



THE MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL OF SCOTLAND

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Rural Development Contracts – Rural Priorities
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Dear Mr Macleod

Lochrosque - Druimdhù Native Woodland Creation (Case Ref HIG-128406-3870104)

The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCoS) welcomes native woodland expansion in appropriate locations with appropriate safeguards for continued access and valuable moorland and upland habitats that are already present, along with a minimal ground disturbance approach.

On behalf of the MCoS, I would like to thank you for consulting with us as the proposal is located in an important area for mountaineering and a route ascending Fionn Bheinn passes through the site. We therefore welcome the commitment to provide access through the deer fences that are to be constructed. It must however be noted that The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and SOAC apply equally on and off paths. Off path access should not be unnecessarily restricted. Additionally, the Outcome Plan states that “well constructed stiles shall be installed to allow hill walkers/mountain bikers access through the native woodland.” Stiles are a barrier to many mountain bikers and very difficult for some walkers that are capable of managing the path through the woodland and continuing north along it. The MCoS would suggest that at least at either end of the path through the enclosure, a walker / biker-friendly structure should be used. An example would be a self-closing gate.

It should be noted that unhelpfully, and potentially problematic for planning purposes, the most northerly point where the path crosses the proposed fence is quoted as NH15676500 on species concept map 1 of 3. More accurately this point would be approximately NH17975959. We would suggest that all grid references quoted on the application be rechecked as at least this one is incorrect by a significant margin, indeed is on the wrong hillside, and could lead to disastrous confusion when implementing the project.

The landscape quality of this area is high and the location is adjacent to an NSA, hence the most landscape-sensitive techniques should be used. This includes the ground preparation as for perhaps a decade or so, it is the ground preparation that will impact visually rather than the trees. In a planting project the size of this, it may be justified to mechanically mound/screef, but the visual impact of this technique is greatly affected by the size of bucket. There appears to be no specification of this. The MCoS would recommend that use of a mini digger with an approximately 30 cm wide bucket would minimise intrusion while maximising efficiency. However, other planting projects have begun by using larger buckets which have led to very visually intrusive holes / mounds of 50 cm+ depth as occurred initially at Loch Clunie. These would be unacceptably intrusive.

The statement in 2.15 regarding deer lawns and resting areas seems odd when the plan is for deer fences to exclude this species. The reasoning for planning these needs to be made clear.

The carbon sequestration benefits of this project very much depends upon the balance between carbon release (primarily due to drying of the peat soil due to planting) and the storage gain through the trees themselves as they grow. The future use of the woodland is a factor in this balance in the long-term, and is not specified, therefore the carbon storage gain cannot be assessed. Although it is accepted that the landscape and habitat gains may outweigh any lack of significant carbon benefit, there should not be a cost.

The MCoS has some concerns about the potential for bird strike, but defer to RSPB opinion in this matter. We would advocate that the minimal landscape impact technique be used that is commensurate with protecting Grouse from flying into the fence.

Please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss these issues further.

Yours sincerely

Hebe Carus
Access & Conservation Officer