

Aros Forest Design Plan 2014-23

Summary of proposals

The following outcomes are required and the following issues have been addressed in the plan revision:-

Economic context

- ◆ Approval for 11.3ha of felling and 11.1ha of restocking is being sought, for completion within the first 10 years of the plan.
- ◆ Timber production from felling and thinning operations is currently estimated at 0.1Km³/annum.
- ◆ Reassessment of felling dates to ensure a balanced approach to restructuring.
- ◆ Review of silvicultural systems in relation to existing opportunities and constraints.
- ◆ Construction of new roads requires EIA approval for 0.14Km of new roading and felling approval for 0.1ha of associated roadline felling within the first 5 years of the plan.

Environmental context

- ◆ Full restoration of PAWS is incorporated outwith the core policy woodland area and enhancement within the core area.
- ◆ Conservation of the setting of small-scale features, such as waterfalls, crags and archaeological sites through diversifying the immediate surrounding landscape, including opportunities to increase associated open space.
- ◆ Protection of sensitive conservation features through appropriate silvicultural design and adherence to agreed SSSI and SAM management plans.
- ◆ Eradication of rhododendron in line with current policy, but retaining any identified ornamental flowering varieties.
- ◆ Regeneration of new native woodland behind the Mull Theatre.

Social context

- ◆ Introduction of further design improvements associated with existing and new recreation facilities and garden areas, including recommendations from visitor zone surveys and community questionnaires.
- ◆ Improvements to forest design from key viewpoints and along recreation routes.
- ◆

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Setting and context

The Forest Design Plan for Aros Park expired on 28th March 2012 and was subsequently extended during the revision process to 31st December 2012. The design plan is intended to sit along side the Aros Park Management Plan 2005 (new plan currently in preparation and will build on the Development Plan of 2009). Consequently, the FDP does not go into detail relating to the work primarily to be covered by the Management Plan. The main focus of the Management Plan will be recreation and community projects. The FDP therefore focuses on felling and restocking proposals and any access provision or construction for which felling or an EIA determination would be required.

The plan area lies east of the A848, south of Tobermory, and east of the Glengorm road at the northern end. Ownership of land in and around Tobermory is unclear due to feus, but it can be assumed that the FC does not own residential property within the town. Aros Park, centred on the site of the old house, occupies that part of the plan area to the south of Tobermory. To the north, are areas of open grazing and native woodland. One area is due to be sold shortly, beside the junction of the B882 and Glengorm road. Another area is classed as crofting, either side of the track south of Erray, whilst the remainder beside the Glengorm road is an agricultural lease. The park area is bounded on the east by Tobermory Bay and the Sound of Mull, including a narrow channel of water, known as the Doirlinn a' Chailbhe, between it and Calve Island.

Within the area officially regarded as Aros Park, there are a number of private properties, agricultural land, and land and buildings with community use potential, in addition to the extensive recreation facility provision, coastal SSSI, loch, commercial plantations and policy woodlands. Aros Park is essentially a community woodland, although not formally adopted as such. A number of organizations and individuals have interests in the park, including the Mull theatre, Tobermory Endeavour, the Mull and Iona Community Trust and Friends of Aros Park. Visitor numbers are currently in excess of 30,000/annum. Many of these visitors are locals. The park is directly accessible from the town on foot or by a short car journey into the centre of the park.

SNH and Argyll & Bute Council are the Forest District's statutory consultees. The Community Council has been made aware of the plan revision proposals. Historic Scotland is routinely consulted regarding the scheduled ancient monuments in the plan area. The Consultation Record provides a summary of all formal correspondence, issues raised and FD responses (see appendix) in relation to the Forest Design Plan, but does not cover ongoing consultation in relation to the management plan. Reference is however made to recent community engagement in relation to the management plan.

The management objectives for the park were set out in the Development Plan:-

- Improve the quality of our tourist and local visitor's experience of Aros Park
- Build on the vision to upgrade existing facilities that are in danger of falling into disrepair

These objectives were intended to deliver under Scottish Forestry Strategies' Key Themes of; Business Development, Community Development, and Access and Health. However, the objectives of the park are wider than these recreation based objectives, resulting in a further set of management aims being constructed ahead of the Management Plan:-

- To conserve the existing native woodlands and maximise their associated biodiversity
- To protect and enhance all natural and cultural interests
- To provide and manage formal and informal recreation resources
- To increase community participation and opportunities
- To manage all woodland areas using sound silvicultural practices, to ensure delivery of the above aims.

Under the FDP, the following objectives will apply for the whole plan area:-

- Commercial timber production (remaining productive conifer areas only).
- Full PAWS restoration, except for those parts of the existing policy woodlands where their historic and visual values take priority.
- Development of habitat networks.
- Eradication of rhododendron (an exception may be made for unusual flowering varieties associated with the former estate).
- Landscape improvement.
- Enhancement and protection of key habitats.
- Providing an adequate access infrastructure.
- Protect and enhance water features, fisheries and water supplies.
- Protect and enhance cultural heritage assets.
- To comply with UKWAS guidance for certification.

1.2 History of plan

The park was acquired in 1957, having been a private estate prior to that. Much of the park has been historically wooded, with 145ha appearing on the NCCS Inventory for Ancient and Long-established Woodland, plus additional areas of Long-established plantation woodland that reflect the past policy woodland management. Policy woodland management has affected much of the core area of the park and associated Ancient and Long-established woodland sites, with further changes after the FC acquired the park. Commercial planting started in 1962. The house was demolished in 1962 and the stone used to build the existing car park. A Millennium Forest for Scotland project was initiated in 1996, primarily to tackle the serious rhododendron problem in the park. Additional funding partners were AIE (Leader) and local volunteers providing 'in-kind' contributions. Project work was completed in

2006, amounting to a further 5 hectares of rhododendron clearance in the plan period from 2000, with 24 hectares having been completed prior to that. However, a considerable area of rhododendron remains. The scheme is based on a Dedication agreement with a review date of 25/06/2022.

Land to the north of Tobermory was acquired in 1967, although half of it is classed as common grazings belonging to Tobermory. One section under an agricultural let is currently being sold.

Felling under the old plan is complete. Restocking through natural regeneration of native woodland is ongoing.

Remnants of Ancient Semi-natural Woodland (ASNW) exist throughout the plan area, but notably within the Sound of Mull Cliffs SSSI, which was notified in 1986. Remnants of old hazel woods occur north of Tobermory, occupying drier steep banks. Those within the agricultural lease were fenced off in 2008 to protect them from cattle grazing.

A significant number of new recreation trails and facilities have been introduced into the plan area over the last 10 years. These include the 'Lookout Tower' and various play areas.

An area of open grazing land behind the Mull Theatre was recently split into two, retaining the northern area as designed open space under grazing, whilst allowing the southern area to revert to native woodland through natural regeneration.

