

Deer Management Plan for Aberdeen City

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1. Executive Summary

This plan sets out the legislative requirements for deer management relating to local authorities and other land- owners, the current situation regarding deer populations in Aberdeen and outlines what Aberdeen City Council as a responsible land owner needs to do to comply with its statutory duties. This will be based on assessments of the level of deer damage to crops, woodlands and other habitats, the condition and welfare of the deer and levels of road accidents involving deer. This plan sets out a collaborative approach to deer management in the City, which will result in an effective and efficient means of managing deer numbers in the area at a sustainable level.

2. Background

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.

3. Legislation

In Scotland there has long been a right for landowners to take deer on their land. Legislation has been updated and landowners now have responsibility to manage

deer on their land. Local Authorities have a statutory duty to manage the deer at sustainable levels on their land.

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).

If land managers fail to manage deer at a sustainable level, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) will help the land manager develop an action plan to manage the deer on their land initially. 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.

4. The situation in Aberdeen.

In Scotland there are five wild deer species (red deer, fallow deer, roe deer, sika deer and muntjac deer). Roe and red deer are native to Scotland; the other species have been introduced into the UK and escaped from deer parks.

In Aberdeen the main wild deer species is roe deer. This is typical of lowland Scotland.

The population of roe deer across the City is thought to be high. There has been no detailed survey of the population across the city to date. Counts have been made at some specific locations where deer damage to young trees has been an issue. SNH have assisted with night time winter counts using thermal imaging equipment. The almost total lack of natural regeneration of the existing woodlands in the City along with regular sightings of roe deer on open ground during daylight hours, prior to deer management starting, would support the theory that the deer population is high.

Whilst knowing the numbers of deer present in an area is useful, it is important to measure the impact of deer on the environment. This is in terms of crop damage, damage to designated sites, levels of natural regeneration of woodland, establishment of new woodlands/trees planted, deer welfare (condition/weight/size of individuals, disease, deformities etc) and public safety (for example, the number of road traffic accidents involving deer).

The ability of deer to move around large areas also brings conflicts with road users. Aberdeen and the surrounding area is one of Scotland's 'hot spots' for deer vehicle collisions (DVC) with parts of the A90 and South Deeside Road having amongst the highest density of deer vehicle collisions in Scotland. More often than not increased levels of DVCs are linked with the spring dispersal of juvenile deer as a result of territorial behaviour by adult does chasing away juveniles as they prepare to give birth in May.

These collisions are usually fatal for the deer, either instantly or as a result of the injuries sustained. They can also cause injury to the vehicle driver and passenger. Records show that at least 61 deer were killed as a result of collisions with vehicles in 2014/15.



Fig. 1 Locations of deer carcasses reported to NESBReC or uplifted from roads 2014/15

There are some deer warning signs on roads around the city. At present there are no up to date records of the locations of these signs. The management plan will see road signage regarding deer reviewed and updated.

Aberdeen City Council has been undertaking deer management on a number of sites but it is important that the Council, as a responsible land manager, extends deer management to all areas of Council owned or managed land where deer could be present. This would include all woodland and woodland edge habitats, parks, greenspaces, tenanted farmland, grounds of Council owned buildings e.g. offices, schools, community centres etc. particularly in the urban fringes. Through the implementation of this plan Council Officers would be able to offer advice and assistance to ACC agricultural tenants to determine levels of deer damage to their crops and deer populations on their farms and advise of suitably qualified stalkers to undertake deer management where needed. This would help to raise the profile of deer management requirements in the agricultural community and support the collaborative approach needed to be most successful.

As a part of this programme, Aberdeen City Council as a major landowner in the area should take a lead on developing links and supporting other land managers in developing and implementing collaborative deer management plans on other areas of land in the City. In some instances land managers are already undertaking deer management so there will be opportunities to work more collaboratively. As more landowners start to take action to manage deer on their ground the benefits of collaborative working will mean that the deer management work will be more effective and sustainable as it will be operating at a population level and not a land holding or site based level.

At present the existing staffing levels would not be able to take on all the larger areas for deer management. There are other suitably qualified stalkers based locally who are members of a local Deer Management Group and will be available to assist with this work. These experienced and qualified recreational stalkers are prepared to take on the deer management work at no financial remuneration in return for suitable arrangements being put in place to cover expenses. ACC would develop an appropriate code of practice to set out qualifications/experience, roles and responsibilities for stalkers on Council land which will be available to other land managers. Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) has Deer Management Permissions for stalkers working on the National Forest Estate which could form the basis of this Code of Practice.

5. Links to Aberdeen City Council Strategy

A number of Aberdeen City Council strategies will link to the management plan.

The sustainable management of deer within the city will support the delivery of the **Nature Conservation Strategy 2010-2015 Objective 2** in which it is stated:-

“Invasive Species

i. There will be a need for the Council to continue its involvement in tackling invasive or non-native species that could have an adverse effect on the natural heritage in the City.

ii. This will help to maintain good conditions for the survival of valuable species.

iii. Tackling invasive or non-native species will also help to prevent irreversible damage to sensitive or vulnerable species.

iv. The Council wants to establish if current control measures conducted are effective or not. This information needs to be fed back at the correct level so that it can inform future policy.

v. The Council will identify new control of invasive or non-native species projects where relevant which are based on national policy and guidance.

vi. An increase of invasive or non-native species may reflect the effects of climate change on our natural heritage. Opportunities should, where possible and appropriate, be sought to assist in measuring any new trends within the City.

vii. Given that invasive or non-native species are found across boundaries, a partnership approach will be sought with other appropriate agencies and local authorities.

viii. Any work associated with the control of invasive or non-native species will be conducted in line with Aberdeen City Council’s Animal Policy which is concerned with animal welfare.”

The sustainable management of deer also supports, to some extent, the delivery of all the other objectives in the Nature Conservation Strategy.

The Aberdeen City Council Animal Policy 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.”

6. Resources

Current staff resources will be utilised to implement this plan, to liaise with colleagues, agencies and other land owners.

SNH have not been able to devise an accurate and practical method for accurate deer counting in the urban environment. In upland areas where red deer are the main species living on the open hill it is possible to undertake accurate counts as the animals form herds. Roe deer in the lowlands are territorial, living in small groups but moving around large areas often in woodlands. This and the varied land-uses make accurate counts difficult in urban areas. With the aid of remotely triggered camera traps, targeted surveying of areas likely or known to hold deer, surveying for field signs such as droppings and hoof prints along with data from NE Scotland Biological Records Centre, establishing some level of base line data should be achievable.

However, it is more practical to assess the impact of deer damage on habitats, crops and frequency and locations of deer vehicle collisions. Some of the deer stalkers would be interested in contributing to this and would have the skills and knowledge required. SNH are willing to assist with some thermal imaging surveys as they are

keen to develop skills and knowledge regarding assessing urban deer populations. These are best carried out during the winter months.

The existing roe deer distribution data for Aberdeen from the NE Scotland Biological Records Centre are shown in Appendix 1. These are records submitted by persons interested in biological recording and are mainly casual records rather than formal surveys. Therefore these surveys only give an indication in those areas which are recorded and do not give an overall picture of the city.

7. Risks

Aberdeen City Council as a responsible land manager has a duty to ensure the management of a sustainable deer population on its land. Not undertaking this could put the Council at risk of SNH requiring action to be taken to comply with the legislation. This could happen where deer numbers are at levels that are not in balance with the habitat resulting in damage to crops or high levels of traffic accidents caused by deer.

Aberdeen City Council will work with partner organisations and agencies to deliver a collaborative approach and by doing so the overall impact of what is done on City Council owned land will be substantially greater.

8. Outcomes

1. By managing the population of roe deer in the City effectively and across land ownership boundaries the City will have a healthy, strong roe deer population which is in good physical condition.
2. Reduction in deer vehicle collisions and associated road traffic accidents, along with a reduction in injuries and costs associated with these accidents.
3. Sustainable natural woodland regeneration across the City which in turn helps to provide more habitats for roe deer.
4. Reduction of damage to garden plants in private gardens and parks and greenspaces.
5. A network of neighbouring land managers who may be able to develop other collaborative approaches to land management.

6. Reduced risk of tick infestation and potential associated tick borne diseases such as Lyme disease.

9. Action Plan

A proposed timescale to deliver this plan is included below but a more detailed timescale will be developed once the plan is approved.

Plan will be reviewed and updated every 12 months.

	Challenge	Action	Lead	Start
1.	Seek approval for the Deer Management Plan for Aberdeen.	Present report to ACC Communities, Housing and Infrastructure Committee for approval.	ACC	October 2015
2.	Measuring the impact of deer on habitats and crops.	Survey ACC property for presence of roe deer.	ACC	Autumn/ Winter 2015/16
3.	Develop a collaborative approach to deer management.	Identify key large landowners and make contact to find out if they are managing deer, know about their responsibilities and would be interested in being part of a collaborative approach.	ACC	2015/16
		Consider starting an Aberdeen Deer Management Group to bring stalkers and landowners together.	ACC	2015

		Liaise with local Deer Management Groups to gauge their ability to assist with deer management.	ACC	Oct 2015
4.	Ensuring the safe delivery of deer management operations.	Develop a code of practice for external stalkers working on ACC land including generic risk assessments, method statements and best practice.	ACC	2016
		Provision of briefing for stalkers to ensure they understand what they are required to do, agree risk assessments, working practices, licence requirements etc before any deer control work is commenced.	ACC	2016
5.	Ensure landowners are aware of their deer management responsibilities.	Ensure ACC tenant farmers are aware of their deer management responsibilities.	ACC	2016
		Assist other land owners to undertake surveys to establish deer numbers on their land.	ACC	2016
		Liaise with ACC agricultural tenants to highlight their responsibilities via ACC Asset Management.	ACC	2016
6.	Review and update road signage regarding deer.	Survey and map locations of wild animal road signage and develop an action plan for any	ACC	2015/16

		additional signage needed.		
7.	Delivery of sustainable deer management.	Commence deer management on areas of ACC owned land where necessary following on from the survey results.	ACC	2016/17
		Continue population monitoring to ensure target population densities are maintained.	ACC	Ongoing
		Continue collaborative deer management work in future years as required as following on from population monitoring.	ACC	Ongoing
8.	Increase public knowledge and engagement about deer management	Develop educational materials/displays about deer and other native mammals at Pets Corner or Ranger Service base.	ACC	2015/16
9.	Management Plan Review	Review plan and update every 12 months.	ACC	2016

ACC Aberdeen City Council

10. References

Deer (Scotland) Act 1996 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/58/contents>

Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 (WANE Act).

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2011/6/contents/enacted>

Code of Practice on Deer Management <http://www.snh.gov.uk/land-and-sea/managing-wildlife/managing-deer/code-of-deer-management/>

Deer Management on the National Forest Estate 1 April 2014 – 31 March 2017

<http://scotland.forestry.gov.uk/managing/plans-and-strategies/deer-management-strategy>

Deer Best Practice Guides http://www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk/best_practice/

Wild Deer In Scotland - SPICe Briefing, The Scottish Parliament - 8 November 2013

Tom Edwards and Wendy Kenyon

http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefingsAndFactsheets/S4/SB_13-74.pdf

Appendix 1 Distribution of Roe Deer NESBReC Records 2010-2015 (Separate file)