



Public Petitions Committee Consideration of PE1340: Questions arising from committee meetings

Scottish Wildlife Trust

11 October 2010

Should there be a strict presumption against felling or damage to any trees, irrespective of whether or not these lie in a conservation area?

The Scottish Wildlife Trust acknowledges that trees outwith woodlands, can add value to local biodiversity, contribute to green infrastructure and the green ecological network, provide a 'sense of place,' connect people to nature - particularly in an urban setting, and provide ecosystem services such as attenuating the micro-climate, storing carbon, removing atmospheric pollutants and regulating water flow.

Woodland provides substantial benefits to both wildlife and people. As the former climax vegetation community over much of Scotland, woodland and scrub supports more species than any other terrestrial habitat, particularly ancient semi-natural woodlands which are the surviving descendants of our original natural forests. These are vitally important, irreplaceable reservoirs from which wildlife can begin to spread back into newly restored habitat thereby helping Scotland's ecosystems to recover from centuries of degradation. In addition to supporting much of our biodiversity, woodland provides highly valued social and economic benefits to Scotland's people.

We do not believe that a strict presumption against felling or damage to **any** tree is practical, workable or desirable. There are circumstances where tree planting/regeneration is inappropriate and a programme of tree removal should be implemented to increase the biodiversity value of the site. E.g. removal of trees encroaching on lowland raised bog, blanket mires and fens (although it is accepted that some 'bogs' are now likely to be so heavily modified that removing trees may do more harm than good, both ecologically and in terms of carbon release); tree thinning/removal to 'open up' the forest canopy and/or increase the amount of 'dead wood in the woodland/park. In addition, part of a woodland management strategy may involve the removal of non-native tree species, such as sycamore and Sitka spruce.

We do recognise that there are notable trees (e.g. those that have high biodiversity value as well as cultural value), particularly those located in an urban setting, which presently lack protection and are therefore vulnerable to felling because they do not have a tree preservation order (TPO) or lie outwith a conservation area. Therefore it would appear sensible to re-examine the ways in which trees which have biodiversity, cultural and historical value could be protected to prevent the occurrence of inappropriate felling which can cause anger and frustration within the local community and in some circumstances be harmful to wildlife.