

8/3/36

## GORDON DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN REVIEW

### Bailies of Bennachie - comments on draft document - 28th Jan. 1987

The Bailies of Bennachie are grateful for the opportunity to make comment on those aspects of the plan which are relevant to the interests of the Bailies, notably the policies outlined in chapter 6) Countryside and Coastline, and chapter 7) Recreation and Tourism. Although our concern is specifically the Bennachie range, we feel that our comments are of relevance, in a broader sense, to recreation and the countryside throughout Gordon District.

### Management Plan for Bennachie.

The District Council is to be congratulated on its farsighted proposal to prepare a management plan for the Bennachie area. Bennachie is under considerable pressure both from the need for landowners to maximise the income from their land and from the general public who have a genuine right to resort to the Hill for the purpose of recreation in its many forms. The Bailies of Bennachie look forward to participating in this venture.

### Upland Tracks

In its Local Plan, the District Council undertook to "bring the construction of tracks and footpaths in landscape conservation areas under planning controls" We are disappointed by the proposal that, "the District will not seek to control the development of tracks in upland areas", especially in the light of recent developments on Bennachie, which is within a landscape conservation area. In this case, the landowner has constructed a

bulldozed track onto the summit ridge of the hill at a height of over 400m. The area through which the track passes, was until recently moorland with regenerating pinewood, but which was allowed to be converted to sheep pasture. The purpose of the road was not clear and only two years later an application was made to the Forestry Commission to plant this ground with trees. The necessity of this track is still not obvious as it would be of little benefit to the process of afforestation. Indeed the Forestry Commission has no tracks on the Hill at this height to service its own forests.

This particular track makes an unsightly scar, on an area of undoubted beauty, which can be seen from considerable distances. A pre-existing track, used by pedestrians for access to the hill, has been obliterated, leaving an unstable and badly eroded surface which will take many years to recover. The benefits of such a track to the landowner are, at best, minimal and surely its existence devalues the Hill's landscape significance.

We would urge the Council to consider bringing all such tracks in upland areas under planning control, involving consultation with interested bodies, and where such a track was considered necessary, to insist on an adequate standard of construction and maintenance.

#### Rights of Way

In its Local Plan, "The Council undertook to record all rights of way in conjunction with the Community Councils" and "to encourage the improvement of known footpaths in the District in towns and countryside" It is regrettable that the Council now feels that they do not have the resources to prepare a map of rights of way.

Walking is probably the most important form of outdoor recreation in this country and therefore deserves at least as much attention from the council as pastimes such as skiing, swimming, football, etc. Walking requires no specialised equipment (except on

mountains) and is therefore open to all sections of the community. By allowing the urban public greater access to the countryside, through sign-posting paths, and opening new routes, the Council will be helping to give a greater insight into the needs of those who live and work there.

We would ask that the Council takes this opportunity to protect an important part of our heritage, by recording rights of way. This should be done through the involvement of the Scottish Rights of Way Society, the Community Councils and the many voluntary organisations such as the Bailies of Bennachie, who have access to valuable local knowledge.

### Forestry

It is likely that large areas of Gordon District, both open hill ground and increasingly farm land (in light of current needs to reduce the output of certain products) will be brought into forestry. There are considerable financial incentives available to those who invest in private forestry schemes. However, a recent report entitled "Forestry in Great Britain", published by the National Audit Office, has shown that such investments of public money give a very poor rate of return, particularly in northern upland areas where tree growth is very poor. Forestry is no longer justifiable solely on economic grounds and, in an area such as Bennachie, recreation must be considered an equally important land-use.

The present system of voluntary consultation on forestry developments is considered inadequate. The process only involves those schemes which are applying for a forestry grant and referral to the District Council is optional on the part of the Forestry Commission. The Commission's own plans are not available for scrutiny, as are non grant aided private plantings.

We agree that blanket afforestation of landscape conservation areas would not be appropriate, but the Council would have no opportunity to comment on such a proposal unless it was grant aided.

We urge the Council to press for greater consultation over proposed afforestation schemes and in particular the introduction of a licensing system as already exists for tree felling.

Where afforestation is considered desirable, hill tops should not be planted and pedestrian access maintained. Many local hills are now almost impossible to climb because of impenetrable spruce forests.