

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aberdeen City Council intends to attempt a tree plantation Tullos Hill. The first phase of planting failed, and the City had to return £43,800 to the Forestry Commission. The reasons for the failure are given in a 2008 soil report. The poor soil quality is a reason for poor growth and wind throw is highly likely. Other conditions on the hill include underground landfill gas. There are warning signs concerning explosion risk and signs banning open flames. These signs are posted on high fences topped with barbed wire. The soil report on the failure of the first planting cites lack of weed control (weed control will be needed for several years); the use of 90cm instead of 120cm tree guards, and deer browsing. Arson is also an issue. The weather can be violently windy, and the hill is adjacent to the North Sea. It is not ideal for a tree plantation when these factors are considered.

The council was meant to consult with stakeholders about this new tree planting scheme (robust consultation, written communication with residents, and liaison with community councils). Community councils had not been given any details re. the deer cull, local residents had no letters, and the public consultation omitted important factors. The deer cull's genesis appears to be in a meeting between City Council operatives and a SNH visitor in late 2010. This small number of people took it upon themselves to rule out the non-lethal methods for planting trees (they wrote of the expense of such methods but did not consider funding could have been found). They favoured the cull, but did not consider the suitability of the hill for tree planting. The public consultation detailed rabbit fencing to protect trees, but made no mention of deer. As the City did not mention the cull alongside rabbit control, many assumed there were no other animal issues. Therefore, there was no large-scale objection until after the cull 'leaked out'. An elected community council member and the author were prevented from speaking at a Housing Committee meeting (on a technicality) held after the cull became public knowledge. This act alone shows there was no meaningful consultation. The consultation also omitted the years of 'weed control and the number of trees planned for Tullos Hill (89,000 – which will forever change the hill). It emerged that the funding application is only at the draft stage – although City advised that the scheme is cost neutral. Had people known of the £43,800 grant repayment at the time of the public consultation, it would have been grounds for objection as well. It is unlikely that a large scale planting will succeed; funds have already been wasted trying; and the public want the hill as it is with its existing biodiversity. Objection is very widespread – thousands have signed petitions, hundreds have signed letters and community councils have lodged formal objections. The Scottish SPCA calls it 'abhorrent and absurd' to cull deer to protect trees which don't even exist yet. After the public outcry, general statements such as 'deer culls are needed' are being made by a backtracking City council, but the cull was always a direct by-product of the desire to plant trees.

Tullos Hill is already enjoyed by the public. Grasslands like Tullos are seen as essential for biodiversity – not least butterflies and bees. Aberdeen City is cash-strapped; so expending funds and energy on this project is also a cause of concern. The forestry scheme was launched at a time when targets for creating forests were all-important. [Saving our Magnificent Meadows - The Case for Greater Funding to Conserve and Enhance the UK's wildflower-rich grasslands](#)¹ is a report resulting from a project funded by Natural England, Countryside Council for Wales, SNH, NI Environment Agency and Plantlife. EU and UK environmental agencies acknowledge that meadow and grass land loss is a serious issue. [Saving our Magnificent Meadows](#) advises grassland losses in England may have been stemmed, but this is not the case in Scotland. Aberdeen is about to lose grasslands at Loirston (for a football stadium which will have a huge carbon impact in construction and operation), and at Cove (for housing). The Tullos Hill tree-planting scheme needs to be halted, and the hill either left as is, or funding sought to enhance without dramatically altering, its existing, and rich biodiversity.

¹ Saving our Magnificent Meadows – Appendix 12