

Introduction

This short document is intended to summarise and outline planning for the management of the land parcel owned by the Arran Community Land Initiative (ACLI).

As a charitable organisation we need to balance our constituted purpose against the responsible stewardship of the land that we own. This draft document is intended as a 'starter for ten'; constructive input and comments are therefore encouraged. Note that it has been deliberately written without the use of any technical language; wherever possible photographs are included to explain what is described.

1) Legislation, Policy and Tenure

The Arran Community Land Initiative was established in March 2013 and is registered by the Scottish Office of the Charity Regulator (OSCR) as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). ACLI's charitable purposes are the advancement of outdoor education and recreation/sport. In 2014 ACLI purchased (with the aid of the Scottish Land Fund) a circa 80-acre portion of a former farm on the undulating hill land above Whiting Bay, Arran in order that the charity might advance its charitable mission.

2) Description

a) Location and Site Boundaries

The land extends to around 0.65km by 0.85km and rises from 60m to 130m; it is bounded to the west by an extensive Sitka plantation owned by Forestry and Land Scotland, to the north by Whiting Bay Golf Club, to the south a number of individual and privately owned fields largely let out for horse grazing; the principle point of access is from Golf Course Road which lies to the east between the landholding and the upper edge of Whiting Bay village.

b) Environmental Information

i) Physical

Meaningful farm activity, laterally limited to the topping of a small number of fields for silage, ended more than 20 years ago with several fields abandoned a decade before that. The result, clearly visible on the Google Earth based map, is a patchwork of fields many of which are reverting to a semi-natural state; original linear field boundaries can still be seen however much of the original fencing is dilapidated and hedging has been overgrown by gorse which is widely developed over the entire site. Several fields are actively used for horse grazing (fields 1 and 6) with other fenced fields (11 and 17) used intermittently. The land is transected by 4 steep sided water courses which run approximately NW->SE each of which are filled by dense scrub and trees. Soil cover is

generally thin overlying a thick layer of glacial clay; the soil is very acid (pH testing indicates a range between 5.4 and 6).

Aside natural watercourses the site has been drained in the past using a combination of field drains and field-margin ditches. These are all now filled and inoperable/ineffective. However, in practical terms, this presents an opportunity to locate water features and encourage water-loving species (plant and animal) into parts of the site that have become waterlogged thereby increasing the overall diversity of the site.

ii) Biological

a) Flora (habitats, communities)

The land parcel owned by ACLI supports a wide range of vegetation types including grassland, shrubland and woodland.

As would be expected, and notwithstanding the two-decade span since being actively farmed, much of the land consists of open space, formerly fields, which can loosely be described as 'grassland'. However, field cover includes variable amounts of rush (of various types) and a wide range (20+) of native flowers as well as multiple grass species. Field edges are in many places covered by bracken. (A field numbering scheme is



1. A largely grassy field with a stand of gorse in the background

presented in the attached map and a field summary in table 1.) In addition, the 4 fenced fields, being actively used for (mainly) horse and (some) sheep grazing are dominated by grass, some rush and bracken and virtually no native flowering species.

Scrub is developed in different locations across the site and most noticeably along field



margins, consisting mainly of gorse and bramble, concentrated at the base of former hedge lines. Along the SW margin of the site and in former fields abandoned more than 30 years ago, scrub has extended well beyond field margins and in places presents dense impenetrable cover over a wide area.

2. Open field with heavy rush growth and background gorse across the span of the photograph

Original trees are concentrated in three main habitats: close to and within the watercourses that crosscut the site, along field margins where they have originally been planted as hedges but also mixed with the shrub that is effectively 're-colonising' the SW margins.

Since taking custody of the land a significant number of young native broad leaf trees have been planted by ACLI volunteers primarily in locations with significant bracken cover between fields.

b) Species (i.e. important/protected species)

The site lies close to the Eastern Margin of an SSSI designated for the Hen Harrier which is regularly seen on site. Other bird species include buzzard, kestrel, sparrowhawk, barn owl, snipe, dunnoek, chaffinch, goldfinch, tree sparrow, great tit, blue tit, carrion crow, hooded crow, ravens, wood pigeon, pheasant, wren, mistle thrush, swallow and house martin. A bird-hide has been installed close to the most western margin of ACLI's land (field 15).

The whole site is grazed to a significant degree by Red Deer all the year round. Other mammals include voles, field mice, rabbits, brown hare, feral cats, mink, badgers and red squirrels.

c) Public Access

There are a number of points of access to the site: vehicles, although not encouraged, can gain access via two rough tracks from Golf Course Road; significant efforts have been made to make the wider site assessible to all with the construction of a track from the NE corner to the SW corner effectively bisecting the holding; from this, a range of paths have been cut allowing access to most fields; a bridge has been built to allow easy crossing into the holdings most-westerly field. Informal access from the land onto the logging track lying to the west of the holding is also possible in two places.

The site is visited regularly by a wide variety of users including walkers, runners, cyclists, horse-riders, orienteers, bird and wildlife spotters and school parties.

3) Options: Active Management, Minimal-Intervention and Non-Intervention

The land parcel being of reasonable size, extending over hilly and in places, steep terrain, and having been effectively abandoned over approximately 20 years, is made up of a broad range of open land, scrub, water course and wood. It is therefore important to be clear about what the management priorities are and why, because there is a lot to manage! To marshal/ration resources in a sensible way we have subdivided the land broadly in terms of the original field units as numbered in the attached map and identified three broad management options: non-intervention (NI), minimal-

intervention (MI) and active management (AM). As well as original fields we also apply this approach to field margins/former hedge lines and water courses.

4) Factors: Scrub, Non-Native and Protected Species/Habitats

We are fortunate that there would appear to be very little evidence of non-native species anywhere on ACLI land, notably Rhododendron and Japanese Knotweed both of which are widely developed elsewhere on Arran.

However, scrub-invasion is a serious issue over nearly all the land parcel primarily with a combination of gorse and brambles along most of the field margins and bracken which left unchecked has swamped significant amounts of former grassland. Gorse also appear as stand-alone patches within fields. Given our proximity to Glen Ashdale it is not surprising that we have a good number of ash trees most of which appear to be affected by ash 'die-back'.

Within all the watercourses and within fields 12 and 13 we have significant stands of mature hazelwood - described by Nature Scot and the Farm Advisory Service and others as 'Atlantic Hazelwood' - and consequently they are protected from *any* type of intervention.



2. Mature ('Atlantic') hazel wood - note the extensive moss and fern cover

5) Objectives

a) Guidelines

The intention is to deliver a management regime which is both sustainable and consistent with ACLI's charitable purpose. In simple terms the land should be looked at as a means to assist in the delivery of our recreational and educational aims.

An important factor when first purchased, was the land's perceived potential in the context of climate emergency; this has only increased in the intervening period and therefore considerations of carbon capture and fostering biodiversity remain at the forefront of all planning.

On the resource side, when first established, monies were available for expert advice and manpower to get things up and running. However, it was recognised early on that as a 'community initiative' moving to a model of greater self-reliance was required. A range of ideas were put forward as to how a measure of sustainable income could be achieved; these have been tested; we have also had the opportunity to get some experience of how to have volunteers contribute to, and benefit from, a range of land management tasks. Furthermore, we have had the opportunity to procure some equipment that helps on the practical side: small tractor with flail and other attachments, petrol driven sickle-bar scythe, brush-cutter, strimmers etc. In short, we need to plan the deployment of the resources we have in a sensible way that addresses *all* of our land.

We are now consolidating our collective experience and lessons learned to take forward something that will be informative and of potential interest to everyone. That means contributing to this planning document, as well as helping with the practical tasks that lie ahead, should you wish. (This does not rule out seeking specialist advice or expertise in the future but only doing so when we cannot draw from our own resource pool; the Land Initiative is an Arran-wide venture, and the island has a wealth of potential contributors.)

b) Management Activities

The land for the most part comprises an open landscape and it is intended that this remains the case.

- **Minimal Intervention**
Each former field has its own character reflected to a large degree by what is growing; this, for the most part, has happened naturally and with a very conspicuous and measurable increase in biodiversity represented by the wide diversity of flora. It is also interesting to note not just the difference between fields but also the significant variation within fields. Therefore, it seems broadly

appropriate to let this continue, letting nature do its own thing, with minimal intervention.

- Mowing**

There is a case for occasional mowing, done once a year, after ground bird nesting and wild plants have flowered i.e. mid-July onwards.
- Bracken control**

In many fields there is significant bracken coverage (note the conspicuous ginger colour of the previous year's bracken on the Google Map photograph taken in spring and before fresh re-growth), typically at the margins and this has the potential to smother everything that it covers. Active management is required and given the desire to avoid the use of chemicals the only course of action is to adopt mechanical intervention: flail, petrol scythe and strimmer depending on location and topography. This is best undertaken in late spring while the new growth is still soft and pulpy.
- Access maintenance**

Field access has been greatly assisted by the construction of a track over the site and the purchase of equipment that has allowed paths to be cut. Apart from a management responsibility to take regular stock of what we have, this affords the opportunity for all to walk, observe and enjoy a landscape bursting with increasing biodiversity. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given deer numbers, there is a high risk of contact with ticks and therefore the risk of exposure to *Lyme Disease*; cutting paths reduces the risk of brushing against tick-bearing vegetation. We note that now some paths are in place, they are kept open naturally and to a large degree by regular footfall. However, periodic cutting and especially through the spring and summer will be needed, as is the maintenance of track margins from spring until autumn. The risk of tick exposure will be explained on noticeboards and on our new website (under construction).
- Hedge Line Maintenance**

Former hedge lines over the whole site are heavily overgrown with gorse ('whins') which if left unchecked will continue to relentlessly expand. Stand-alone gorse bushes are also present in many fields. The latter require to be cut and removed as a priority. Dealing with the former is a large task which can only realistically be tackled on a systematic field-by-field/hedge-by-hedge basis over several years. Gorse cutting can take place at any time of year.



3. Typical overgrown hedge margin (some original hedge plants visible) heavily choked by gorse and brambles

- Tree Planting

The planting of native broad leaf species has taken place every winter since the land was purchased. This has typically been done in locations where bracken is the main ground cover. However, this does require a lot of work to knock back the bracken to prevent the young trees being smothered during their first 2-3 years in the ground. At the point that the young trees grow above bracken height they are less susceptible to being overwhelmed and as they continue to grow, they increasingly 'shade out' and therefore weaken the underlying bracken. Given the effort required through this between-the saplings-bracken-bashing phase, we now plan to weaken the bracken growth over at least a couple of seasons, before planting tree saplings. Tree planting is a winter activity; bracken weakening through mechanical means, is best done in the late spring/early summer.

Planting of hedge species such as hawthorn, blackthorn and rowan, when located on spaces cleared of gorse along field boundaries, will inhibit gorse regrowth, bolster existing original hedges and thereby build an interconnected network of wild-life corridors over the whole site. A winter task.



In some places it will be appropriate to site particular species e.g. alders in wet/poorly drained ground and hazel above and in proximity to existing watercourse-located hazel stands. Again, a winter task although in autumn some hazelnuts can be taken and grown on so that future planting is done from the same, established, stock. Note that we are advised by Nature Scot and our consultant from the Farm Advisory Service that hazel stands should be left as they are and not cut back or coppiced; a condition of our environmental grant from Rural Payments stipulates this.

4. A magnificent old hazel tree

6) Resources

Delivering Our Mission

Given ACLI's purpose around education and recreation, we want to provide the opportunity for anyone to join our planned work groups thereby taking part in group activity, developing new skills and deepening their engagement with the land and its upkeep. Having a written land management plan will help to provide meaningful structure and purpose to all participants.

Regular Volunteer Sessions

In the past we have run sessions once a month on a Saturday morning in order that people of all ages can assist. Tree planting has been popular with all including families with children of primary school age and upwards; bashing bracken seems to appeal to young people of secondary school age; these tasks are season specific. Other tasks and in particular, gorse management require adults; we have a number of individuals who know how to use a chain saw safely and therefore a work party consisting of cutters and handlers will allow us to tackle our well-developed gorse in a systematic and effective way; gorse cutting can be undertaken at any time of year.

Mechanical Aids

We now have a small tractor with flail as well as a petrol driven scythe. Both are effective for cutting paths, tidying track margins and cutting back bracken. However, the tractor (insured for anyone 14 or older) can only safely be used on flat, or near flat ground; the petrol scythe is versatile on a greater range of terrain but given its size cannot approach field scale tasks.

Financial Budgeting

Monies from the rent of fields for horse grazing together with the annual grants we receive from Rural Payments (Basic Farm Allowance and Environmental Grants) allow us to pay for public liability insurance (including volunteers) and tractor insurance, with enough left over to address the topping of grassland in at least some fields; we can tackle the smaller flatter fields with our own tractor but the larger fields over varying gradients need to be contracted out.

7) Actions

A summary of activity across the calendar is presented below in terms tasks required, month and who can assist.

Table of Activities vs Time of Year

Month vs Task	Tree Planting	Bracken Bashing	Bracken Cutting	Path Cutting	Field Topping	Gorse Management
January	ALL					AO
February	ALL					AO
March	ALL					AO
April						AO
May		All	AO	AO		AO
June		All	AO	AO		AO
July			AO	AO	AO/C	AO
August				AO	AO/C	AO
September				AO	AO/C	AO
October						AO
November						AO
December	ALL					AO

Tasks that can be undertaken by all ages = ALL

Adult only tasks = AO

Contractor Tasks = C

The land planning format used in this document has been adapted from (pages 6-11):

<https://www.welshwildlife.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Management-planning-guide-wtsww-October-2020.pdf>



6. Field margin now marked by mature beech trees which have largely prevented (shaded out) any gorse growth.

7. As well as being well developed along many field margins the gorse ('whins') also pop up as individual stands within fields



ACLI FIELD INVENTORY

Field	Size (Ha)	Descriptor	Vegetation Cover	Pedestrian Access	Vehicle Access	Tasks	Non-Intervn, Min Mgmt, Active Mgmt
1	1.05	Front Horse Field	Grass	Good	Good	Graze	AM
2	1.54	Upper Horse Field	Grass	Good	Good	Graze	AM
3	0.85	Small in-between field	Wild/wooded/ dense thicket	Perimeter only	Perimeter only	Leave	NI
4	0.34	Orchard Field above hub	Heavy bracken/ grass cover	Good	Unlikely	Feed and prune trees; cut grass	AM
5	1.23	Allotment/Hub/ Garden	Grass and rush	Good	Good	Feed and prune trees; cut grass	AM
6	0.41	Behind Farm Shed	Heavy bracken cover	Good	Possible	Potential future tree planting site	AM
7	0.84	Swing	Heavy bracken between saplings	Good	Unlikely	Bracken knock back	MM
8	1.29	Front of Bench	Steep, grass/ bracken cover at margins	Good	Possible	Cut bracken-potential tree planting site	AM
9	2.57	NW Corner Field	Mainly grass with heavily overgrown perimeters	Good	Possible	Top field annually and flail margins	MM
10	1.16	Ex-caravan field	Mainly grass with heavily overgrown perimeters	Good	Possible	Top field annually and flail margins	AM

ACLI FIELD INVENTORY

11	2.3	Lower Sheep/ Horse Field	Grass with margins overgrown by bramble, gorse and bracken	Good	Possible	Graze; remove whins	AM
12	1.97	Bounds Habitation/ Lower Glenashdale Track	Very heavily overgrown with significant tree/shrub growth in proximity to GA Track	Challenging	Impossible	Scrub Management' designation	NI
13	4.46	Middle Field bounding Glenashdale Track	Very heavily overgrown with significant tree/shrub growth in proximity to GA Track	Challenging	Impossible	Scrub management' designation	NI
14	3.12	Upper Field bounding Glenashdale Track/ Footpath steps	Grass with very extensive rush cover	Good	Possible	Remove whins	MM
15	2.32	Bird Hide Field	Grass with some rush, bracken and shrub	Good	Impossible	Scrub Management' designation	NI
16	2.3	Two Pond Field	Grass with very extensive rush cover	Good	Possible	Top field annually and remove whins	AM
17	1.69	Upper Sheep Field	Grass with margins overgrown by bramble, gorse and bracken	Good	Possible	Graze and flail margins	AM
Total Ha		29.44					

