Game Shooting on University Farms

A meeting of a review group considering current game shooting arrangements on University farms was held on Monday 21 October at 4.00 pm in Committee Room 1, Whiteknights House.

Present: Professor Mark Fellowes (Pro Vice Chancellor (Academic Planning & Resource)) [Chair]
[MEMBER OF STAFF from School of Biological Sciences]
[MEMBER OF STAFF from Head of School of Agriculture Policy & Development]
[MEMBER OF STAFF from Head of School of Agriculture Policy & Development]
[MEMBER OF STAFF] [Secretary]

19/01 Apologies

It was noted that apologies had been received from [MEMBER OF STAFF from School of Biological Sciences], who would be included in matters by circulation.

19/02 Remit of the group

The Group was reminded that the terms of reference were to consider the commercial game shooting held at Hall Farm, raised by the League Against Cruel Sports (LACS) in their letter to the Vice Chancellor of 4 September 2019. The LACS had requested that the practice of game shooting at Hall Farm, Shinfield, cease in February 2020, when the current syndicate agreement ended. This was a small commercial shoot, releasing a few hundred pheasants each year and generating an income to the University of £2,700 per annum as per the 2017 lease (exclusive of VAT, subject to review).

19/03 Documents submitted for consideration

The Group received the following documents circulated previously, including:

- The original email sent to the Vice Chancellor by LACS on 4 September 2019 regarding pheasant shooting on University land, and the Vice Chancellor’s response;
- A relevant extract and paper from the University Executive Board (UEB) meeting held on 23.9.19;
- Relevant legal documents for the agreement with the Hall Farm Shoot for the period 1 March 2015 to 29 February 2020 inclusive;
- A consultation response from LACS;
- A paper prepared for and on behalf of the Hall Farm Shoot syndicate;
- Written evidence submitted by the British Association for Shooting and Conservation, including an appendix reviewing LACS campaign statements on pheasant shooting on University of Reading land;
- A document by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust: ‘The environmental benefits that can be delivered on well managed lowland game shoots’;
- A formal submission from the Reading University Students’ Union (RUSU) President;
• An email to Council members from the Pro Vice Chancellor (Academic Planning and Resource), and responses to this;
• Examples of communications received from members of the public.

The Group reviewed the documentation and were grateful for the various contributions, several of which were substantial and well-considered. They noted the arguments made by the contributors. The Group noted that over 4000 emails, with the great majority calling for a halt to the practice, had been received from members of the public.

19/04 Discussion

The Group discussed the very minimal income generated for farm operations from these agreements. The risk of reputational damage was considered disproportionate to any financial benefit. Other factors suggested for consideration included the management of woodland and rough areas and other uses of land and noted that the University was reviewing its environmental and sustainability strategy. The Group took no position on the ethical or environmental issues raised, and noted the considerable disagreements between those who supported or opposed shooting. Instead, the group considered a) the commercial costs and benefits and b) the habitat management services provided by the shoot. The commercial benefits were very small. With regards the latter, the Group noted the University’s plans for increased habitat management as part of its sustainability agenda.

The Group noted that the Full Time RUSU Officers had confirmed their personal support for ceasing the practice of sport shooting on University farmland, although the position of the full student community could not be provided until a vote was held on 12 November 2019 (the student body will debate a motion to support the ending of the Hall Farm shoot). The student voice was considered to be an important further factor in the decision.

Following discussion, the Group concluded that any commercial agreements for the shooting of pheasants and partridges should not be renewed, given the minimal commercial benefits of the operation. It was confirmed that this recommendation would be taken to UEB for final decision.

Action: Pro Vice Chancellor (Academic Planning & Resource)

It was noted that the syndicate had requested security arrangements be considered for an upcoming shoot on Saturday 26 October 2019, prior to a decision being formally released. The Secretary was asked to contact the Security Services Manager and request that they liaise with the Head of School of Agriculture Policy & Development regarding this.

Action: Secretary

In addition, the Group made a recommendation that the Farms Board consider the wider implications of this decision for University Farms.

Action: Pro Vice Chancellor (Academic Planning & Resource)