

March 2022

Finding the Common Ground on Sustainable Upland Deer Management

A joint project between the Association of Deer Management Groups and Scottish Environment LINK

We believe this process will help to reset relationships in a way that makes them fit to meet the challenges of the changes ahead and deliver sustainable high-quality outcomes for upland deer management in Scotland. And now, as the Scottish Government considers how to implement the Deer Working Group recommendations in the context of the biodiversity and climate crises, is exactly the right time to do this.



© John MacPherson WTMIL

1. Context

Deer management is a crucial component of addressing the climate and nature crises in upland Scotland. Changing deer management to restore habitats at scale is recognised as a key part of Scotland's contribution to mitigating climate change and reversing biodiversity loss. While the onus rests on individuals holding rights and responsibilities, deer management can be achieved at landscape scale, with collaboration across multiple landownerships and working with other land use sectors. Social and economic elements also need to be considered to ensure that any change encompasses a just transition that will support a healthy and vibrant rural economy through nature based solutions.

The next few years will see a change in Scottish Government policy as it delivers the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and implements the recommendations of the Deer Working Group Report on the Management of Wild Deer in Scotland ('the DWG recommendations'). Inevitably, the focus will be on the technicalities of managing deer. However, if workable solutions are to be found, any changes will rely on constructive dialogue between the range of stakeholders that are involved in upland deer management.

The current reality is that for decades, these relationships have often been characterised by low trust and conflict. If we are to genuinely navigate the changing priorities for upland deer management, we urgently need to understand and then address the barriers to workable relationships.

Recognising this, The Association of Deer Management Groups, Plantlife Scotland, Scottish Land and Estates, Trees for Life and Woodland Trust have formed a steering group to look at how we find ways for the stakeholders to better work together. This group is called the "**Finding the Common Ground Steering Group**" and is advised by Cairngorms National Park Authority and NatureScot.

The Steering Group contracted the Centre for Good Relations (CfGR), a civic mediation organisation, to conduct an initial assessment to help surface and unpick the issues behind the blockages preventing constructive dialogue, and propose how these issues could be addressed.

In May 2021, CfGR held confidential interviews with 46 stakeholders from a range of organisations



© Dee Ward

including private landowners and managers, deer stalkers, public landowners, statutory agencies, environmental NGOs and community trusts to explore the key issues related to deer management in upland Scotland.

A summary of the key issues and concerns heard by CfGR can be found [here](#). There are no surprises in the issues and concerns that were raised, but this is the first time that such an objective assessment has been made. CfGR affirmed that without trust and respect between the various stakeholders, the ability of stakeholders to work together to find ways to successfully deliver ambitious targets associated with the twin climate and biodiversity crises will be hampered.

The Steering Group then explored interventions proposed by CfGR and decided the best way forward was to hold a process, lasting about a year, using civic mediation methods to **develop better relations across the deer sector in upland Scotland to find shared solutions that will support the implementation of the Scottish Government's action in the light of their response to the DWG recommendations.**

This process will be separate from, but will complement, other processes that the Scottish Government will, or is, leading to find technical solutions to future deer management in upland Scotland. It should be seen as an enabling process to help identify and implement workable solutions on the ground, and address the greater need for collaboration that the Scottish Government has acknowledged will be needed as the DWG recommendations are implemented.

2. Using a civic mediation approach

Civic mediation has not been tried before in a deer management context, but has successfully been applied to complex human conflicts elsewhere (see section below “About Centre for Good Relations”).

The approach involves a process of **accountable dialogue**, taking place over the course of a year, and focuses on building better relationships by bringing people together who see an issue from different angles, using their skills and expertise to work out how, together, they can find solutions to that issue. The intention of mediation is to effect positive change in situations of conflict, contention or division. The work supports sustainable positive change, and lays the basis for better collaborative working to agree and develop long-term solutions.

The approach aims to create space for individuals (or groups or organisations) to work through to positive outcomes themselves. Being an iterative process, it is tailored towards the needs of the particular situation. Using civic mediation therefore presents an opportunity to address the lack of trust and understanding between different perspectives which continue to be an obstacle to the delivery of sustainable collaborative deer management.

It's important to note that this approach is not simply a series of workshops. Over the course of the year there will be a series of meetings, starting with a 2.5-day residential gathering where stakeholders will collectively consider their values and what matters to them. This residential gathering is then followed by ongoing fieldwork including smaller stakeholder group gatherings and single-party discussions as needed, to enable stakeholders to gradually explore issues and develop a deeper understanding of each other's perspective of them.

Mediators work with the stakeholders throughout the process to assess what progress has been achieved at each stage and informing the design of the next stage. This will identify sticking points to progress and inform the process design to address these as we move forward.

In this way, the process builds empathy and trust, enabling people to accommodate each other more easily, develop a commitment to work together, and test out and explore options that will enable the sector to work collaboratively towards its vision.

Participants will be selected by the steering group (including those in an advisory function). They will include front-line practitioners as well as policy makers and decision makers.

It is important to emphasise that the positions and priorities of the stakeholders may not completely change as a result of the process; rather that participants gain a better understanding of each other's positions and priorities and that their respect and understanding for each other develops. This improves relationships and thus enables collaborative working.

The Steering group has decided that this work should be carried out by the Centre for Good Relations because:

- CfGR carried out the preliminary assessment, and are therefore already have a good understanding of the issues, and have developed relationships with some of the stakeholders both during and after the assessment.
- CfGR is the only organisation in Scotland that uses civic mediation methodology. If we were to go to another organisation, the nearest place with anything equivalent would be in Northern Ireland. However they have no experience of working within an environmental context.
- CfGR has a track record and level of expertise in working with multi-stakeholder, multi-issue situations, which often affect policy matters (i.e. while they explore a particular conflict, they work within the broader context).

See more details about CfGR in Section 6.

3. Outputs of the process

This process is separate from the Scottish Government workstreams to implement the DWG recommendations and identify technical and practical action plans to deliver sustainable deer management in upland Scotland. Our aim is to complement those processes with relationship-building so that the revised approach is successfully applied at ground level to deliver aspiration targets for climate and biodiversity while safeguarding the livelihoods that depend on upland deer management and the related rural economy.

1. The specific conflicts and issues identified in the [assessment stage](#) are mapped out in detail, making the links between policy and grassroots levels. This will include looking forward to potential challenges that may emerge in the future.
2. Participants have a better understanding of the values and beliefs that underlie differing viewpoints and management objectives as a result of respectful, honest and open dialogue, and recognise the barriers to constructive relationships.
3. A shared set of objectives for deer management that can act as a 'guiding star' when the hard choices come to be made.
4. Develop understanding around the hard choices that may result from the implementation of the recommendations of the DWG. Recognise that these choices will impact adversely on some individuals and understand the feelings and emotions involved.
5. Use a shared understanding of the principles of a Just Transition to develop practical steps to help stakeholders who are adversely affected by these hard choices to adapt to the changing situation.
6. An agreed set of principles for future ways of collaborative working between participants – including a commitment to “accountable dialogue” by which participants carry out any actions they agree to in a timely manner.
7. A set of key individuals who can act as changemakers are identified and equipped with the skills required for effective engagement in conflict and tension, in order to sustain people's commitment and positive approach to difficult conversations into the future.
8. A set of recommendations of changes to be made to any existing structures and mechanisms considered not to be working well.
9. Suggestions for any follow-up work to ensure the benefits from this process are embedded in future upland deer management.

4. About the *Finding the Common Ground Steering Group*

The group is formed of organisations that represent a balance of upland deer management and woodland restoration in Scotland, with the chair taking a neutral role. The individuals of the group are considered to have a good understanding of the issues in the current context; a high stake in the outcomes; and an open-minded view on the issue of deer management. As a result, since the group formed in early 2021, we have found our conversations to have been amicable, candid and constructive.

The main purpose of the Steering Group is to advise on the process so it works as well as possible; including identifying who the key stakeholders are to be involved. Individuals are not there to represent any particular side of the debate, or indeed have the debate. It's their expertise and their outlook which are the most important attributes.

The core group are the decision-makers of the group. We are fortunate that staff from CNPA and NatureScot also sit on the group with an advisory function.

Core group (decision-makers)

Name, job title, organisation	Expertise/role
Julie Stoneman Saving Scotland's Rainforest Project Manager Plantlife Scotland	Chair of group – plays a neutral role and brings project management and facilitation skills. Is involved because the herbivore impact is a major threat to Scotland's rainforest, but this work applies to all of upland Scotland.
Alan McDonnell Conservation Manager, Trees for Life	Member of Scottish Environment LINK Deer Task Force and Convener of LINK Woodland Group, developing a landscape scale proposal for collaboration between nature restoration, landowning and community interests in the central Highlands.
Ben Harrower Head of Wildlife Management, Woodland Trust	Oversees all wildlife management issues on the Woodland Trust estate across the UK. Involved due to the Trust's interest and involvement with woodland creation in Scotland.
Karen Ramoo Policy Adviser - Forestry, Conservation & Wildlife Management, Scottish Land and Estates	Identifies and develops key policy issues for the rural sector with a focus on forestry, conservation and wildlife management.
Richard Cooke Vice Chair, Association of Deer Management Groups	Involved with ADMG since its outset in 1992, most recently as Chair. Was the first Chair of the Lowland Deer Network Scotland (2011-2019), a former Board member of the Deer Commission for Scotland (1996-2002), former Convener of the National Access Forum, and has recently become Chair of the Scottish Venison Association. Has been involved in resolving stakeholder conflict in his role on the Moorland Forum and around the development of the outdoor access code.
Tom Turnbull Chair, Association of Deer Management Groups	Chair of ADMG. Has been undertaking deer management in the Highlands for twelve years, and is former Chair of the Inveraray and Tyndrum Deer Management Group. Also has a background in farming in land management.

Advisory members

Name, job title, organisation	Expertise/role
Colin McLean Head of Land Management, Cairngorms National Park Authority	Before joining CNPA in 2021, worked at Glen Tanar, balancing nature conservation interests with sporting interests of a traditional Highland estate. He has managed deer for agencies, for pinewood regeneration and for sport stalking.
Holly Deary Wildlife Management Officer, Nature Scot	Has worked with ADMG since 2015 on the effective delivery and implementation of deer management planning to deliver a range of public and private interests based on an evidence lead adaptive management approach.

5. About Centre for Good Relations

CfGR is an independent not-for-profit company whose core work is 'civic mediation'; involving facilitation and dialogue, working through issues of contention and dispute, and addressing social conflicts and tensions. The organisation works with people positively on matters of contention, taking them through dialogue processes, which unpack issues and tensions.

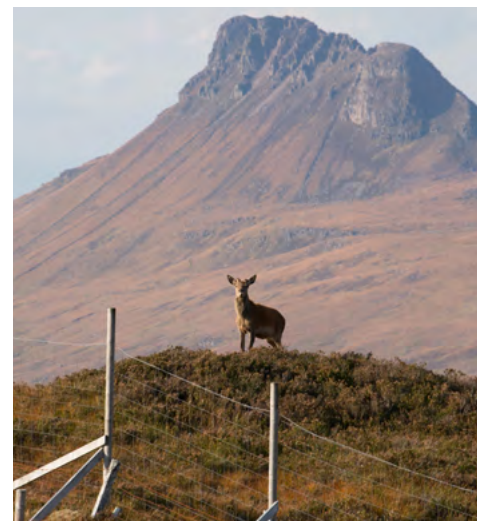
CfGR is uniquely placed to facilitate this process because of the organisation's track record of working on a range of relevant conflicted issues, which are centred on complex, systemic and contested issues. CfGR has experience of applying this process in the following situations:

- "Keeping Our Cool" at COP26 – an initiative commissioned by Scottish Government Justice Department to provide mediative support and input to help reduce tensions around protests and demonstrations in and around COP26 in Glasgow. A team of mediators worked on the ground to enable peaceful protests and manage relationships within and between protestors, police and local communities and businesses.
- Work with the Fishing Industry, Scottish Government and eNGOs on disputes associated with resource management in marine protected areas. This included exploring varied perceptions about scientific evidence and disagreements about the relevance of particular data, the challenge between historical traditions and the opportunities and risks generated by new approaches to the use of the marine environment. The work focussed on exploring and developing relationships to enable constructive dialogue around the designation of marine protected areas.
- Tensions and divisions involving race relations in East Lancashire (Burnley, Blackburn, Pendle) working with a range of political parties including the far right, members of Islamic organisations and local communities.
- Work in Lincolnshire on issues involving the economics of the agricultural and food processing labour market and the community and political impact of European Union migration.

More information about CfGR can be found on their website: <http://www.centreforgoodrelations.com/>



© Dee Ward



© John MacPherson WTM

With thanks to the following for funding this project:

Association of Deer Management Groups
Cairngorms National Park Authority
Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority
NatureScot
Scottish Environment LINK
Woodland Trust

For further information please contact:

Julie Stoneman
Chair of Finding the Common Ground Steering Group
Julie.Stoneman@plantlife.org.uk