

Appendix 11 – Emails from Pete Leonard to Natasha Chetwood (bold Italics are S Kelly's)

1.

Date: Fri, 2 Dec 2011 14:12:46 +0000
From: PLeonard@aberdeencity.gov.uk
CC: ChiefExec@aberdeencity.gov.uk
Subject: RE: REF: Tullos Hill Deer cull-

Dear Ms Chetwood

Management of Deer

With regards to your email of 28 and 29 November 2011, our officers took advice from the organisations and professionals in the field of deer management namely Scottish Natural Heritage and Forestry Commission Scotland as these are the organisations who have the necessary scientific background and knowledge to give such advice. ***The person suggested by Animal Concern was, as we understand, an independent retired officer from another local authority who was not in a position to give advice with the backing of established, well founded, peer reviewed and published research. As a public body Aberdeen City Council is expected to take advice from the recognised professionals who have the relevant background science, knowledge and experience to give advice.***

Your suggestion of planting taller trees is not an economically viable proposition given the substantially greater cost of buying and planting larger trees. The cost of buying trees large enough not to be damaged is between 50 and 100 times the price. This would not represent best value or best practice, so would not attract grant funding or be a legitimate use of public money. Larger trees also suffer a greater checking of growth than small whips. It is common for larger trees not to put on any growth for several years when planted at a larger size. Where small whips are planted alongside larger trees, the small ones will usually attain a greater size within just a few years than the larger ones.

Using individual tree shelters is again not best value or best practice on this scale of planting. The costs involved are prohibitive, both to buy and install the shelters but also to maintain them and eventually remove and dispose of them.

I would be interested to know what measure you have used to assess the sustainability of the existing deer population on Tullos Hill. It is your opinion that the population is sustainable, ***the research based evidence we have on what constitutes a sustainable population suggests otherwise. Two deer were found dead in April this year in the area. They appeared to have starved to death.*** Roe deer are a largely woodland living species which require woodland habitat to thrive in. By creating new woodland we will be creating more habitats that in the long term will be a better habitat for roe deer.

Whilst deer are wild animals which do not belong to anyone, under the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996 the landowner has a legal responsibility for the management of deer on its land which includes not only the right to cull them, but also (under the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011) places an onus on the landowner to maintain deer populations to levels recommended by SNH. Under this legislation powers are reserved to SNH to carry out additional control measures after a 6 month warning period and charge the cost to the landowner. This would be a requirement whether or not trees were planted on Tullos Hill, or elsewhere in the City. The rapid rise in roe deer population in the lowland and urban areas of Scotland and the impact on these areas and on public safety has been widely recognised which has brought about these legislative changes requiring landowners to manage deer numbers with advice from Scottish Natural Heritage.

The deer management proposals we are developing are on a city-wide basis not just on Tullos Hill. This is likely to include partnership working with neighbouring land managers to address the issues in a collaborative way, as the deer, as you say are mobile and do not respect land ownership

boundaries. This will be required to comply with the recently changed legislation, which has been enacted since our original proposals to manage deer on our tree planting sites.

Your suggestion of neutering the stags is not a practical or legal option. The only way to do this would be by surgical methods which could only be done by a vet and would require the darting of the deer and the administration of anaesthetic. It is illegal to use a darting rifle on wild deer. The legislation around deer management is very specific on what type of firearms and ammunition can be used. In addition, the veterinary advice based on captive bred deer is that around 50% of roe deer die under anaesthetic. The stags also have a large home range so ensuring all stags in the area were neutered would be very difficult.

Other options including deer fencing was considered but the advice from Scottish Natural Heritage was that they would require the deer numbers to be reduced substantially through a population reduction cull if fencing was used due to the loss of habitat available for the deer in the area. This would also impact on the public access to the site. There are also ongoing costs involved in ensuring the fence is kept secure. The fencing around the perimeter of the site and the steel fencing around the landfill restoration area is frequently vandalised so it is highly likely that any deer fencing would also be a target for this vandalism.

Yours sincerely

Pete Leonard

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2.

Date: Mon, 28 Nov 2011 11:30:52 +0000

From: PLeonard@aberdeencity.gov.uk

To: natasha_chetwood@hotmail.com

Subject: REF: Tullos Hill

Dear Ms Chetwood

Management of Deer

Thank you for your enquiry.

On 10th May 2011 the Aberdeen City Council Housing and Environment Committee confirmed the decision made at their 1st March 2011 meeting to authorise officers to proceed with a deer management programme as a part of the Tree for Every Citizen project. This is to reduce the population of roe deer to a sustainable level at the tree planting sites for the Tree for Every Citizen Project including Tullos Hill. This will ensure that the level of damage to the young trees will not exceed levels where by the grant funding for the project would be compromised.

Other options were looked at before coming to the conclusion that culling some of the deer was the most appropriate means of managing this issue. There is no practical and legal means of neutering wild roe deer, so this is not an option. The decisions made on this issue follow established and best practice land management as occurs on any well-managed landholding and are supported by the Scottish Government and Scottish Natural Heritage. Recent changes in legislation put a greater requirement on all landowners to manage deer numbers on their land through the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011. We must remember that the natural balance achieved through the predator/prey relationship does not function naturally in relation to deer as there are now no natural predators left in the UK due to man's eradication of lynx, wolves and bears.

By managing the population of roe deer we will be ensuring that there is a healthy and sustainable deer population in the city. Without this the population will soon be reaching levels at which there will be welfare issues for the deer through starvation and ill health due to the pressures they will be putting on the habitats that they are trying to exist in, outwith their normal woodland/woodland edge habitat. Once there are welfare issues for the deer, damage being caused to neighbouring land or crops or public safety issues then Aberdeen City Council is legally required to undertake a cull of the deer under the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996 and the new Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011.

The deer management activities that we are proposing are no different from those which are carried out on estates and areas of public land across the whole of Scotland. Our proposals have been developed with advice and assistance from the nationally recognised experts in the field from Scottish Natural Heritage and Forestry Commission Scotland and conform with the required best practice procedures.

The area of the site where we are planning to plant trees is not a wildflower rich meadow but area of rank grassland dominated by coarse grasses and the garden escape, dames violet, which is a non native invasive species. As such, the area has minimal biodiversity value. To convert this to a wildflower meadow and manage it as such would be very costly, not sustainable and not subject to the level of grant that would make it economic to undertake in the current financial climate.

By planting more trees we will have more diverse, attractive and sustainable habitats for deer and other wildlife as well as a better environment for people.

Yours sincerely

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