

# **MINUTES OF ARRAN ENVIRONMENT PANEL**

## **30th October 2015**

Present: Andy Walker, Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS)  
Rob Soutar, FCS  
Jim Lauder, FCS  
Andrew Jarrott, FCS  
Graeme Walker, SNH  
Kate Sampson, National Trust for Scotland  
Kenny Bone, VisitArran  
John Rhead, Scottish Raptor Study Group  
Margret Bruce Arran Museum  
Richard McMaster, Arran Community Council

### **1. National & District Updates**

**RS** summarised the issues concerning FCS at present:

Timber prices have dropped recently. Prices are cyclical in nature & it is 8 years since the last low. There are a number of reasons for this drop: China's economy has slowed down and the fears that Greece may leave the Euro have resulted in a very strong pound. The overall effect is that cheap Scandinavian timber is being landed in Britain, driving down our home-grown prices. It is predicted that it will be 1-2 years before the timber price begins to increase again.

Sales account for something like £100m income for FCS across Scotland. This year we addressed a £5 million shortfall in income by cutting our expenditure, of which over £1 million was cut in Galloway FD. Next year we are addressing a forecast of £11 million shortfall by making deeper cuts. It is also expected that the Comprehensive Spending Review by the Westminster government is probably looking for a further 20% cut in public spending. We don't yet know how much this will effect our budgets.

As a result of this funding difficulty, Forest Enterprise Scotland may consider restructuring. It is certainly a time for planning for the upturn in timber prices (when it comes )& looking to other funding sources (especially in the interim). For some programmes such as bog restoration, there is funding, in this case through the Peatland Action Fund.

RS asked the Environment Panel to assist in identifying the planning priorities for Arran – e.g. woodland fringe, bog restoration, trails, laybys, car parks. It was proposed to focus on priorities at the next meeting & invite more representatives from Arran Access Trust, Visit Arran & Community Council.

### **2. Glenloig sale**

This property has now been bought by a company from Northern Ireland. The solicitor's name can be supplied if anyone wants details of the new owner.

### **3. Update on Arran Timber Transport Strategy**

**JL** brought the Panel up to date:

The Marine licence has been granted & FCS are working towards planning permission but there will be no funding for the next 2 years.

The Focus group has now been expanded to include Community Councillors from Lochranza, Lamlash & Whiting Bay & there is strong resistance from Machrie members. One of the major difficulties in the group has been that full details of timber costs cannot be given due to that information belonging to 3<sup>rd</sup> parties. **RS** agreed to investigate ways of overcoming this.

There are ongoing discussions about a forest road through Machrie private block with the forest management company & a Landscape Architect has been appointed to work on designs for the stacking area.

### **4. Southend Land Management Plan**

**AW** introduced the main points of the plan:

Production smoothing – a major objective of Forest Enterprise is to work towards a normal forest ie where harvesting & replanting is such that the same level of production will continue into perpetuity. In the original plan production was heavily skewed to the next 10 years but this has been smoothed to a certain extent. The number of coupes to be harvested between now & 2025 has been reduced from 40 to 30 & from 2026 to 2040, increased from 13 to 24.

Coupe size – coupes have not become smaller due to several reasons. The plan area is dominated by a series of small, rolling hills & each is being harvested as a whole in accordance with Landscape Architect's advice. The landscape is a 'large' one requiring larger coupes. There are significant areas of windblow requiring large coupes to clear them.

LISS (Low Impact Silvicultural System) – a substantial area within Aucheleffan is being managed under this system because much of it is the mixed woodland of the previous replanting strategy. Management of this area is still well in the future but will probably be managed on a small scale clearfell system. Another area managed as LISS is 50 year old Sitka spruce/Lodgepole pine mixture which is a mix of old blown spruce, recent blown spruce, standing spruce & low quality pine. The standing & recent blown spruce will be harvested & larger areas restocked with spruce & smaller areas left to naturally regenerate. In the longer term this will result in a mixed structure, mixed aged woodland. Much of this area is adjacent to the top edge of the forest & will become an important part of the woodland fringe. It will also give permanent habitat for red squirrels.

Species mix – due to the soils, Sitka spruce will still dominate but there are some opportunities for species diversity. Around the southern edge of the plan area, pockets of broadleaves will be established close to farms & settlements for future firewood sources.

Open space - following felling, a large area will be left unplanted and restored to active bog. This is the flattest and wettest area of the site

with deep peat and good remnants of bog habitat, in particular sphagnum moss. The previous tree crop has performed badly and the area is prone to windblow. If funds permit, the standing crop will be felled in such a way to leave the forestry drains clear which will then be blocked to raise the water table and re-wet the site.

## **5. Date of next meeting**

28<sup>th</sup> April 2016 (provisional)