

## **The Common Ground Forum on Sustainable Upland Deer Management**

August 2023

A new forum has been established comprising individuals and organisations from across Scotland's deer management sector who have been involved in a two-year project called "Finding the Common Ground". The group has committed to work together to look at how a more collaborative approach to deer management, based on mutual respect and consensus building, can contribute to a vision of a greener, healthier and economically vibrant future.

In 2021, the Scottish Government accepted the majority of the recommendations of the Deer Working Group report, which will lead to some changes in the way in which wild deer are managed, and further reduce deer numbers across Scotland. As the Scottish Government decides how these changes are to be made, it's important for people in the deer management sector to work constructively and respectfully together. This will help ensure that future changes will be beneficial for people, and that the continuing role of the deer management community in delivering Scotland's priorities of woodland expansion, carbon sequestration and habitat health is recognised.

The deer management sector has been characterised by low trust and conflict for decades, so during the Finding the Common Ground process, Centre for Good Relations, an independent not-for-profit company whose core work is civic mediation, has been working with a group of more than 100 people to help build better relationships and understanding between them. Participants included private landowners and managers, deer stalkers, the Scottish Government and statutory agencies, public landowners, environmental NGOs, the agricultural sector, foresters and community trusts.

The group came to a common understanding that while deer management has a key role in tackling the climate and biodiversity crises, any changes must support a healthy and vibrant rural economy. This is encapsulated in a vision that the group put together to describe what they would like the future to look like.

In the final workshop, participants also signed an accord committing themselves to abide by a shared set of principles about how they will communicate with each other, in order to set a standard for respectful behaviour throughout the sector. Where different views within the deer sector need to be discussed, the accord will facilitate constructive dialogue, both between deer management interests and with the Scottish Government, as they look to develop effective changes in policy and legislation.

The aim of the new Common Ground Forum is to continue to build trust and relationships as the sector deals with some likely contentious issues in what will be a time of change ahead.

It is now working together on a proposal for a future phase of work, building on the progress they have made, bringing people from different viewpoints together to work collaboratively on areas of common interest.