Appendix 5

Response to the questions from [redacted]

Jonathan Willet, Beaver Project Manager, 18 September 2023, amended on 18 October 2023

Background

The Cairngorms Nature beaver sub-group was established in 2017, comprising representatives from National Farmers Union of Scotland, Scottish Land and Estates, Spey Fishery Board, Spey Catchment Initiative, Forest and Land Scotland, RSPB Scotland and NatureScot. The group's remit was to investigate the likelihood and be prepared for the potential arrival of beaver to the Cairngorms National Park by natural means, as per the action in the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan to, "Plan proactively for the potential and management implications of beaver populations in the National Park". A report published in April 2022 concluded that there were significant barriers to arrival by natural means.

In the meantime, the group's remit evolved further with the change in government policy to facilitate beaver translocation into new catchments, outwith their current range. This represented in the current National Park Partnership Plan as an action to 'Facilitate beaver translocation in the Cairngorms National Park'.

In June 2022 the Park Authority Board discussed a proposal to facilitate translocation in the National Park. The paper presents the history and background of partnership working and changing policy context and set out three options for the Park Authority's involvement in any proposals: taking a lead role in making an application, liaising closely with NatureScot on applications made by 3rd parties, or commenting on applications made by 3rd parties.

The Board agreed the recommendation that the Park Authority take a lead role in taking forward an application to release beaver into the Cairngorms National Park. Amongst the benefits of this approach were felt to be the opportunity to build on the existing close relations with land managers and partners, to take a multi-sectoral, multi-issue

approach, to support an application process with rigorous data collection and consultation processes, to consider a whole catchment approach to identifying suitable sites and population dynamics, and to be able to provide additional support and advice to any mitigation and management scheme. Preparatory work with the beaver group and stakeholders began immediately.

In September 2022, Scotland's Beaver Strategy 2022-2045 was published setting out a route map for beavers in Scotland over the coming decades. The strategy will steer wider efforts to identify and actively expand the population to new catchments, alongside appropriate management and mitigation, following the Scottish Government's change in policy to encourage wider beaver restoration.

The Park Authority is following the Interim guidance on NatureScot support for and assessment of beaver translocation projects and Beavers in Scotland - Conservation translocation guidance for applicants, consultees and interested parties that has been produced by NatureScot.

NatureScot identified the Spey as having the greatest area of potential core beaver woodland of all the catchments in Scotland and produced an Environmental Report on the catchment in June 2023 to facilitate any translocation licence application there.

The questions

These questions were sent in an email on the 25 August 2023.

1. Why 3 sites now/2024? Why not 1 then 2 at a later stage, possibly staged. Surely this would reduce risk. Learn from any issues with 1st release.

See the background information above as to why the work for the licence application is being taken forward now.

The general behaviour of beavers on a given site is well known from research and the many beaver reintroductions programmes that have taken place in Europe over the last 100 years. However, their activity and impacts at a very local level can only be determined when beavers are on that site. What beavers do on one site will not necessarily be the same as on another.

As the proposal is to establish an expanding, self-sustaining population it made sense to undertake the SEA and other assessments at the upper catchment scale, covering a number of sites, rather than one site at a time. To create a viable and sustainable population several release sites will be required, so the releases will be staged over a number of years. There will be plenty of opportunity to learn from the first releases. The whole process of managing the project will be adaptive.

The Park Authority gained agreement from three landowners to have beavers released on their land, these sites are part of a release programme that will take place over the period of the translocation licence (if we are successful in obtaining that) and on a number of sites. We are speaking to other landowners, but we have no more confirmed translocation sites as yet.

2. Are they expecting beavers from the 3 sites to meet up? Timescale?

Yes, the expectation is that the sexual mature juveniles will leave their parents' territory in their second or third year to explore, set up new territories and find a mate. The dispersal of the beavers will depend on the age of the kits in the family.

The establishment of a healthy, self-sustaining population depends on dispersing beavers finding unrelated mates. The larger number of families in the founder population, the faster this will happen.

3. It wasn't clear to us at what point it would be considered the population was successful and large enough before it became troublesome and what would happen to their protected status.

The results of beaver activity can be an issue for land managers at any point in population expansion. Therefore, beaver population size and 'trouble' may not be directly correlated. The issue is impacts. Once an unacceptable impact is identified, then mitigation escalation will commence, right up to the point of relocation and ultimately, when all other options have been fully explored, lethal control. All other mitigation techniques will have to have been tried and demonstrated to have failed before

translocation and lethal control is considered and potentially licenced because of protected species status and the requirement for favourable status.

The three 'components' for consideration of favourable conservation status are defined by a paper from NatureScot ;

- Population dynamics
- Range
- Availability of suitable habitat

4. We need more clarity on the timescale with regards to how quickly they will spread from their release sites

There is population modelling available from NatureScot/ Newcastle University. It is in the Environmental Report Published by NatureScot in June 2023 (figure 3b). It predicts that a founder population of 10 families will increase to 29 families after 10 years and that dispersal in that time frame is unlikely to be outwith the Kingussie –Aviemore areas. It should be recognised that it is a model and so only an indication of what might happen.

6. Scottish Code for Conservation Translocations:
6.1 p.8 can we see the plan referred to in bullet point 3

The plan is effectively a combination of the Scottish Beaver Strategy, the legal status of beavers and the policy relating to beaver of the Scottish Government. Certain element referred to, such as the monitoring plan, is a discussion between partners and is dependent on the location of the release sites. Any management actions will be informed by the monitoring undertaken and will follow the national beaver mitigation scheme.

As partners in the Scottish Beaver Strategy 2022-45, we are committing to its vision, "Throughout Scotland, communities are supported in working together to maximise the ecosystem and wider benefits of beavers while minimising negative impacts. The beaver population is actively expanded into appropriate areas; adaptive management and mitigation is used to protect assets and interests."

The movement of beavers and the establishment of new territories will be ascertained through weekly monitoring undertaken by the Park Authority, partner agencies and organisations, and by members of the public submitting their sightings of beavers and their feeding and denning signs. Relationships with landowners along the Spey will be strengthened and maintained to ensure good communication so that the Park Authority is made aware of beaver sightings or signs of activity as soon as possible.

We are confident this will ensure that any beaver activity that might have unacceptable adverse impacts on the riverbank or elsewhere can be identified early on and management measures put in place quickly. Should management measures not be sufficient, the removal of beavers from the area would be licensed and actioned by NatureScot, after an escalation of the available mitigation techniques had been shown to be not working. The additional resource provided by the Park Authority will enable this to be done swiftly and simply.

National and Spey catchment Environmental Reports have been published by NatureScot.

Beavers has been legally classified as a “former native” species and a European Protected Species and will therefore remain in Scotland. As such the strategy is for managing and mitigating impacts. Should beavers in the upper Spey cause issues that cannot be resolved through mitigation, they may be re-located. If there are no other places in the upper Spey catchment they may be relocated to, they will be relocated elsewhere.

6.2 p.9 ref Maximising … other land-users. Can we see the evaluation in bullet point 3 and confirmation ref resources in bullet point 4

Bullet point 3. See the national environmental report above.

Bullet point 4. This is NatureScot’s responsibility as it is delivering the national Beaver Mitigation Scheme. Your question needs to be directed to them.

From the Beaver Mitigation Scheme’s website

"NatureScot will provide free expert advice to all, with regards living with beavers and where appropriate, how to manage beaver activity.

The financial costs of delivering mitigation works will be supported by NatureScot where they meet scheme aims. This support is available to all landowners and managers. Use of public funds will be directed to protecting public and private interests[1] and in addition will need to demonstrate good value for money. Public bodies that have an existing biodiversity duty under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 will not be eligible for financial support under the scheme however can request advice (for free) at any time.

[1] Public interest meaning an issue related to public health or safety; environmental, economic, or community well-being.

While the detail of what mitigation will be appropriate on each site will vary, NatureScot and the Scottish Government are committed to expanding the scheme into new areas and to provide support to land managers experiencing negative impacts from beavers."

6.3 p. 16 refers to consultation with stakeholders during detailed planning presumably this happened a while ago, were landowners and managers further downstream and upstream from the release sites considered as a stakeholder at this stage?

The development of the Scottish Beaver Strategy in 2022 involved a national stakeholder engagement process. The current proposal to translocate beavers to the Spey was developed with the members of the Cairngorms Beaver Group.

Informal engagement events ran during March 2023 at the early stage of detailed planning, the events were focussed on the likely release area. Their aim was to;
1) to raise awareness and understanding of issues and opportunities in order to allow people to make informed comments during formal engagement and,
2) to listen to feedback and feed into the proposal out for formal public engagement now.

80 people attended four events during this stage

The formal engagement and consultation on the proposal to release beaver into the upper Spey Catchment began on the 14th of August and will end on the 25th of September. We are holding six public events, five within the Park and one in Aberlour. We have publicised the public engagement events and period.

When all three proposed releases sites were confirmed in April 2023 the Park Authority and the RSPB focussed our efforts to speak to or contact all the landowners/ managers within the initial release area (between Kingussie and Aviemore) and did that before the public engagement started. During the public engagement period we have met with farmer and crofters up and downstream of this area.

The report on the engagement is a key part of determining the success or failure of the licence application.

6.4 P 17 box on left – confirm this is or not a "fast-track"

This is not on a "fast-track". The application for a licence to release Beaver into the National Park is following exactly the same process and protocols as any other application. A licence application is required due to beaver's legal status. However, the issues raised in the text you mentioned have been answered in the national and Spey catchment environmental reports.

6.5 Please confirm this is a "non-native" translocation.

Yes. For the purposes of a beaver translocation licence application, a non-native species licence needs to be obtained for the upper Spey Catchment. The law that requires the licence is under section 14 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is illegal to release, allow to escape from captivity or cause to be at a place outside the control of any person any animal species outside its native range (as defined in the Act) without a licence. "Former native" species are considered to be "non-native species" for the purposes of the Act. Beavers are considered a "former native" species in Scotland. Therefore, any release of beaver into the wild in Scotland requires a non-native species licence under Section 16(4)(c) of the Act to ensure that they are legal acts.

The Scottish Government decision in 2016 allowed beavers to remain in Scotland and they were granted European Protected Species status in 2019. Even with these decisions they will be considered a "former native" species until the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) is further amended.

However, outwith of any translocations, beavers are a *defacto* native species.

6.6 P21 degree of constraints – has this been assessed as low/medium/high

- Translocated Species – High. Licence required.
- Release Sites – Medium/ High. Monitoring Plan and Operations Requiring Consent required from NatureScot.
- Release Site (post release) – Low. Beaver may be added to the existing designations. That is a matter for NatureScot.
- Source Population. High. Licence required for translocation. NatureScot's responsibility.
- Animal Welfare. High. Agreed nationally, part of the licence requirements.
- Quarantine/ Biosecurity. Low. National reviews in 2015 and 2019.
- Dangerous species. Low/ Medium? High. Licence required for translocation. NatureScot's responsibility.

6.7 P.23 Risk attributes assessed as No/Low / Medium / High

- Likelihood of strong social resistance by some to the translocation. To be determined by the engagement process and survey.
- Harm to Human Health and well-being. Low (using the criteria in the table).
- Harm to human livelihoods. Low (using the criteria in the table).
- Insufficient resources may prevent successful implementation of the translocation plan. Low. CNPA is providing additional resource to support land managers and remove barriers to accessing the NS mitigation scheme swiftly and efficiently. Beaver officer, conservation team, ranger and vol ranger support NatureScot is funding the translocation of beavers.
- Major financial costs once the translocation has been completed. Medium, see NatureScot's Beaver Mitigation Scheme.

6.8 P.24 can we see the goal setting? Bullet point 3 refers to carrying capacity. Has this been assessed and what is it in your consideration?

We are following the vision of the Scottish Beaver strategy, "The beaver population is actively expanded into appropriate areas; adaptive management and mitigation is used to protect assets and interests

The range and maximum population size in a catchment is for NatureScot to determine. See Favourable Conservation Status and current activities allowed under licence e.g., lethal control.

6.9 P.25 refers to SSSIs – what effect does the Spey catchment being a SSSI have on this reintroduction?

Any impact is for NatureScot to determine and they are doing so at the moment, this determination is required for the licence application. The Habitats Regulations Assessment (for Special Areas of Conservation) will also require a monitoring scheme to be agreed between NatureScot, the Park Authority and other partners.

6.10 P.26 have ORCs been obtained by the land managers?

A determination on any OCRs for all the SSSI's in and adjacent to the proposed translocation sites is being prepared by NatureScot. This is part of the licence application process. NatureScot has asked that the Park Authority applies on behalf of the landowners to minimise the duplication of paperwork. All the documentation required for the licence application will be made public in due course.

6.11 P.27 have non-native species licences been obtained for the 3 sites?

Not yet. This is part of the species translocation licence application that is being drafted and will be submitted to NatureScot by the end of October.

6.12 P.29 covers pests and disease – have the risks associated with Giardia been assessed? Scottish Water have raised this as an issue elsewhere in the country. There

have been recent cases of Avian Influenza transferring to mammals – has this hazard been assessed with regards to beavers?

From Girling (2019). "The risk of introducing significant disease to humans, domestic animals, or wildlife by releasing into the wild in Britain a beaver that was captive-bred in Britain or a wild beaver from Scotland, based on the current evidence of disease incidence, and assuming the use of robust, peer reviewed, pre-release health screening techniques, can be viewed as low."

Regarding Avian Influenza, the Park Authority not aware of any research specifically on beavers. You would need to contact NatureScot. beavers@nature.scot

6.13 P.34 last bullet point refers to population viability modelling – has this been done and may be useful for consideration ref point 4 above.

Population modelling is available from NatureScot/ Newcastle University. It is in the Environmental Report Published by NatureScot in June 2023 (figure 3b). It predicts that a founder population of 10 families will increase to 29 families after 10 years and that it is very unlikely there is dispersal in this time frame beyond the Kingussie to Aviemore area. It should be recognised that it is a model and so only an indication of what might happen.

6.14 P.35 have these assessments been done and can one view them?

We have received expert advice from the Beaver Trust. Their views on the timing and location of the proposed releases are in a Site Selection Report that is currently in draft. When it is finalised, we will publish it on our website.

The best-case scenario for the beavers would for a large number of families released into the best available habitat as close to each other as their territoriality allows. The availability of habitat and landowner approval for a release on their land and the availability of beavers will determine when, how many and where the beaver families are released.

In terms of post-release assessment, we would be seeking to ensure that the population is expanding and breeding successfully. This forms part of the monitoring plan that we are discussing with NatureScot at the moment.

6.15 P.40 chapter 8 covers socioeconomics. We can see the potential positives. The 2nd bullet point in column 2 is a valid one "Any financial …. Incurring costs" with regards to eco-tourism operations and landowners. And the bullet points at the bottom of that column are relevant too to the landowner/farming community. Your comment on these points would be appreciated.

Eco-tourism

This matter is one for a landowner and the ecotourism business to discuss between themselves. We hope that business in the National Park can make financial gains from the reintroduction of beavers. Our approach of identifying high risk sites, monitoring them frequently and initiating mitigation measures as soon as possible is considered robust enough to mitigate and manage any potential impacts on rural businesses.

Minimising harm bullet point

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6.16 P.41 – important para in Column 1 “Where there is potential for such harm, translocations should not proceed unless acceptable solutions can be developed.” 2 following bullet points important too: “Management actions/mitigation including containment/control, damage prevention, and culling to minimise impacts” and “Long-term compensation agreements to offset losses.” The way this section reads these should be in place prior to any translocation as it is in the “detailed planning” stage. This page then goes on to describe in detail the “stakeholder engagement” process and in my mind to date this has been inadequate, and I don’t consider the envisaged timescale is reasonable. What are your intentions with regards to these points?

The paragraph you mention is dealt with by the change in Scottish Government Policy allowing translocation of beavers outwith their current range, Beavers in Scotland (2015), the Scottish Beaver Strategy and the Beaver Mitigation Scheme.

We are following the engagement process as outlined in Beavers in Scotland - Conservation translocation guidance for applicants, consultees and interested parties

6.17 P.44 refers to monitoring post translocation. Please clarify your monitoring programme.

The primary monitoring will be undertaken by the Park Authority, partner agencies and organisations, and by members of the public submitting their sightings of beavers and their feeding and denning signs. Camera traps will be set up in and around the beaver lodges or burrows. This data gathering will determine breeding success and the development of new territories.

Through modelling and discussions with landowners and managers we are also identifying high-risk sites that need regular monitoring. Initially this is focussed around the release sites and will adapt to any spread of beaver range. Regular communication with the owners and managers of these high-risk sites will be the key to early intervention to avoid or minimise any beaver-related impacts.

Working with the Spey Fisheries Board we have identified potentially high-risk sites to Atlantic Salmon migration and spawning by overlaying redd data with Beaver

Damming Capacity modelling. After the initial translocation, any damming of spawning burns will be closely monitored in partnership with the Spey Fishery Board to identify if there are any impacts on the redds and adult fish migration. We will encourage research on beavers to be undertaken within the National Park.

7. Costed mitigations should include at least, in writing and reviewed annually:

7.1 Damage to existing trees
7.2 Damage to new plantations post translocation
7.3 Dam removal
7.4 Translocations
7.5 Loss of land value
7.6 Loss of land use
7.7 Land owner/manager management time
7.8 Responsibility for monitoring beaver activity and damage
7.9 Support and use of flow devices/monitoring
7.10 Exclusion fencing where necessary

The mitigation scheme that NatureScot are responsible for delivering nationally is detailed here. In partnership with NatureScot and others, The Park Authority will be dedicating staff resource to facilitating the successful delivery of the mitigation scheme within the Park.

The Park Authority would like to reiterate that we will be focusing staff resource to make this mitigation scheme work as smoothly as possible, through regular monitoring, good communication, timely site visits and undertaking licence applications for activities requiring them. Through the delivery of these actions, we aim to avoid or mitigate any unacceptable impacts that beavers have on landholdings.

8. We should investigate further Ali's points with reference to what has been put in place in Devon and paid benefits to landowners/managers as a result of accepting beavers.

The Park Authority highlighted the opportunity for support in achieving National Park Partnership Plan outcomes in the recent Agriculture Bill consultation.

Question from 26 August.

One thing I meant to ask was if the beavers will be electronically tagged so you can monitor their movements?

This may be useful to gain knowledge as to how quickly they move from one place to another or if they do at all.

Answer.

There are no plans to tag or monitor beavers individually.

The monitoring will focus on where beaver activity is happening, within or out with the release areas and where new territories are being set up (evidence of new lodges or burrows). This will follow the protocol that NatureScot has used for assessing the population size of beavers in the rest of Scotland.

Sightings of beaver signs and impacts will be monitored by beaver officer, conservation team, general public, land managers, rangers and volunteer rangers. The main thing is to monitor impacts, not just where they go. As already mentioned, the number of beavers in an area is a much less important a metric than the impacts that one or more beaver have.