading to starvation.

## 8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011  
Deer (Scotland) Act 1996 as amended  
Scottish Natural Heritage Code of Practice on Deer Management 2012  
Aberdeen City Council Nature Conservation Strategy 2010-2015  
Aberdeen City Council Animal Policy

## 9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

Ian Talboys, Countryside Officer  
[italboys@aberdeencity.gov.uk](mailto:italboys@aberdeencity.gov.uk)  
01224 326429