

LARGE SCALE WOODLAND CREATION: ENVIRONMENTAL CONSTRAINTS

TILHILL FORESTRY

Carrick Farm near Lochgoilhead, Cowal, Argyll



Right: John Gallacher (Tilhill) and friend

Background

Carrick Farm which extends to 1526 hectares was purchased by a Tilhill Forestry client in 2011 with the aim of establishing a productive woodland as a long-term investment. Previously managed as an upland sheep farm which became economically unviable, the initial investment appraisal was predicated on planting approximately two thirds of the farm. However shortly after purchase, a pair of Golden Eagles was recorded nesting on the site, the first known breeding attempt in over 40 years; this placed the proposed planting scheme at risk.

Stakeholder Engagement

Understanding the eagle pair's current use of open ground at Carrick Farm has been critical to the design of the new woodland. Tilhill Forestry staff engaged extensively with Scottish Natural Heritage and Forestry Commission Scotland together with the UK's leading eagle experts to better understand the eagle's habitat requirements within Carrick Farm, which forms an important part of their home range. The revised woodland design incorporates data from over 200 survey hours of eagle flights from vantage points, data from nest cameras and satellite transmitters and results from computer-generated models to identify topographical features of importance within the landscape.

Wider stakeholder engagement was undertaken with the local community throughout this process and part of the native woodland element of the proposal is designated the Carrick Jubilee Wood. Thirty children from Lochgoilhead Primary School helped plant 200 trees to mark Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 2013. The Carrick Jubilee Wood was part of an initiative delivered in partnership with the Woodland Trust.

The Outcome

A planting proposal for 563 hectares of mainly productive woodland (Sitka spruce with areas of Norway spruce and Scots pine) was consented by Forestry Commission Scotland in 2013 and planting was completed in 2015. Partnership working facilitated by Tilhill Forestry's ecology team has resulted in a scheme that retains as much productive woodland as possible whilst also retaining areas of open ground important to the eagle pair as part of a well-balanced, multi-benefit forest. A long-term monitoring programme agreed with FCS and SNH aims to gain a better understanding of the interaction between new woodland creation and the potential loss of open ground to Golden Eagles in Scotland. This has been a very targeted approach to dealing with a specific issue and involved relationship building and close working with a small number of stakeholders over an extended period.

Lessons Learnt

- Early positive engagement is key - it is important to engage proactively from the start with stakeholders.
- All parties must be willing to work together constructively. Expect to compromise.
- There can be many issues to address prior to deciding whether ground is plantable – policy issues, statutory designations, protected species, deep peat, landscape and visual impacts. A high input of time early on will save a lot of time and cost at a later stage.