

**EVALUATION OF THE
DEER INITIATIVE**

**Prepared for the Forestry
Commission (England), Forestry
Commission (Wales) and
Countryside Council for Wales**

**by
Land Use Consultants**

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14 Great George Street
Bristol BS1 1SRH
Tel: 01179 291 997
Fax: 01179 291 998
luc@bristol.landuse.co.uk

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Deer Initiative is a broad partnership of statutory, voluntary and private interests, established under the Deer Initiative Accord. Its overall aim is to "ensure the delivery of a sustainable, well-managed wild deer population in England and Wales". Partners include most of the main non-governmental organisations with an interest in land management, deer management and deer welfare, as well as land management agencies in England and Wales (Forestry Commission, English Nature, Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Countryside Council for Wales) and the Highways Agency. Government agencies provide most of the Deer Initiative's funding while other partners' contributions are mainly in-kind contributions, along with an annual subscription fee.
2. The Deer Initiative partnership, established in 1995, comprises a Council representing the partner organisations and an independent Chair. The Deer Initiative Ltd, established in 2000, is a charitable trust governed by a Board of Trustees drawn from the partner organisations. It employs five staff to deliver information, advice and assistance. Although the Deer Initiative has five regions within England it is presently represented by staff in only three of these. The Deer Initiative in Wales initially operated independently of that in England but the organisations are now integrated, with the overall Deer Initiative providing management and administration for the Wales Project Officer. Deer populations and associated impacts appear to be growing in both countries, although the evidence base is not comprehensive.
3. This evaluation was completed at the request of the funding partners under the following terms of reference:

To evaluate the Deer Initiative, established through the Deer Initiative Accord, against the objectives and assumptions in the Deer Initiative Development Strategy and Business Plan April 2000 – March 2005.

The Evaluation will:

- *Examine achievement against the ten objectives set out in the Deer Initiative Accord and incorporated into the Development Strategy and Business Plan as strategic objectives.*
- *Consider the cost effectiveness of achievement against objectives.*
- *Outline the extent to which sufficient momentum and financial sustainability have been secured.*
- *Evaluate the contribution made towards these objectives by all signatories to the Accord, through their own policies and activities.*
- *Include a distinct section addressing issues in a Welsh context.*
- *Make recommendations as to whether the Deer Initiative and Deer Initiative Trust Ltd should continue as the main co-ordination and delivery mechanism.*

- *Outline options for the future both in terms of the appropriateness and balance of objectives, and mechanisms for delivery.*
4. The evaluation process involved interviews with Deer Initiative partner organisations, Deer Initiative personnel, representatives of local deer management groups (DMGs) and some additional interviewees. Questionnaires were also circulated to all identifiable DMGs in England, none having been identified in Wales.
 5. The Deer Initiative Ltd's head office was initially based in Exeter, moving to Wrexham following a restructuring in late 2003. Initial delivery of outputs was slow, in part reflecting the need to devote resources to seeking sponsorships as was envisaged by the Business Plan. When such sponsorships proved unobtainable an alternative funding strategy was adopted based on continued core funding from Government agencies (mainly the Forestry Commission in England and Wales) and additional short term contracts.
 6. The Deer Initiative Ltd's overall effectiveness has been fair over the four year evaluation period, with evidence of a significant improvement in the six months to April 2004 (since restructuring). There is some evidence that landowners and managers are becoming engaged with the need for co-operative deer management but there is still a long way to go. The Deer Initiative partnership approach has been a success to the extent that it has caused groups with divergent interests to communicate, but it requires more commitment and support on behalf of the partners and perhaps stronger direction from the Chair to encourage compromise and joint action. Most major deer or land management organisations are partners in the Deer Initiative but some such as Defence Estates and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds do not belong and the National Farmers Union (England) has recently withdrawn from membership, which is of concern.
 7. The Deer Initiative Ltd's cost-effectiveness has been fair, as it has undertaken a creditable amount of activity with somewhat less funding than anticipated. Government funding has leveraged additional in-kind contributions from partners although these are difficult to quantify. Partners continue to make major contributions to achieving the principles of the Deer Accord through their own ongoing work
 8. At present the Deer Initiative Ltd is not financially sustainable, being reliant on short-term funding agreements with Government agencies and a limited number of other contracts.
 9. Due to the different nature of deer management issues in Wales, with relatively low populations currently, the emphasis of the approach has differed somewhat. In England the priority is to provide advice to and facilitate co-operative deer management among groups of adjoining landowners and managers, while in Wales the priority is currently research and general awareness-raising. Overall, the Deer Initiative Wales is in good health and benefits from being an integral part of the wider Deer Initiative. As it develops into facilitating local deer management, there will be an increased resource requirement over time.

CONCLUSIONS

10. There remains a need for an organisation such as the Deer Initiative, both as a partnership and as a delivery organisation, and it should remain in broadly the same form. However, funding and resources remain a major constraint on operations and in particular a greater staff resource needs to be applied to local deer liaison. The organisation cannot meet partner expectations at current resource levels. This could be addressed through the development of regional and local partnerships to provide local deer management liaison. In addition, steps should be taken to bring further partners on board and to engage partners fully in the Deer Initiative's work, while focusing the Deer Initiative Ltd's work on priority functions.
11. The following functions are suggested for the Deer Initiative, providing it with a somewhat narrower remit than currently.
 - DMG assistance and monitoring
 - Deer management information
 - Best practice
 - Public education
 - Partner co-ordination
 - Partner support
 - Advice to Government

RECOMMENDATIONS

(A) Recommendations on funding

- **Recommendation 1:** Government should, at minimum, continue to fund the core costs of the Deer Initiative for a further three years. Funding should be increased to ensure that full-time Deer Liaison Officers can be provided in at least the three current regions of England, as well as in Wales.
- **Recommendation 2:** Core funding should continue to be directed through the land management departments and agencies (Defra, Forestry Commission, English Nature and Countryside Council for Wales), reflecting the conservation, forestry and agricultural benefits of sustainable deer management. The balance of funding is currently heavily weighted towards the Forestry Commission (England and Wales) and this may need to be redressed.
- **Recommendation 3:** The Highways Agency should consider making a direct contribution to the core costs of the Deer Initiative over the same period in addition to its valuable funding of the Deer Collisions research. This would enable more resources to be directed to local deer management.

- **Recommendation 4:** Funding agencies should evaluate the Deer Initiative at the end of the three year period. If adequate progress has been made, including demonstrated reductions in deer impacts, funding should continue on a five year cycle with an interim evaluation at the mid-point of the cycle. If significant further progress has not been made funding agencies should consider alternative models for the delivery of sustainable deer management, including delivery through existing agencies or the separate statutory agency model.
- **Recommendation 5:** The Deer Initiative, with support from partners, should prepare a summary of the conservation, rural development and road safety benefits from effective deer management. This should be used as a basis for seeking regional and local contributions towards the costs of further Deer Liaison Officers.
- **Recommendation 6:** The Deer Initiative should investigate options for developing a standard charging regime for deer management advice provided to individual land owners and managers, and to DMGs after an initial two years of assistance.
- **Recommendation 7:** The Forestry Commission Wales and CCW should continue to fund Deer Initiative activity in Wales at the current level over the next three years, subject to evaluation at the end of the period.
- **Recommendation 8:** The Forestry Commission Wales and CCW should note the likely increased funding needs of the Deer Initiative in Wales over the coming five to ten years as deer populations increase and should investigate the possibility of local funding contributions in areas where deer are present.

(B) Recommendations on Deer Initiative activities, priorities and partner contributions

- **Recommendation 9:** The Deer Initiative Ltd's range of activities should be focused more clearly on priority tasks, as described in this report, and other activities should not be undertaken without formal approval from partners.
- **Recommendation 10:** Greater commitment should be obtained from Deer Initiative partners to work together in promoting the Deer Initiative to landowners, land managers, stalkers and the wider public and to develop consistent information resources for these groups. This will require the preparation of a formally agreed communications strategy with clearly allocated targets and roles.
- **Recommendation 11:** The Deer Initiative Ltd should consolidate its current resources in existing regions and geographic expansion should only be undertaken if additional funds can be accessed to support this. If resources allow expansion, the South West should be targeted as a priority area.
- **Recommendation 12:** Partner resources should be made better use of where possible, as is already happening to an extent with the Forestry Commission. Written agreements (memoranda of understanding) should be developed by the

Deer Initiative and its partners to ensure that responsibilities are clearly allocated. Possibilities for resource sharing such as co-location of offices with the Deer Initiative partners should be investigated.

- **Recommendation 13:** The next phase of the Deer Initiative should be promoted through the launch of the Strategy for Sustainable Management of Wild Deer (currently under development by Defra), and endorsed by Ministers. The publicity campaign should make clear who the key contacts for deer management are. A major focus of this promotion should be towards landowners, which will require the active support of organisations such as the NFU, CLA and FTA. The websites of partner organisations should also provide a consistent description of responsibilities and contact organisations.
- **Recommendation 14:** The Chair of the Deer Initiative should be charged with gaining greater recognition of the Deer Initiative by landowner and land manager groups and to ensure that all partners are fully engaged with the Deer Initiative. The Chair should also continue to encourage partner representatives to seek compromise solutions and take these back to their organisations for formal ratification.
- **Recommendation 15:** A specific effort should be made to re-establish an active relationship with the NFU (England) and develop a relationship with Defence Estates and other major landowners such as the RSPB.
- **Recommendation 16:** The Deer Initiative should be required to develop a new operational plan as a matter of urgency, including agreed performance targets, and should be required to report on progress again on a six-monthly basis. The operational plan should be reviewed annually.

I. CONTEXT FOR THIS EVALUATION

BACKGROUND TO THE DEER INITIATIVE

- 1.1. The Deer Initiative is a broad partnership of statutory, voluntary and private interests, whose aim and principles are set out in the Deer Initiative Accord (Appendix 1). The overall aim of the Deer Initiative is to "*ensure the delivery of a sustainable, well-managed wild deer population in England and Wales*". The fundamental reason for its existence is the increase in the population and range of the various deer species over time and the consequent (or expected) increase in impacts such as nature conservation, forest and agricultural damage and road traffic accidents.
- 1.2. The Deer Initiative was established as a partnership in 1995, and has grown to encompass most of the organisations in England and Wales which have a significant interest in deer management. By 1998 the concept of an independent, national Deer Initiative for England was accepted and endorsed by its member organisations. An independent Chairman was appointed in 1998 and, following the preparation of a Development Strategy and Business Plan in 1999¹, it was established as an independent charitable organisation (The Deer Initiative Ltd) in 2000.
- 1.3. The Deer Initiative Wales² was initially established in parallel with the Deer Initiative for England, with its own Project Officer. By agreement, the Deer Initiative Wales is now integrated within the overall Deer Initiative structure and receives administrative, management and technical support from it.
- 1.4. The overall Deer Initiative structure thus comprises the following elements:
 - The Deer Initiative Council which represents the Deer Initiative partner organisations and provides policy guidance to the Deer Initiative Ltd.
 - The Deer Initiative Ltd Board of Trustees, drawn from partner organisations.
 - The Deer Initiative Chairman, who chairs the Deer Initiative Council and Deer Initiative Ltd Board of Trustees.
 - The Deer Initiative Ltd, comprising central office staff (based in Wrexham) and regional staff in England and Wales. Of the five Deer Initiative regions in England (Figure 2.1), regional staff are currently present in only three, because of resource limitations, there being no staff in the Northern and South Western regions.
- 1.5. The Forestry Commission has been the main funding partner of the Deer Initiative in England, with substantial contributions also provided by English Nature, the Woodland Trust and the Highways Agency (the latter two contributions are tied to specific projects). Most other partners contribute a £1,000 annual subscription. **Table I.1** shows the original projected income and expenditure for the Deer

¹ The Deer Initiative Development Strategy and Business Plan, April 2000 – March 2005. Firm Crichton Roberts Ltd and John Clegg and Co, for the Deer Initiative. December 1999

² Also referred to as the Wales Deer Initiative.

Initiative in England, which was anticipated to rise to over £400,000 including in kind services for the years 2001/02, 2002/03 and 2003/04. These figures do not include the Deer Initiative Wales, which was initially established as a separate project and is funded at £45,000 p.a. plus provision of office facilities by the Forestry Commission and the Countryside Council for Wales under an agreement running until March 2005.

Table I.1. Projected income and expenditure of Deer Initiative (England)

(1999 prices; from Development Strategy and Business Plan 2000 – 2005).

	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004	2004/2005
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Income⁽¹⁾	298,112	375,950	409,700	411,950	415,200	416,450
Board Services (In Kind)	24,000	24,000	24,000	24,000	24,000	24,000
Sponsor Services (In Kind)	137,500	142,500	142,500	142,500	142,500	142,500
Membership Income	6,562	30,000	31,250	32,500	33,750	35,000
Contracts & Grants	4,150	124,500	156,000	156,000	198,000	198,000
Development Fund (Cash)	67,100	44,000	44,000	44,000	4,000	4,000
Other Revenue	8,800	10,950	11,950	12,950	12,950	12,950
Development (IPR)	50,000	-	-	-	-	-
Expenses	(262,722)	(373,332)	(403,212)	(404,349)	(407,849)	(411,350)
Board Services (In Kind)	(24,000)	(24,000)	(24,000)	(24,000)	(24,000)	(24,000)
Sponsor Services (In Kind)	(137,500)	(142,500)	(142,500)	(142,500)	(142,500)	(142,500)
Salaries, Bonuses, N Ins	(11,204)	(103,600)	(123,980)	(125,360)	(128,120)	(130,880)
Overheads	(29,538)	(94,772)	(104,972)	(105,079)	(105,819)	(106,560)
Other Revenue Costs	(6,480)	(7,410)	(7,410)	(7,410)	(7,410)	(7,410)
Development Costs	(4,000)	(1,050)	(350)	-	-	-
Development IPR	(50,000)	-	-	-	-	-
Net Profit	35,390	2,618	6,488	7,601	7,351	5,100
Note (1):						
Total Income In Kind	211,500	166,500	166,500	166,500	166,500	166,500
Total Income In Cash	86,612	209,450	243,200	245,450	248,700	249,950

- 1.6. Partners also contribute substantial in-kind resources to the enterprise such as through attendance at meetings, promotion of the Deer Initiative, provision of information and expertise, occasional joint publications and participation in joint projects and events.
- 1.7. Full partners in the Deer Initiative at the time of undertaking this evaluation are shown in **Table I.2**. Some additional organisations are associate members or have a regular involvement with and input to the Deer Initiative, such as Wildlife Trusts and National Parks in Wales.

Table 1.2 Deer Initiative Partners (at March 2004)

- The Forestry Commission (England)
- The Forestry Commission (Wales)
- English Nature
- Countryside Council for Wales
- Forest Enterprise
- Forestry and Timber Association (FTA)
- Country Land and Business Association (CLA)
- Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO)
- Highways Agency
- Defra
- The National Trust
- North West Association of Deer Management Groups
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA)
- National Farmers Union (NFU)
- The Game Conservancy Trust
- The Woodland Trust
- The British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC)
- The British Deer Society (BDS)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1.8. The current evaluation has been undertaken as a condition of the funding agreement between the Forestry Commission and the Deer Initiative. Government has also recently undertaken a wider public consultation on deer management in England³, the results of which should be considered alongside this evaluation of the Deer Initiative.

1.9. The terms of reference for the evaluation are as follows:

To evaluate the Deer Initiative, established through the Deer Initiative Accord, against the objectives and assumptions in the Deer Initiative Development Strategy and Business Plan April 2000 – March 2005.

The Evaluation will:

- *Examine achievement against the ten objectives set out in the Deer Initiative Accord and incorporated into the Development Strategy and Business Plan as strategic objectives.*
- *Consider the cost effectiveness of achievement against objectives.*
- *Outline the extent to which sufficient momentum and financial sustainability have been secured.*
- *Evaluate the contribution made towards these objectives by all signatories to the Accord, through their own policies and activities.*

³ Achieving the Sustainable Management of Wild Deer in England. A joint consultation by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Forestry Commission. January 2004.

- *Include a distinct section addressing issues in a Welsh context.*
- *Make recommendations as to whether the Deer Initiative and Deer Initiative Trust Ltd should continue as the main co-ordination and delivery mechanism.*
- *Outline options for the future both in terms of the appropriateness and balance of objectives, and mechanisms for delivery.*

2. METHODOLOGY

- 2.1. The research methodology included telephone and face to face consultations, written questionnaires and a review of relevant documents.
- 2.2. Consultations were undertaken with:
 - Representatives of deer management groups (DMGs).
 - Representatives of Deer Initiative partner organisations and a limited number of other organisations and individuals with knowledge of the Deer Initiative.
 - Deer Initiative management and staff.
- 2.3. Questionnaires and interview scripts for each group were developed and agreed with the Steering Group.
- 2.4. In addition to the consultations various documents and other information sources were reviewed including:
 - The Deer Initiative Development Strategy and Business Plan 2000-2005. Firm Crichton Roberts, 1999.
 - The Deer Initiative Annual Operating Plan April 2000-March 2001.
 - The Deer Initiative. Initial Progress Review. Firm Crichton Roberts, 2001.
 - The Deer Initiative Strategic Plan 2002-2004.
 - Proceedings of the Future for Deer Conference, March 2003. English Nature Report No. 548, 2003.
 - Current and Future Deer Management Options. Report on behalf of Defra European Wildlife Division. Defra, December 2003.
 - Future of the Deer Initiative (Draft). The Deer Initiative, March 2004.
 - Various other documents provided by the Deer Initiative and Deer Initiative Wales including financial statements, Deer Initiative Council minutes, funding agreements and progress reports.
- 2.5. Consultees for this research were specifically asked to comment separately on both the overall Deer Initiative partnership and the Deer Initiative Ltd as the delivery organisation. In practice, many found it difficult to make this distinction as they only had contact with one or the other body. The DMG respondents mainly commented on the Deer Initiative Ltd, as this was the aspect of the Deer Initiative that they were most familiar with. The Deer Initiative partner organisations were usually able to comment on both the Deer Initiative partnership and the Deer Initiative Ltd but some of the consultees had little direct experience of the Deer Initiative Ltd.

Deer Management Groups

- 2.6. Deer management groups (DMGs) are a core part of the Deer Initiative's philosophy of deer management. In general terms a DMG is a group of landowners and managers who agree a common deer management aim and where necessary, execute a deer management plan. DMGs may also include recreational and professional stalkers, Government agencies such as English Nature and Forest Enterprise and other interests such as local conservation groups. The Deer Initiative seeks to foster and assist DMGs as the primary means of achieving co-ordinated and sustainable deer management.
- 2.7. The DMG consultations sought to gain an understanding of the main deer management issues that existing groups were addressing, how they co-operated in their deer management activities, the types of assistance they had received from the Deer Initiative Ltd (where relevant) and their perceptions of the Deer Initiative's strengths and weaknesses.
- 2.8. Written questionnaires were sent in March 2004 to 47 DMGs that had been identified by the Deer Initiative Ltd (**Table 2.1**). These were sent to the chair or secretary of the group, either by email or post. An additional ten DMGs identified by the Deer Initiative Ltd were either not yet fully operational, had gone into recess or, in a few cases, could not be contacted. The questionnaires were followed up by telephone and email contact to encourage their completion. No DMG contact details were available for Wales.
- 2.9. In addition to those DMGs contacted, approximately 60 further local groups belonging to Defence Deer Management manage deer on 240,000 hectares of Defence Estate land across the UK. Defence Deer Management is a special interest group of the British Deer Society and its membership is largely restricted to current and former members of the armed forces. These groups are somewhat different to the DMGs promoted by the Deer Initiative as the land they operate on has a single owner (Defence Estates) and, therefore, they do not face the same challenges in achieving collective action although they may still need to co-operate with adjacent landowners. Defence Deer Management was contacted as part of this study but its local groups were not contacted directly.
- 2.10. Twenty-nine written responses were received from operational DMGs (a 62% response rate), of which three were received too late to be included in the full analysis. Of the remaining 26 groups, two considered that they could not complete most of the questions as the group was in the early stages of establishment, thus 24 substantive responses were analysed.
- 2.11. Twelve follow-up interviews were undertaken with DMG chairs or secretaries, ten in person and two by telephone. These were selected to be representative in terms of geographical spread, deer management issues and whether they had received assistance from the Deer Initiative. Difficulties in arranging suitable interview times, and the fact that not all respondents were willing to be interviewed, led to a slightly uneven distribution of interviews but all Deer Initiative regions were covered. One of the interviewed DMGs (Woolhope Dome) had not responded to the

questionnaire but was selected for interview because of its position near the Wales border.

Table 2.1 Deer management group consultations

Deer Initiative Region	Number of known DMGs	Questionnaires sent	Responses received	Interviews
Northern*	9	9	5	2
Central	16	14	9	5
Eastern	19	13	5	1
Southern	12	10	9	4
South West*	1	1	1	0
Total	57	47	29	12

* The Deer Initiative does not currently have staff in these regions

- 2.12. The distribution of respondent DMGs, and whether they had received some form of assistance from the Deer Initiative Ltd, is shown in **Figure 2.1**. Some other DMGs had received Deer Initiative assistance but did not respond to the consultation. **Figure 2.2** illustrates which respondent DMGs were established prior to the creation of the Deer Initiative Ltd in 2000, and which were established in year 2000 or later.

Deer Initiative personnel

- 2.13. The following Deer Initiative personnel were interviewed in March and April 2004:
- Chairman (in person)
 - Technical Director/Deer Liaison Officer Central Region (in person and by telephone)
 - Deer Liaison Officer Eastern Region (in person)
 - Deer Liaison Officer Southern Region (telephone)
 - Wales Project Development Officer (telephone).
- 2.14. These interviews sought to gain an understanding of how the Deer Initiative currently operates, how it has evolved since its establishment, its strengths and weaknesses, problems it has encountered, the staff members' own perceptions of how well the organisation has performed and views on how it could evolve in future.

Deer Initiative partners and other stakeholders

- 2.15. There was an initial research target of 15 telephone consultations with Deer Initiative partner organisations and other stakeholders in England and Wales. During the course of the research it became apparent that several additional organisations would need to be contacted. A total of 20 consultations were therefore undertaken in April and early May 2004. These were with representatives of 15 partners in the

Deer Initiative in England, some of whom also had knowledge of the Deer Initiative in Wales, four Welsh organisations and one other organisation outside the Deer Initiative (Defence Deer Management). The interview script was provided in advance of the interviews. A list of consultees is shown at **Appendix 2**.

- 2.16. The telephone interviews explored the respondent's perceptions of the performance of the Deer Initiative, its strengths and weaknesses, the problems it had encountered and views on its future role.

Figure 2.1 Respondent Deer Management Groups: involvement in consultation

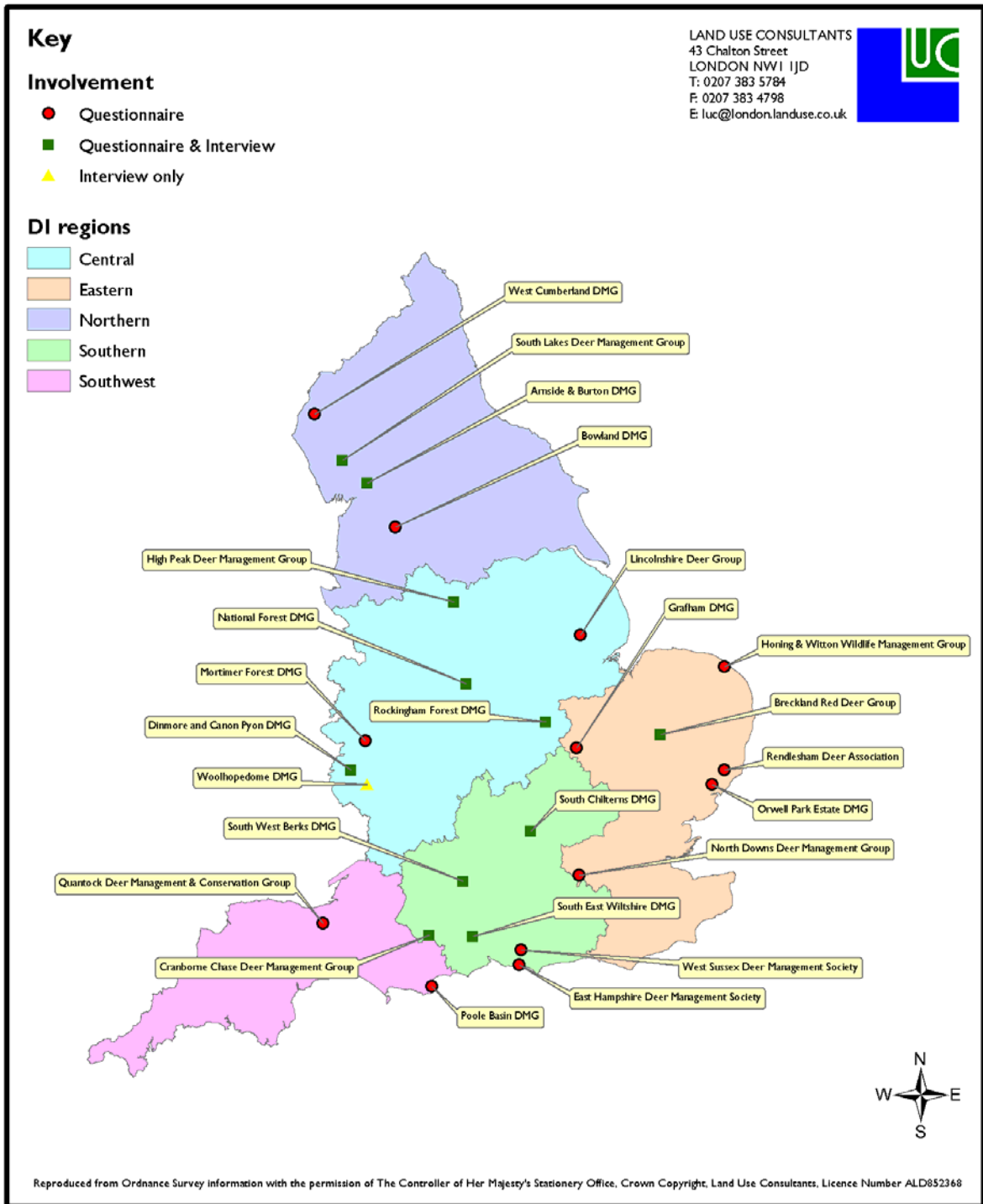
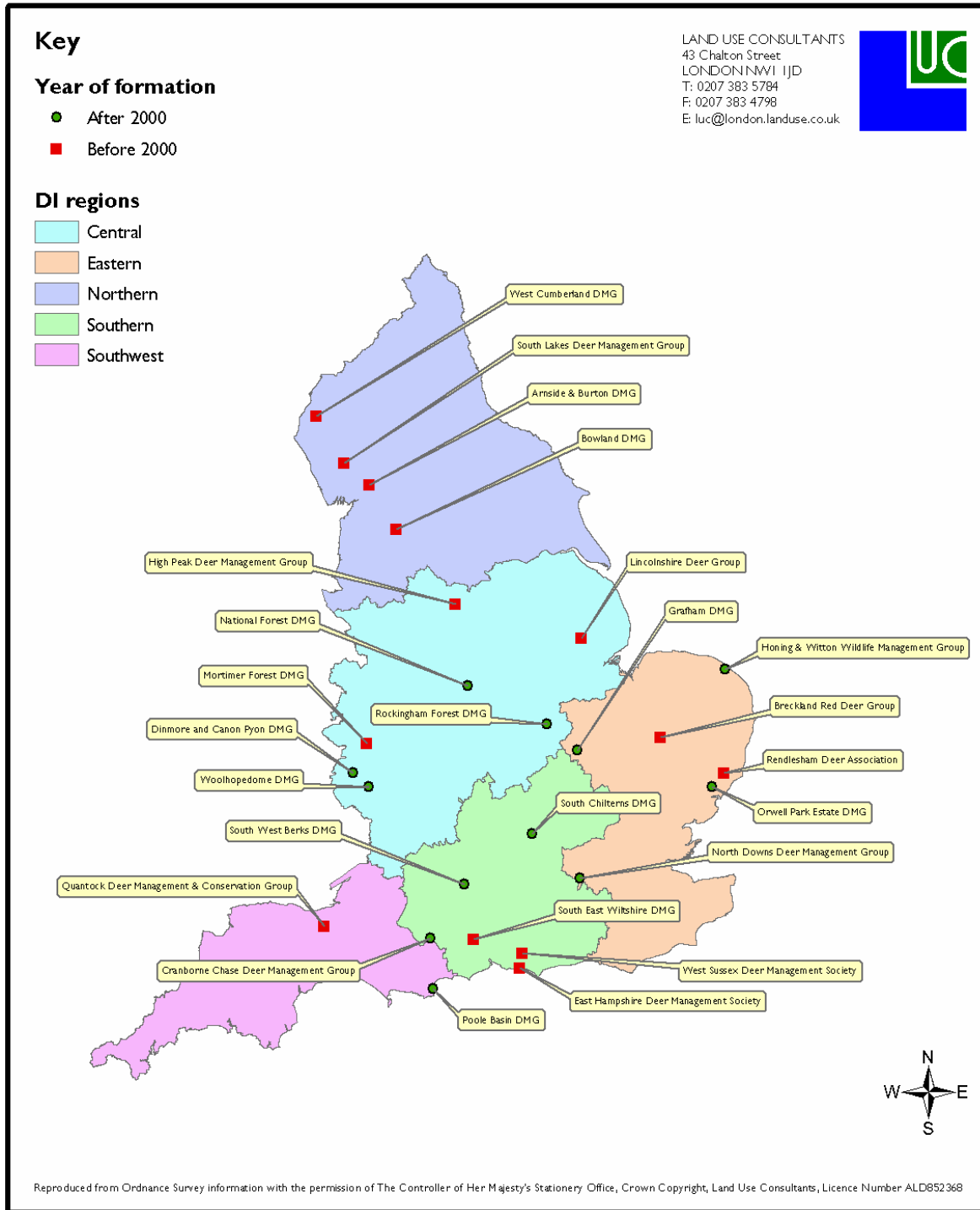


Figure 2.2 Respondent Deer Management Groups: year of formation (pre- or post-2000)



3. FINDINGS

DEER INITIATIVE ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

- 3.1. The main measurable Deer Initiative activities and outputs are listed in **Table 3.1**. These outputs were identified through Deer Initiative documents and discussions with Deer Initiative personnel and partners.
- 3.2. The activities listed are mainly those of the Deer Initiative Ltd, but Deer Initiative partner organisations also made significant contributions in many cases, and very few of the activities in Table 3.1 included no partner involvement at all.
- 3.3. Although a small organisation, Table 3.1 shows that the Deer Initiative has been active across a range of areas, with assistance from its partner organisations.
- 3.4. Little information is available on the ultimate outcomes from Deer Initiative activities, such as changes in deer populations, deer impacts and the public's knowledge and perceptions of deer management. This is understandable to some extent, as the information can be difficult and time consuming to obtain, and it would be difficult to attribute any changes to the activities of the Deer Initiative.
- 3.5. Some deer management groups are co-ordinating regular deer censuses in their local areas and/or measuring deer browsing impacts, often with Deer Initiative assistance, but this information is not currently collated for the purpose of showing regional or national trends. The Deer Initiative does not have ready access to a Geographic Information System, which would be a prerequisite for such monitoring and reporting, but an arrangement for use of a partner agency's GIS (e.g. Forestry Commission or English Nature) should be possible. Further impact monitoring is undertaken by the Forestry Commission/Forest Enterprise and English Nature on land which these agencies manage or have statutory responsibilities over.
- 3.6. Consultees noted other, less tangible outcomes from the Deer Initiative's activities, including improved communication between partner organisations and greater general awareness of deer issues among landowners, land managers and the wider public. These are covered in greater detail in the discussion of Deer Initiative personnel and partner responses.

Table 3.1 Main activities and outputs of the Deer Initiative (to April 2004)

<p>Deer population and damage assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contribution to BDS mapping of deer distribution, notably through activities of Wales Project Officer• Work with individual DMGs on local deer population census (including thermal imaging) and deer damage assessment
<p>Deer management groups and local liaison</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establishment of database of DMGs in England• Deer Liaison Officers in place in Central, Southern and Eastern regions of England and in Wales, and contract Deer Management advisor in Central region (total of approx. 0.5

<p>FTE each for three regions of England and 1.0 FTE in Wales)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assisted with establishment of approximately 23 DMGs in England since 2000, of which some are still in the early stages of formation • In contact with and providing some assistance to the majority of DMGs that were in existence before the Deer Initiative Ltd • Local deer awareness seminars for land managers, stalkers and other interested persons • Advice to individual land managers including preparation of deer management plans
<p>Research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deer Collisions research project with Highways Agency • Co-operation with English Nature on nature conservation damage research in England • Deer impacts research in Wales
<p>General communications and events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bi-annual Deer Initiative Council meetings • Future for Deer Conference 2003 • Workshop: The Future and Making the Most of Regionalisation and Partner Participation, 2003 • Annual Deer Initiative Wales seminars • Various deer awareness seminars for partner and non-partner organisations • Advice to Government on various issues, including foot and mouth disease • Promotion of the Deer Initiative at local shows and events • Establishment and maintenance of Deer Initiative website and input to other deer-related websites (e.g. Heartwoods) • Various media activities through print, television and radio, including partner organisations' journals.
<p>Publications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proceedings of the Future for Deer Conference (published by English Nature) • Advice notes on DMGs, high seats and culling deer out of season • Deer Management Plan template and guidance • Stalking code of practice (with BDS and BASC) • Wild Deer in Snowdonia public information leaflet (Wales) • Deer Management and the Law advice note (Wales) • Regional newsletters for DMGs and other interested persons in Central, Southern and Eastern regions (mainly in 2003/04) • Deer Initiative Wales newsletters (produced twice yearly in colour) • Occasional press releases and journal articles
<p>Other activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of a Research Working Group • Establishment of a Foot and Mouth Disease Working Group (now wound up) • Establishment of a Venison Marketing Working Group (not currently active) • Partnership project with Heartwoods in West Midlands

INFORMATION FROM DEER MANAGEMENT GROUPS

Results of questionnaires

- 3.7. Analysis of the English deer management group questionnaires showed that their size and membership profile varied widely. (As indicated earlier, no deer management groups are yet established in Wales). The smallest had three members, the largest about 150 and the median number of members was 20. Year of formation ranged from 1960 to 2003, with about half of the respondent DMGs formed after the Deer Initiative Ltd was created in early 2000 (**Table 3.2**).

Table 3.2 Year of formation of respondent deer management groups

Period	Number of respondent DMGs formed in period
1960-69	3
1970-79	4
1980-89	3
1990-99	3
2000-03	12

- 3.8. Membership was drawn from a broad spectrum, although there were variations between groups (**Figure 3.1**). Estate owners, farmers and woodland owners were the most numerous DMG members followed by recreational stalkers and professional deer managers and then by conservation groups. The relatively high proportion of landowner/land manager members is appropriate given that these were the groups targeted by the Deer Initiative and their involvement is essential for co-operative deer management across property boundaries. However, participation by estate owners is much higher than participation by farmers, even though there are many more farms in England and Wales than estates, which suggests there may be factors discouraging farmer participation in DMGs.
- 3.9. Half of the DMG respondents (12) considered that deer populations were sustainable in their area, and the other half considered that they were too high (**Figure 3.2**). A majority of DMG representatives in the northern and central regions considered that populations were sustainable, while a majority in the eastern and south west regions considered that populations were too high.
- 3.10. **Figure 3.3** shows the locations of the DMGs that reported receiving some form of Deer Initiative assistance.
- 3.11. The most common types of assistance received from the Deer Initiative Ltd were the provision of published information at DMG start-up (10), ongoing advice (10), advice at start-up (9) and general awareness-raising (9) (**Table 3.3**)

Figure 3.1 Membership of respondent deer management groups (by occupational category)

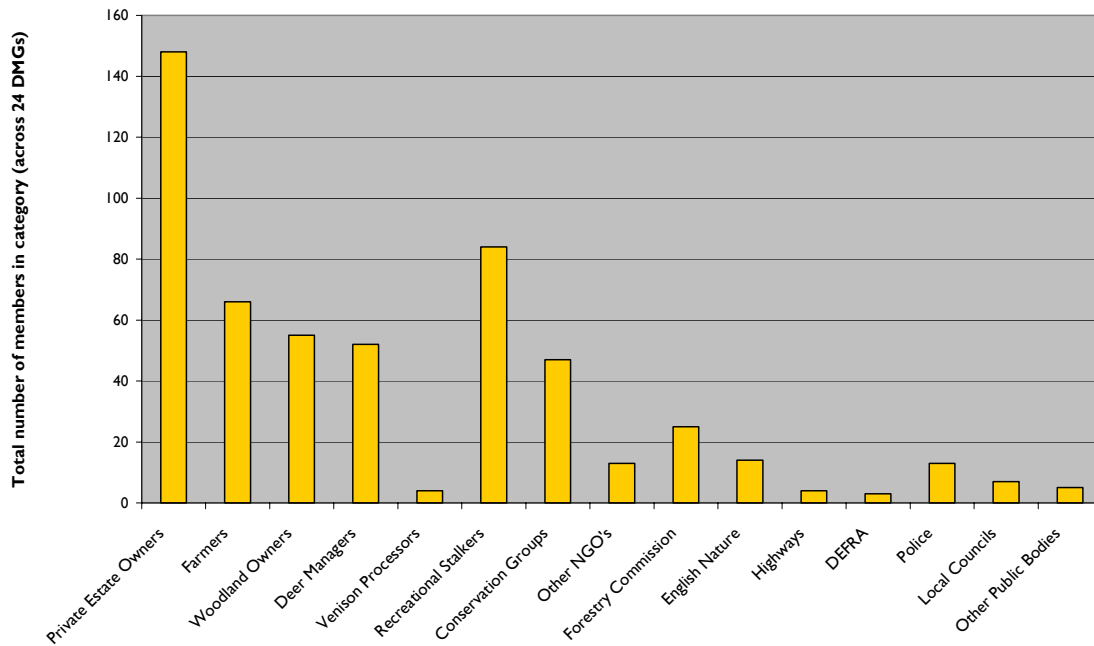


Table 3.3 Assistance from the Deer Initiative Ltd as reported by respondent deer management groups

Type of assistance	Number of DMGs assisted
Provision of published information at DMG start-up	10
Ongoing or occasional advice from Deer Initiative staff	10
Advice from Deer Initiative staff at DMG start-up	9
Raising awareness among land managers, stalkers or the public	9
Help with counting deer	6
Access to contacts e.g. with other DMGs or other organisations	6
Help with assessing deer damage	5
Access to training	5
Financial assistance at start-up	3
Ongoing or occasional financial assistance	1

Figure 3.2 Respondent deer management groups' views of deer population

(n = number of responses in each Deer Initiative region)

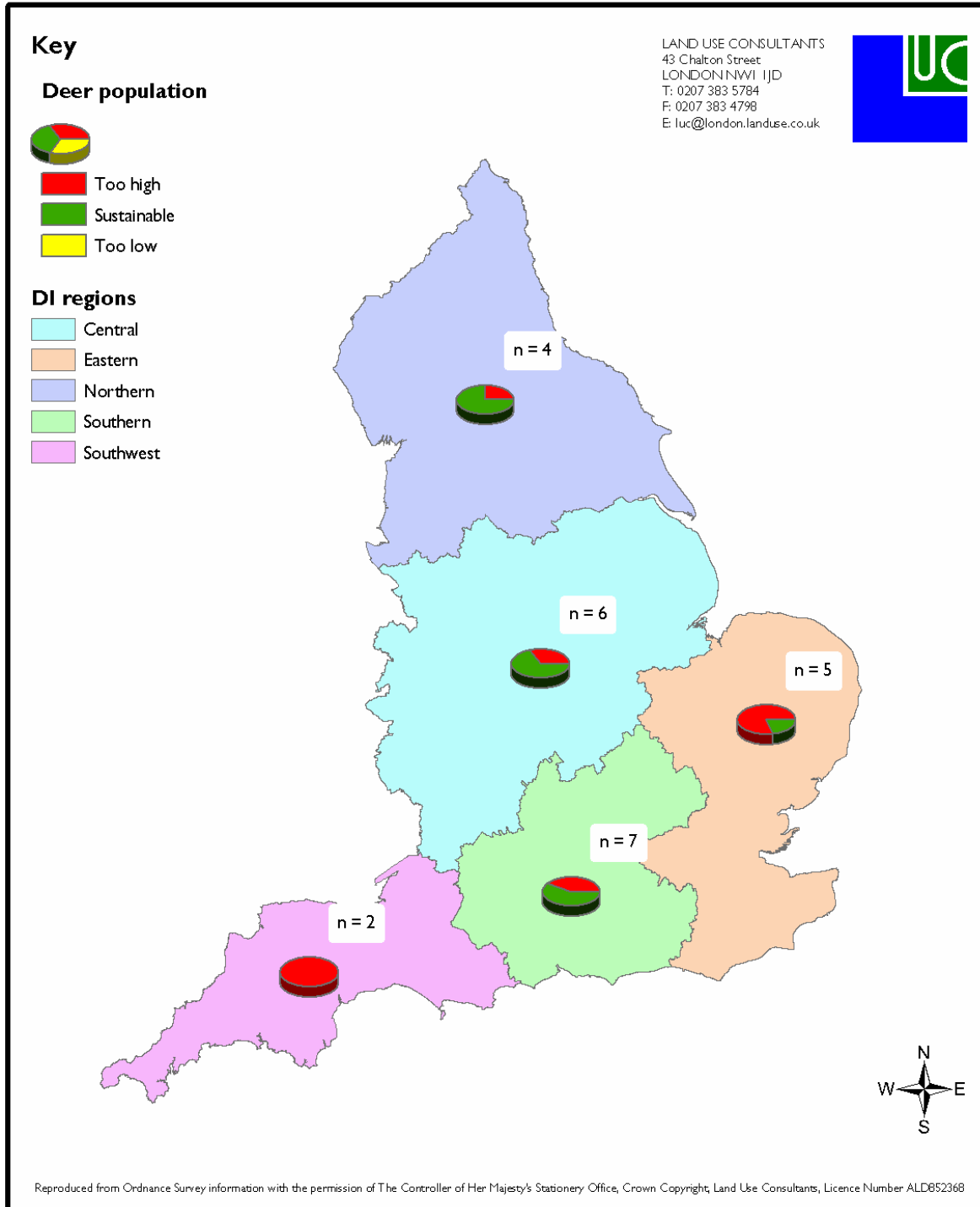
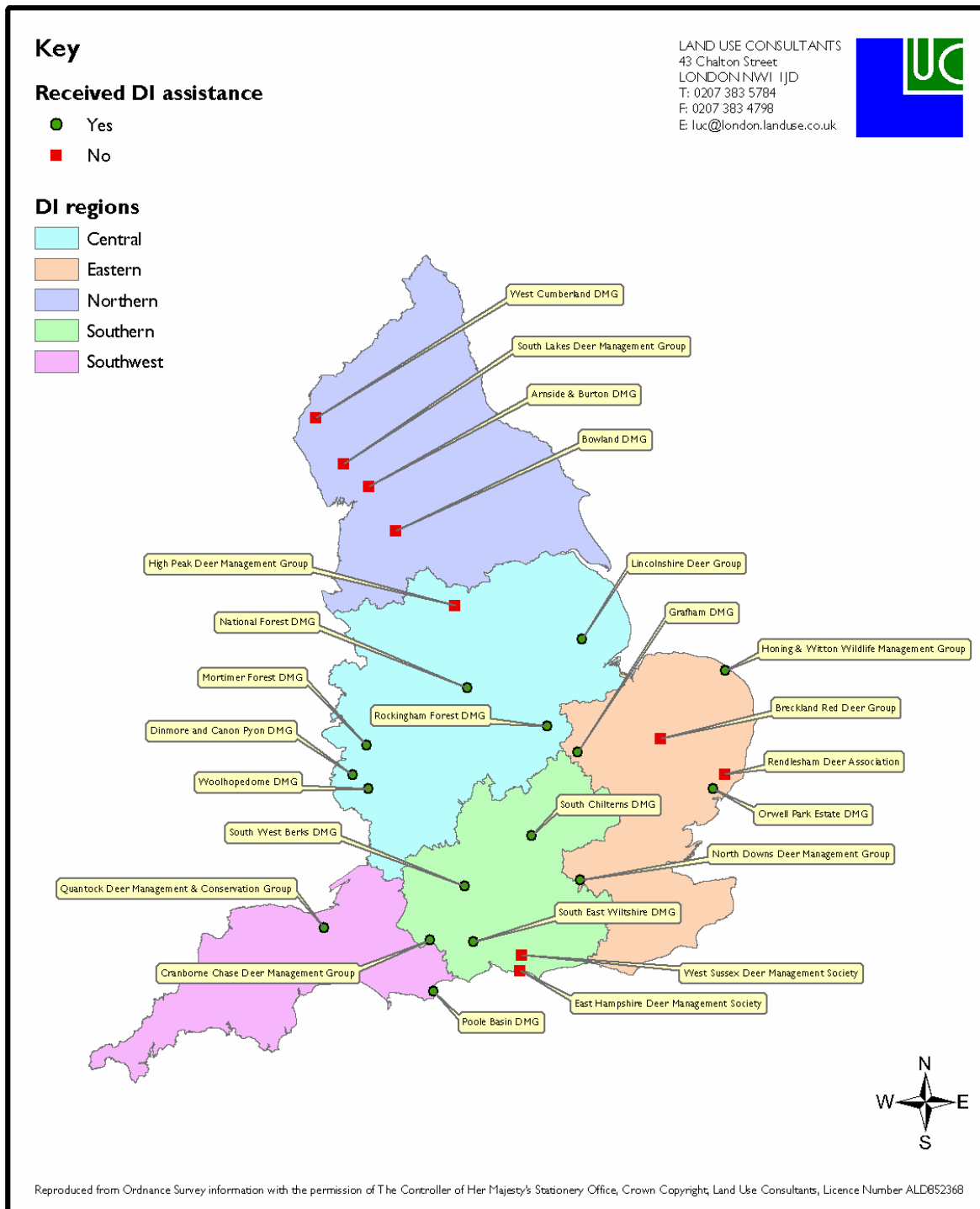


Figure 3.3 Assistance received from the Deer Initiative Ltd by respondent deer management groups

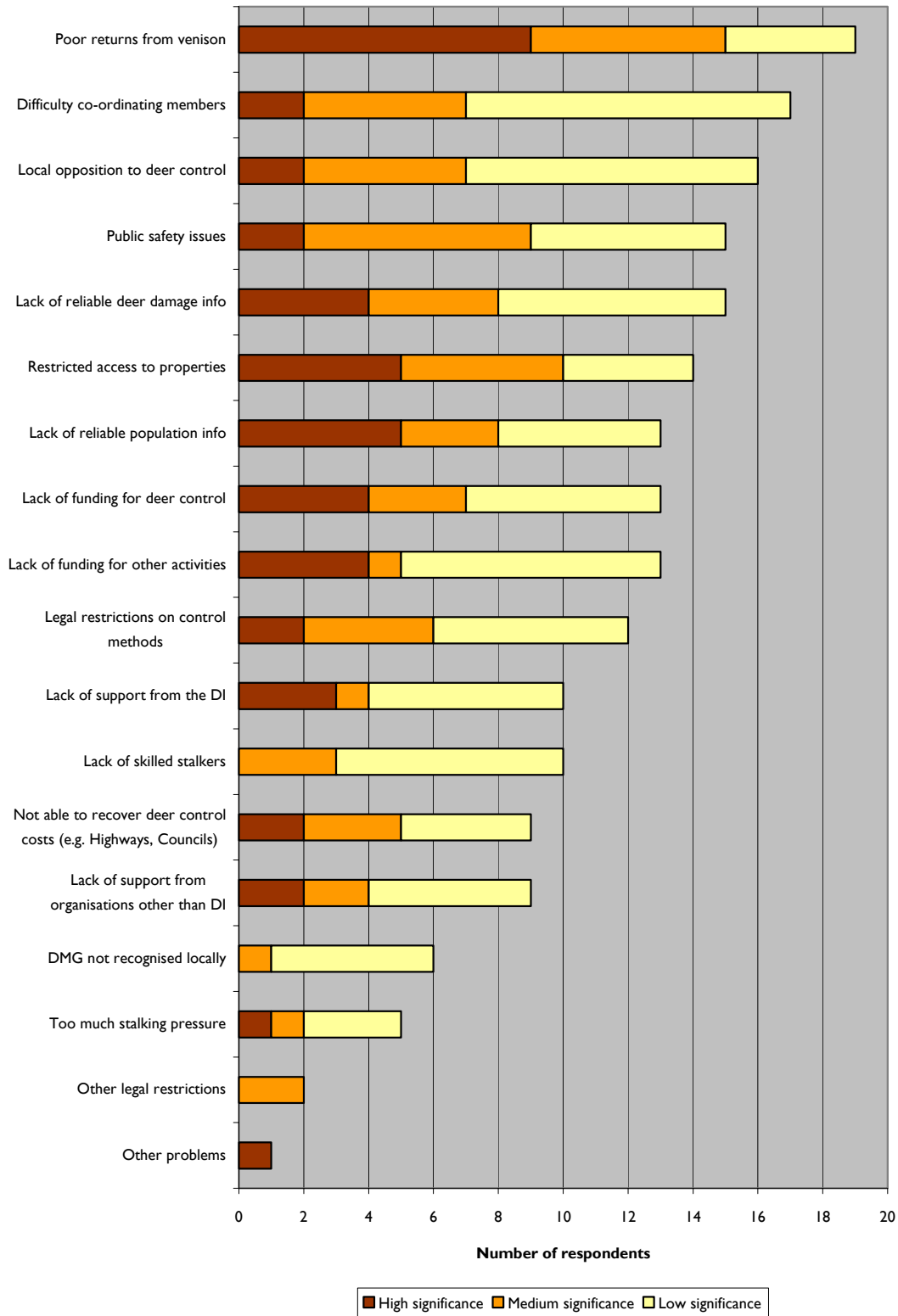


- 3.12. The most common problems affecting the ability of DMGs to manage deer are presented in **Figure 3.4** in order of their overall reported significance (high, medium and low significance combined). Those most often rated as high or medium significance by respondents were poor returns from venison (15 of 24 respondents), restricted access to properties (10), public safety issues (9), lack of reliable population information (8) and lack of reliable deer damage information (8). A range of other problems were reported by smaller numbers of DMGs. Only four DMGs considered that lack of support from the Deer Initiative or other organisations were problems of high or medium significance.

Results of interviews

- 3.13. Ten of the 12 DMG representatives interviewed had regular or occasional contact with the Deer Initiative Ltd. Two were located in the northern region where the Deer Initiative currently does not have staff and therefore they had had little or no direct contact with Deer Initiative staff. All of the comments reported below relate to the Deer Initiative Ltd rather than to the wider Deer Initiative partnership.
- 3.14. All DMG representatives were agreed on the principles of the Deer Accord and most wanted to see the Deer Initiative Ltd continue in some form. Comments included that it is “early days” for the Deer Initiative and “they need to have a good run at it”. The expertise and commitment of the staff were well respected and some consultees provided particularly strong endorsements.
- 3.15. Some of the well-established DMGs did not believe that they required assistance from the Deer Initiative Ltd. However, such groups tended to receive assistance from Forestry Commission (or Forest Enterprise) staff, acting as group secretary and providing other administrative and facilitation services. In many ways the Forestry Commission is performing the role of the Deer Initiative for such groups, particularly in the northern region.
- 3.16. Several consultees believed that deer were still a relatively small problem in landowners’ priorities, although the problem is increasing. Deer impacts were recognised, but landowners had more significant problems to deal with and did not have a great deal of motivation to attend DMG meetings or undertake deer census or control work. This was particularly so in view of current low prices for timber. Many of the groups, particularly those associated with the Forestry Commission, Forest Enterprise and English Nature, were motivated by a desire to reduce the ecological impacts of deer. This was linked to Woodland Grant Scheme payments being conditional on good silvicultural management, including deer control, providing a strong incentive to the landowner or manager. There were suggestions that deer management should also be required by agri-environment schemes, which are currently under review.

Figure 3.4 Deer management problems and barriers reported by respondent deer management groups (24 respondents)



- 3.17. Economic impacts of deer on agriculture and forestry were considered to be significant in localised areas depending on factors such as crop type (e.g. root crops such as carrots) and deer species (e.g. fallow are less desirable to stalk and often more damaging because of herding). This highlighted the need for a co-operative and flexible approach to control, with access to a network of skilled stalkers when required. Two respondents felt that the Deer Initiative was overstating the problem in some of its public statements about increasing deer numbers, as in many locations deer are not causing significant damage.
- 3.18. Landowner disinterest was felt to be a significant issue, with DMGs sometimes perceived as “talking shops” and the Deer Initiative not having effective carrots or sticks to encourage participation in deer management. One respondent described their DMG as “a popular church, it is well attended and everyone repents on Sunday, but for the rest of the week the congregation still sin”. Another commented that “everyone nods happily [during the meetings] but we don’t change”. It was also difficult to get land managers themselves to attend meetings, as they would often send staff to represent them.
- 3.19. Some negative views were expressed regarding the Deer Initiative. Two consultees commented that it was hard to justify a single issue land management organisation in the current climate of integration of rural delivery (the Haskins Review and design of an integrated agency), when there were other significant wildlife problems which had no dedicated organisation. One consultee considered that the Deer Initiative had a bias towards managing populations for stalking, rather than being solely focused on reducing deer numbers (particularly does) and resultant deer impacts. Finally, two consultees had expected more assistance from the Deer Initiative than was forthcoming, which disappointed them.
- 3.20. There was some concern over duplication of roles, with the BDS, BASC, Forestry Commission and others cited as providing similar services as the Deer Initiative Ltd, and often being the first organisations that landowners or stalkers would approach. However, strategic level networking such as contact with Government was seen as a particular strength of the Deer Initiative.
- 3.21. The Deer Commission for Scotland model, including statutory powers, was not supported by any of the consultees. Most of the consultees who commented on this point considered that landowners would strongly resent a body with power to intervene in their deer management, and that the more fragmented mosaic of land ownership in England, compared with Scotland, required a co-operative approach.
- 3.22. Overall it was felt that, for the Deer Initiative to be more effective, more staff on the ground (deer liaison officers) were needed, with a greater focus on facilitating practical deer management and interacting with local landowners and stalkers.

INFORMATION FROM DEER INITIATIVE PERSONNEL

Overall Deer Initiative

- 3.23. Deer Initiative management and staff felt that the Deer Initiative had made good progress in some areas but accepted that there were other areas where progress had

- been less than anticipated. They noted the difficulty in encouraging landowners, stalkers and others to co-operate and share information at a local level. The Deer Initiative is being asked to facilitate a cultural change in the way people interact, and this is inevitably a slow process, with Deer Liaison Officers having been on the ground for a relatively short period. The initial suspicion in some quarters has dissipated over time as people realise they will not be told how to manage their deer.
- 3.24. Management noted that there had been severe difficulties with resourcing and staffing interruptions, which had distracted the organisation's focus on the tasks at hand. Substantial time and resources had been invested pursuing sponsorship funds for a capital trust, as recommended in the original business plan, but this had been unproductive and the decision had been made to pursue an alternative model based on project-based funding. This in itself was seen as a time-consuming way of generating funds, and did not provide certainty over future funding.
 - 3.25. The Deer Initiative management has, over time, put together a highly creative package of funding streams which has enabled the Deer Initiative to achieve a measure of success despite operating with less than its anticipated budget.
 - 3.26. The restructuring of the Deer Initiative in late 2003 and the move of office from Exeter to Wrexham was viewed as a turning point for the Deer Initiative. However, it was regarded as still having barely enough resources to operate effectively despite efforts to reprioritise its work programme. At present the staff, Chair and some other Board members are contributing significant unpaid hours. This includes activities such as attendance at DMG evening meetings and undertaking night counts of deer using thermal imaging equipment.
 - 3.27. Other successes noted included the continuing dialogue among partners, the Future for Deer Conference in March 2003, the Deer Initiative's contribution during the foot and mouth disease outbreak, the ongoing Deer Collisions (road traffic accident) study with the Highways Agency and the workshop leading to the draft Future for the Deer Initiative document which was provided to this evaluation.
 - 3.28. In recent months a newsletter has been circulated by each Deer Liaison Officer in England to interested persons in their region. The information includes both national and regional events and developments.
 - 3.29. Deer Liaison Officers also emphasised the difficulty in getting DMGs to co-operate and share information, but recognised that this requires a long-term commitment which is beginning to bear fruit. Without long-term funding in place there was a danger that the Deer Initiative would be seen as "just another project". The Deer Liaison Officers highlighted the value of being able to offer small-scale financial support in the way of small grants for costs associated with meeting and administration expenses, to help facilitate DMG establishment. At present there is little or no scope for this due to budget constraints.
 - 3.30. A viable future for the overall Deer Initiative was seen to depend on a secure core funding stream, regional and local government engagement, an adequate Deer Liaison Officer resource on the ground and the development of a range of local partnerships with relevant deer interest groups and partner agencies.

Deer Initiative Wales

- 3.31. The Deer Initiative Wales operates differently to that in England, mainly because deer are largely a potential threat in most places rather than an existing major problem. The Project Officer's work mainly involves awareness raising and facilitating communication among those with an interest in deer, as well as undertaking deer damage research as the basis of a PhD project. A large number of organisations contribute to the Deer Initiative Wales's work and attend events. The Project Officer recorded contributions from 26 governmental and NGOs in 2003-04, and estimated the value of in-kind support at £6050, which appears to be a conservative estimate. Core funding is received from the Forestry Commission Wales (£35,000) and Countryside Council for Wales (£10,000), a total of £45,000 of which £10,000 is retained by the overall Deer Initiative to cover administration and management costs and the remainder funds the Wales Project Officer. This funding agreement runs until 31st March 2005.
- 3.32. The Deer Initiative Wales produces a newsletter in spring and autumn each year, with a print run of 2000, of which 500 are sent to a regular mailing list. The newsletter covers topical issues in a readable manner and is produced to a high standard (including colour photographs) in both English and Welsh.
- 3.33. The Project Officer has organised an annual Deer Initiative Wales conference for the past four years, with typical attendance of 40 or more people. Additional projects have included assisting Snowdonia National Park and (currently) Brecon Beacons National Park to develop strategies for deer management. Advice is also provided to the Welsh Assembly Government, and in the coming year work will begin on establishing deer management groups.
- 3.34. The current arrangement by which the Wales Project Officer relies on the overall Deer Initiative for administrative assistance works well, and there is strong co-operation across the border.
- 3.35. Overall, the Project Officer considered that the Deer Initiative Wales had been successful to date, and its main strengths lay in its independence, the resources available from partner organisations and its provision of landowner-focused advice. The main challenge faced continues to be encouraging people to realise that deer exist in Wales, and they will increasingly need to be managed in the future. The Project Officer noted that further staff resources, at least a part time officer, are likely to be required in future as deer populations in Wales and people's awareness of deer issues grow.

INFORMATION FROM DEER INITIATIVE PARTNERS

- 3.36. Deer Initiative partner representatives were generally able to comment on both the Deer Initiative as a partnership and the Deer Initiative Ltd as an organisation. Their responses were analysed to identify commonly recurring comments, and these are presented in **Tables 3.4 to 3.8**.
- 3.37. Most partners were familiar with the operation of the DI in either England or Wales, while a few were familiar with both. Responses from England and Wales are combined below, and additional comment is made on the views of Welsh partners at

the end of this section. With the exception of Table 3.4 (partners' overall assessment), only comments made by more than one partner are included in the Tables.

Overall assessment

- 3.38. Consultees were asked if the Deer Initiative had been successful overall (both as a delivery organisation and as a wider partnership under the Deer Accord). **Table 3.4** shows consultees were evenly divided between those who thought the Deer Initiative had been successful (6), those who felt it had had a measure of success given the financial and other constraints it had faced (6), and those who were not sure as they did not have enough information about whether there had been improvements to deer management on the ground (5). One consultee thought that the Deer Initiative had not been successful, and five did not express a view.
- 3.39. Comments highlighted the substantial tasks that the Deer Initiative had been set and the need to maintain a sustained effort over the long term. These included:
- “There is still a long way to go but it has been a worthwhile start”
- “Starting from scratch was always going to be slow”
- “It has come from nowhere and laid a foundation”
- “[The Deer Initiative] should be prepared to evolve, but the fundamentals are sound”.

Table 3.4 Partners' overall assessment of the Deer Initiative

Do you think the Deer Initiative and Deer Accord have been a successful approach for managing wild deer populations?	
Overall yes	6
Overall no	1
Some success, despite constraints	6
Difficult to tell whether successful on the ground	5
No clear view expressed	3

Deer Initiative partnership

- 3.40. The strengths and weaknesses of the Deer Initiative partnership and the Deer Initiative Ltd were assessed separately.
- 3.41. Its structure as a voluntary partnership of diverse organisations was considered the Deer Initiative partnership's greatest strength (11 responses) (**Table 3.5**). As one consultee noted, “people do talk to each other now, where they did not before.”
- 3.42. Other strengths cited were the expertise represented among the partners (6), concept or ethos as represented by the Deer Accord (5) and independence (5).
- 3.43. **Table 3.6** shows that the main weakness of the Deer Initiative was seen as differences of views and difficulty in reaching agreement (6 responses), with several

consultees expressing frustration about the slow process of reaching decisions through bi-annual Council meetings. One of the concerns was that those partners which are membership organisations appear unable or unwilling to adopt policies or actions which might be unpopular with their members.

- 3.44. Three consultees highlighted the lower than expected mobilisation of partner resources through the Deer Initiative, and felt that more could be done. Other concerns were also voiced by a minority of consultees, including the need to engage with additional partners. Defence Deer Management is not a Deer Initiative partner even though it has much expertise to offer and there is potential for collaboration in local deer management. Some partners also noted that it would be desirable for the RSPB, as a manager of large areas of high conservation value land, to be part of the Deer Initiative. In addition, and of some concern, the NFU (England) is not intending to renew its membership of the Deer Initiative for the 2004 financial year. This decision, according to a representative, was taken partly as the result of an internal reorganisation and reprioritisation and reflected the fact that the NFU was not seeing the outcomes it had hoped from the Deer Initiative, chief of which was a single point of deer management advice for its members through Deer Liaison Officers across the whole country.

Table 3.5 Deer Initiative partnership strengths

Main strengths and achievements of the Deer Initiative partnership and the Deer Accord	
Able to bring together a wide partnership	11
Expertise among partners	6
Overall concept/ethos	5
Independent/credible/unbiased	5
Communication with partners	2

Table 3.6 Deer Initiative partnership weaknesses and barriers

Main weaknesses/barriers of the Deer Initiative partnership and the Deer Accord	
Differences between partners/difficulties reaching agreement	6
Unable to mobilise partners and their resources enough	3
Majority of members have stalking/culling interests	2
Vested interests in the deer world (organisations and individuals) inhibiting progress	2
Conflicts between Deer Accord principles	2
Lack of strong direction/run by committee	2
Not enough partner commitment to developing solutions	2
Some potential partners missing	2

Deer Initiative Ltd

- 3.45. **Table 3.7** confirms that consultees were strongly supportive of the Deer Initiative's staff (7 responses) and of their ability to provide practical advice to support partners

- (7). This avoids the need for each partner organisation to employ their own deer specialist. The Deer Initiative was considered to have performed well in other areas such as advising Government and landowners during the FMD crisis (6) and general awareness raising (4). Relatively few consultees highlighted (unprompted) the promotion of DMGs as a major success, which must be of some concern given that this was intended to be a core function of the Deer Initiative. On the other hand, there has been an increased focus on developing DMGs since the Deer Initiative restructuring in late 2003, and perhaps not all partners were aware of this work.
- 3.46. Almost all consultees pointed to resource limitations as being the major weakness of the Deer Initiative (15 responses), followed by a low public profile (6) (**Table 3.8**). These two issues are linked, as resources have constrained the amount of promotion that is possible, while too much promotion may generate additional enquiries that would overstretch staff resources. Organisational priorities were seen by some to focus on survival (4), particularly through seeking additional short-term contracts or funding agreements. There were also concerns about a lack of clear focus on priority tasks (4), with a number of consultees believing that the Deer Initiative Ltd should have accepted earlier that it would not have the resources to fulfil its entire mandate, and redirected resources at a few key areas.

Table 3.7 Deer Initiative Ltd strengths

Main strengths and achievements of the Deer Initiative Ltd	
Staff (experienced, committed, credible)	7
Support for partners in developing their knowledge/providing practical advice	7
Foot and Mouth outbreak co-ordination and advice	6
Raising awareness of deer issues generally	4
Success in promoting DMGs (existing and new)	3
Deer Collisions research project	3
Organising training events for partners' staff	3
Having a local presence	2
Landscape scale approach to deer management	2
"Future for Deer" conference 2003	2

Table 3.8 Deer Initiative Ltd weaknesses and barriers

Main weaknesses/barriers of the Deer Initiative Ltd	
Finance and resource limitations	15
Low public profile/lack of acceptance by stakeholders	6
Focus on survival rather than on their goals	4
Lack of clear focus, trying to do everything	4
Lack of influence/levers (e.g. incentives)	3
Lack of incentive for landowners/managers to get involved (e.g. low venison and timber prices)	2
Lack of geographic coverage	2
Publicity by Deer Initiative unhelpful (early part of 2004)	2

Deer Initiative Wales

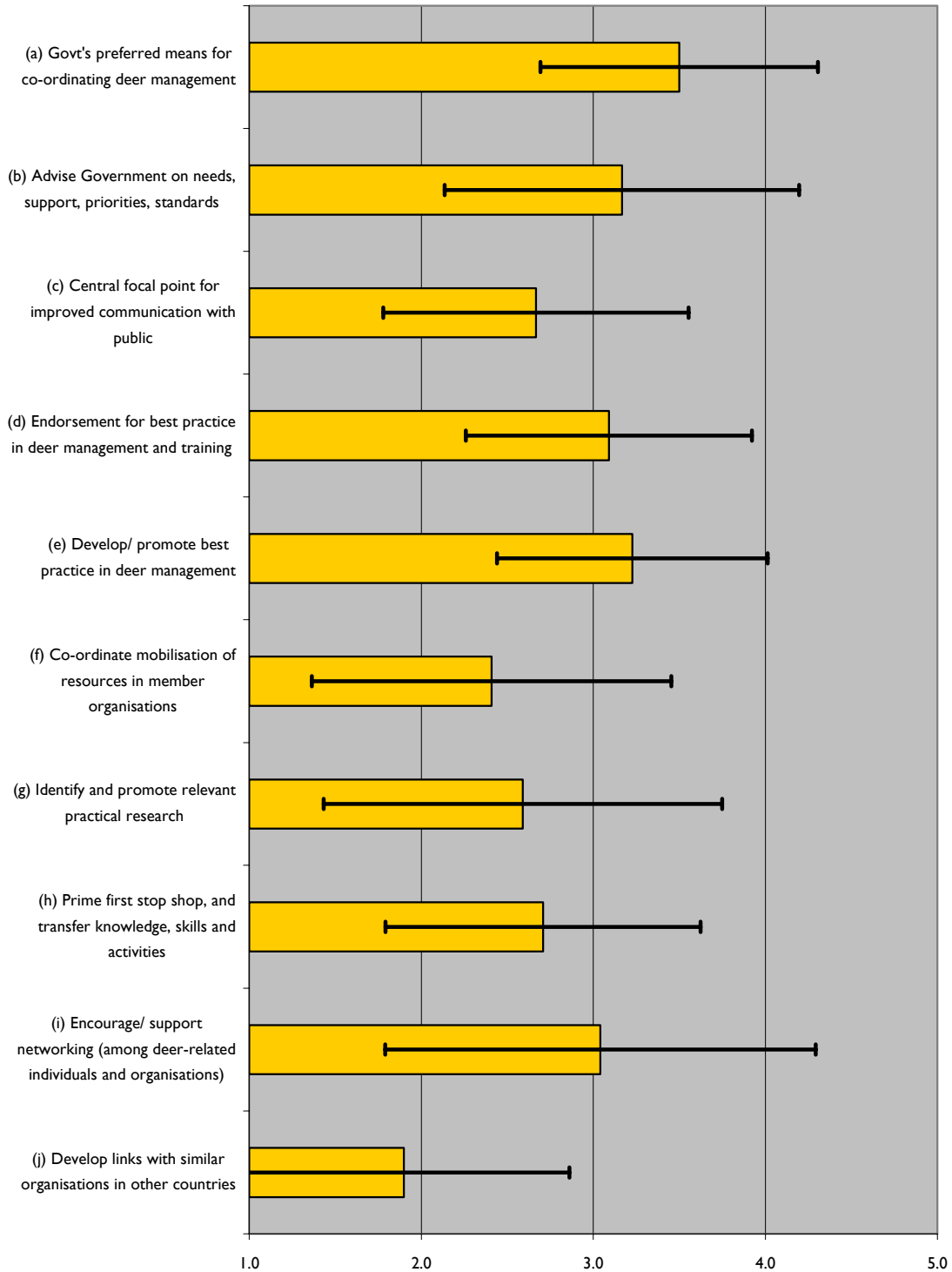
- 3.47. The responses received from consultees in Wales (which are incorporated in the above Tables) were particularly positive. These all considered that the Deer Initiative had been a success to date in Wales. The main strengths identified were the development of a partnership approach of interested organisations, the staff member's skills and enthusiasm, increased awareness of deer issues generally and the organisation of training events for partners' staff.
- 3.48. Weaknesses were seen to include finance and resource limitations, a lack of influence and a low public profile amongst stakeholders and a perceived vulnerability as a one-person organisation. With regard to the latter point, it should be noted that the Deer Initiative Wales is part of the wider Deer Initiative, and any change of staff should not generate long-term disruption other than the time taken for a new person to establish working relationships with organisations and individuals.
- 3.49. Thoughts on the future focused on continuing with the same basic approach, more communication with the public and stakeholders, training for partners, promoting local venison and encouraging landowners and managers to see deer as an asset in terms of stalking value. All consultees accepted that the deer population in Wales would continue to increase, and it would be necessary to adapt to this and accept them as part of the landscape. One consultee believed that venison promotion was realistic in Wales as current deer populations are so low that market saturation should not be problematic.

Achievement against objectives

- 3.50. Deer Initiative partner representatives were asked to rate the Deer Initiative Ltd's achievements against the ten objectives established for it in the Strategy and Business Plan 2000-05 and repeated in the Deer Accord. The objectives were primarily for the Deer Initiative organisation itself, although the Deer Accord states that partners are expected to support these objectives through their own activities.
- 3.51. The Deer Accord does not specify a timeframe within which the objectives should be achieved. The Deer Initiative Development Strategy and Business Plan 2000 – 2005, where the objectives were originally proposed, indicates that they are for the period to 2005, so they are being reviewed here approximately one year ahead of schedule. The objectives were not assigned different priorities in the Business Plan.
- 3.52. Partners were asked to score the Deer Initiative Ltd's performance on the following scale, and to make brief explanatory comments:
- 5 - very good; 4 – good; 3 – fair; 2 – poor; 1 - very poor.
- 3.53. Twelve respondents, representing 13 partners, were willing to do so, and their averaged scores are presented in **Figure 3.5**. For most of the objectives the scores were highly variable between partners, as indicated by the standard deviation shown on either side of the mean.

Figure 3.5 Average score by partners for achievement of objectives by Deer Initiative Ltd

(5 = very good; 1 = very poor. Standard deviation shown either side of mean.)



(a) Maintain the Deer Initiative's position as the Government's preferred means for co-ordinating the delivery of deer management throughout England and Wales

- 3.54. The Deer Initiative has done this well within the constraints of its resources, although a minority of respondents considered that it had not been able to achieve it. The various partners have made a major contribution to delivery of deer management but only the Deer Initiative has been in a position to co-ordinate the efforts of all.

(b) Advise Government on national needs, support and priorities for deer management and its appropriate standards

- 3.55. Again, the Deer Initiative has been largely successful against this objective. The Deer Initiative's advice to Government and others during the FMD outbreak was seen as a particular success.

(c) Act as a central focal point for improved communication with the public on all matters connected with wild deer and deer management

- 3.56. Most respondents felt that the Deer Initiative had achieved a fair standard against this objective, while others felt that the role of a central focal point for the public is beyond the resources of the Deer Initiative, and did not feel that it had been able to achieve this. There was some concern over delays in producing materials for public education and keeping the website updated and a perception that the Deer Initiative had not marketed itself enough to stakeholders and the wider public. It should be noted that over recent months significant additional effort has gone into promotion, with various press statements and media coverage involving Deer Initiative staff, and an upgrade of the website. Partner scores and comments may not fully reflect this.

(d) Seek to become the recognised endorsement for best practice in deer management and training

- 3.57. Many respondents were positive about the Deer Initiative's achievements in co-ordinating and endorsing best practice guidance and training, but those most closely involved with deer management and training tended to be the least satisfied with the Deer Initiative's efforts. In some cases best practice guidance notes (e.g. dispatch of injured deer) have been produced by partners without Deer Initiative endorsement, with reasons including the difficulty of getting all Deer Initiative partners to agree on their content. Deer Management Qualifications Ltd (which is chaired at present by the chair of the Deer Initiative) has become the national endorsement for stalker training, which has assisted the development of a consistent national approach and reduced the need for a central role for the Deer Initiative itself.

(e) Develop and promote best practice in all aspects of deer management

- 3.58. This objective is closely linked with the above, and was given a similar overall score.

(f) Co-ordinate the mobilisation of deer management resources in Deer Initiative member organisations

- 3.59. Respondents were least happy with this aspect of the Deer Initiative's performance, with six respondents scoring it as 2 (poor) or 1 (very poor). This is of concern as the Deer Initiative's original Business Plan envisaged it as a 'virtual organisation', which would rely heavily on its partners' resources for delivery of co-ordinated and sustainable deer management. On the other hand, a few respondents felt that the Deer Initiative had done as well as it could have given its resource constraints and the widely differing perspectives of the various partners.

(g) Identify and promote relevant practical research on wild deer and their management

- 3.60. Some respondents considered that this was not an appropriate role for the Deer Initiative, and a majority felt that it had received relatively little attention apart from the Deer Collisions project. Deer Initiative staff, on the other hand, pointed to work in deer damage assessment and deer counting through techniques such as thermal imaging, which perhaps not all partners were aware of.

(h) Become the prime 'first stop shop' for all matters connected with wild deer and their management, and transfer knowledge, skills and activities to other organisations

- 3.61. The concept of a 'first stop shop' was not universally agreed among respondents, with a number feeling that this is an over-ambitious goal. The Deer Initiative was, rather, seen as one of many information sources, with a particular role in advising landowners and the general public. For stalkers and deer management professionals, other organisations such as the BDS and BASC were considered the primary source of information. In terms of the transfer of knowledge, skills and activities, partner organisations without a deer specialisation found the Deer Initiative a very useful resource although specialist wildlife or stalking organisations tended to possess adequate expertise in-house.

(i) Encourage and support networking amongst landowners, stalkers, specialist and professional deer related organisations, government departments and agencies, local authorities, land managers, and environmental and animal welfare organisations

- 3.62. This was seen as a core task for the Deer Initiative. Many felt that it had done well, although others expressed disappointment at the lack of translation from discussions in DMGs to improved deer control on the ground, and also felt that more DMGs should have been established over the period of Deer Initiative's existence. This may have been somewhat unrealistic given the long timeframes required to build trust among diverse individuals before they are likely to start working together. In addition, the Deer Liaison Officer resource has been thin on the ground (1.5 FTE across the whole of England) due to a lower than anticipated operational budget for the Deer Initiative.

(j) Develop links with similar organisations in other countries and to thereby share experiences on effective communication messages and deer management methods.

- 3.63. Most respondents considered that this was not a high priority objective although others believed that the Deer Initiative could learn a lot from its European and Scottish counterparts. Overall, most felt that little effort had been made in this area (although some felt unable to answer) and Deer Initiative staff acknowledged that they had consciously given it lower priority.

Contributions from partners

- 3.64. Partner representatives were asked to summarise their financial and in kind contributions to the Deer Initiative. Most felt unable to give a clear answer to this question, other than an approximate number of days spent attending Deer Initiative Council meetings and the cost of the annual membership subscription. Of those who felt they could respond, examples include:
- £3000-£5000 per year including time, travel costs and hosting occasional meetings (an NGO)
 - “Cannot calculate as [Deer Initiative related activities] are intertwined with day to day work of the organisation, but would be very substantial” (an NGO)
 - 12 – 15 days per year for one staff member, 8 days for another, 3 – 4 days per year for staff member in Wales (an NGO, which contributes a Trustee as well as a Council member).
 - The Wales Project Officer estimated that £6,050 was contributed in kind by Wales partners in 2003-04.
- 3.65. It was clear from discussions that in-kind contributions have been substantial, and would average between 5 and 10 days per year for most partners and more for some, plus expenses. There are also significant but unquantified in kind contributions through access to partners’ staff and expertise, information resources, networks and services such as newsletters.
- 3.66. The Forestry Commission England surveyed its staff (including Forest Enterprise) in 2003 and found that, in one year, they spent 325 days dealing with over 2,000 deer related enquiries (about 1.5 full time equivalent staff, after leave, training etc. are deducted). 65% of this time was spent on enquiries from woodland owners and farmers and 20% on general public enquiries. Equivalent data were not available for Wales but it could be assumed that Wales staff also spend time giving advice, as do Defra and English Nature staff.
- 3.67. This could be viewed as an in-kind contribution to the Deer Initiative, and a very substantial one. Alternatively, it could be viewed as time which staff of public agencies could spend on other tasks if the Deer Initiative Ltd was fully operative across all of England and Wales and was recognised as the primary source of advice to landowners or managers and the public.

4. EVALUATION

- 4.1. Drawing on the results of the consultations and other evidence available, this chapter makes an overall evaluation of the Deer Initiative against the priorities set in the Business Plan and the criteria set out in the Terms of Reference for this evaluation (Chapter 1).
- 4.2. The 2000-2005 Business Plan for the Deer Initiative established ambitious targets. Expectations of the Deer Initiative among partner organisations were high, perhaps unrealistic, and some partners have expressed frustration about the slowness of change in terms of deer management on the ground. Nevertheless, the sum of Deer Initiative achievements (at least in terms of outputs, if not measured outcomes) has been significant considering its resource limitations.
- 4.3. The total income of the Deer Initiative Ltd (in England only) was projected to be £375,950 in 2000/01 (of which £166,500 was to be in kind and £209,450 in cash), rising to £415,200 in 2003/04 (of which £166,550 in kind and £248,700 in cash) (Table 1.1).
- 4.4. In the event the Deer Initiative has had to operate with significantly less cash funding. In 2002/03 cash income was £240,889. This included £45,000 tied to the Deer Initiative Wales, which was not included in the original England-only budgets, and £30,000 of Highways Agency funding tied to the Deer Collisions research project. The resources available to promote actual deer management and public understanding of the need for it, which is what most partners expected from the Deer Initiative, have been correspondingly less than anticipated. In addition, it is unlikely that the projected value of in-kind assistance (£166,500) has been received by the Deer Initiative, although it is difficult to value accurately. Taken together, these resource limitations have constrained the Deer Initiative's ability to deliver.
- 4.5. By way of comparison, the Deer Commission for Scotland's annual budget is over £1,000,000 per annum. Although the Commission has a range of functions that the Deer Initiative in England and Wales does not, the costs of the Deer Initiative to date have been modest for an organisation expected to have a national presence.

PERFORMANCE AGAINST BUSINESS PLAN PRIORITIES

- 4.6. The operational priorities for the period, as stated in the Business Plan, are listed below with brief comment on their achievement.
- 4.7. The Deer Initiative Ltd has achieved a fair standard of success against most of its business plan priorities and objectives. To the extent there has been underachievement in some areas this is somewhat mitigated by a necessary preoccupation with seeking funding. There has also been disruption due to staffing interruptions, including the change of Director in late 2003 and the move of the head office from Exeter to Wrexham. These problems were hard to absorb in a small organisation with no spare capacity.

- 4.8. The main criticism that could be raised is that the Deer Initiative did not accept earlier that it could not do all that was expected, and reduce its activity areas to a few key priorities through a process of partner agreement. In addition, a greater focus on monitoring of organisational performance could have been expected. In recent months the Deer Initiative appears to have emerged from a period of crisis into an organisation that is more sure of itself and that the great majority of partners and stakeholders would like to see continue and grow.

1. Establishment of the Company (the Deer Initiative Ltd)

The Deer Initiative Ltd was established successfully and has become recognised as a policy consultee by Government, although it is probably not yet recognised as the lead consultee. It is also well recognised as a source of deer management advice, but not the first stop shop for all. The Deer Initiative's advice has been of particular benefit to partner organisations that do not have specialist deer or wildlife advisors in-house. Overall, it has made reasonable progress towards this priority.

2. Securing funding to 2005

The Deer Initiative Ltd has secured enough funding to maintain a presence and a degree of influence. The Deer Initiative deserves great credit for developing creative solutions to its funding needs through partnerships, given that the original assumptions on availability of funding proved to be unrealistic.

3. Agreement on clear operating goals and targets

The Deer Initiative Ltd made a good start with its first operating plan (for the 2000/01 year) but has subsequently been unable to keep on track with the extensive work programme it set for itself. Recent decisions to reduce some activities and prioritise local deer liaison have been positive.

4. Development of the regional activities (deer liaison)

It took longer than expected to establish the Deer Liaison Officer network in England. The effective staff resource for local deer liaison is about 1.5 Full Time Employees across the three (out of five) regions of England, excluding time spent by the Eastern Deer Liaison Officer on the Deer Collisions project. The Deer Initiative Wales has continued to benefit from a dedicated Project Officer. Funding and difficulty finding appropriate persons have been the main constraints to increasing the network in England. However, the resource that is available is generally well appreciated by those consulted, the use of a contracted deer management advisor has recently been adopted with success (Heartwoods project) and the Technical Director advises that another such appointment is planned.

5. Preparation of an information portfolio

This priority has lagged and the anticipated "comprehensive, structured portfolio covering all aspects of deer management" has not eventuated on the whole. However, the Deer Initiative website has been operating since 2000 and provides a range of useful information. Again, resourcing has been the main issue. Several advice notes have been produced and in recent months there has been further

activity including the publication of a deer management plan template for landowners, accompanying guidance and a revamp of the website.

6. Achievement of financial sustainability.

The Deer Initiative Ltd cannot be said to have achieved financial sustainability, but it has secured its future in the short term through a range of contracts and has developed a promising strategy for future funding through drawing on regional partnerships. This should be allowed time to prove itself.

7. Introduction of performance and impact monitoring

Deer Initiative Ltd staff have put substantial work into monitoring deer populations and impacts in areas where DMGs are present, but this information does not appear to have been formally reported back to the partners. As noted in paragraph 3.5 the resources have not been available for establishing a national deer impact monitoring system and if this is to be a function of the Deer Initiative it will need access to information collected by Deer Management Groups, land management agencies and others. It is possible to envisage an internet-based system in which monitoring data are fed in by a range of outside stakeholders. In terms of the Deer Initiative monitoring its own performance, the changing priorities over time have made this difficult, and it does not appear to have been given adequate attention.

EFFECTIVENESS

- 4.9. Overall effectiveness has been fair over the four year evaluation period, with evidence of a significant improvement in the six months to April 2004 (since restructuring). The Deer Initiative partnership approach has been a success to the extent that it has caused groups with divergent interests to communicate, but it requires more commitment and support on behalf of the partners and perhaps stronger direction from the Chair to encourage compromise and joint action in areas such as public education and delivery of a consistent information package to landowners, land managers, stalkers and local partner organisations.
- 4.10. Like many attempts at intervention in land management issues, the Deer Initiative has had some difficulty in gaining the trust of landowners, who are the key to establishing effective co-operative deer management. It will need to be part of the scene for some time before it gains the full acceptance and trust of stakeholders. It is notable that the NFU (England) is no longer an active member. This should be addressed as a matter of priority, although the Deer Initiative may have to demonstrate further results on the ground before the NFU is willing to rejoin.

COST-EFFECTIVENESS

- 4.11. Overall cost-effectiveness has been fair, given the reduced funding for the Deer Initiative relative to that expected and the need to enter into contracts which tie funding to specific projects. The cash funding from Government agencies has enabled the Deer Initiative to access substantial in-kind contributions from partner organisations (see paragraph 3.64) which have added value to the public funds received.

- 4.12. In terms of deer management on the ground, the great bulk of the costs are borne by private and institutional landowners and to an extent by unpaid recreational stalkers. This is the more so given the lack of a strong venison market. The operational costs of the Deer Initiative Ltd could be considered as the visible tip of an iceberg, whereas the ongoing control costs met by the private sector are largely invisible.

MOMENTUM AND FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

- 4.13. The Deer Initiative at present neither has sufficient momentum as an organisation nor financial stability for the future, although recent changes have been made to improve its focus. If public funding were withdrawn at the present time the Deer Initiative would be unable to continue, as it has a relatively small income stream from other activities and members are unlikely to agree to a significant rise in subscriptions. Ultimately, many of the benefits deliverable by the Deer Initiative are benefits to wider society, such as improved conservation values and reduced traffic accident risk. To guarantee delivery of these benefits some proportion of public funding is likely to be necessary, but this needs to be spread fairly between the national, regional and local governmental organisations with an interest in achieving sustainable deer management.

CONTRIBUTION BY PARTNERS

- 4.14. The contribution of partners to the Deer Initiative has been variable but generally good. Most attend Council meetings regularly but there is a (perhaps not unexpected) degree of reluctance to compromise on their respective organisational views and goals in order to reach consensus. The Forestry Commission (England and Wales) and Forest Enterprise have made the greatest contributions overall, in both funding and supporting resources such as staff time.
- 4.15. Partners continue to make major contributions to achieving the principles of the Deer Accord through their own ongoing work. This includes provision of information to the public and promotion of training and best practice (by BDS and BASC in particular), keeping their members informed through newsletters and other methods, providing venues for meetings and a range of other contributions. Nevertheless, more co-operation between partner organisations should be possible. This is likely to require a renewed push by the Deer Initiative Chair to raise the profile of the Deer Initiative among senior management of partner organisations.

THE DEER INITIATIVE WALES

- 4.16. The funding agreement for the Deer Initiative Wales for the period April 2002 to March 2005 included the following objectives:
1. Assess & monitor the Wales wild deer population, their impact and examine future research and monitoring requirements
 2. Raise awareness of the public, policy makers and all land managers of the need for a co-ordinated approach to deer management through events and publications
 3. Exchange and disseminate information on the status of deer in Wales

4. Promote awareness of the types and extent of damage caused by deer in both woodland and adjacent farmland
 5. Identify environmental benefits associated with sound deer control
 6. Establish Deer Management Groups and encourage production of local deer strategies
 7. Promote and provide best practice training in deer management methods
 8. Evaluate the current extent and future potential economic damage caused by deer to agriculture and forestry
 9. Encourage local employment opportunities through deer management and through marketing venison
 10. Provide a forum for wild deer issues on Wales
- 4.17. These objectives are broadly similar to those established for the Deer Initiative overall and consultees were happy with the progress the Wales Deer Initiative has made. Some objectives have not received significant attention to date, notably the establishment of deer management groups and development of venison marketing, but further activity is planned in the current year.
- 4.18. The Deer Initiative Wales is regarded as effective by those with knowledge of it, and is well supported by partner organisations. Its role is largely awareness raising at present, but as deer numbers increase it is moving towards the co-ordination of deer management on the ground. It too must rely on grant funding from agencies, and several consultees expressed the wish for funding to be directly provided from the Assembly.
- 4.19. Although the Deer Initiative Wales is administered and supported as part of the wider Deer Initiative it has local meetings of partners and other stakeholder organisations, which ensures ownership of the Initiative in Wales.
- 4.20. Overall, the Deer Initiative Wales is in good health and benefits from being an integral part of the wider Deer Initiative. As it develops into facilitating local deer management, there will be an increased resource requirement over time, and it should look to local partnerships to support these where possible rather than being wholly reliant on central funding.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1. The clear message from the consultations was that there remains a need for an organisation such as the Deer Initiative, for the following reasons:
- The Deer Initiative Accord is accepted as a set of principles that all feel they can work within.
 - The Deer Initiative has had some major successes. It has established a presence at a number of levels – in providing advice to Government, in liaising with partner organisations and the deer management community, and in providing practical advice and assistance on the ground. The bringing together of diverse groups for a common purpose has been an achievement in itself. The integration of the Deer Initiative across England and Wales has been successful.
 - The Deer Initiative has only been in place in its present form for four years and appears to be gaining momentum after an initially slow start.
 - Deer populations and damage are expected to increase over time in the absence of intervention.
 - There is no other organisation or agency with a similar mandate and capability, although the Forestry Commission/Forest Enterprise comes closest.
 - Establishment of a statutory agency with powers to enforce deer management was almost universally opposed, and would be at odds with the primary need of deer management in England and Wales, which remains the facilitation of co-operative management of deer at a landscape scale over a mosaic of land tenure and management.
 - In the absence of the Deer Initiative or an equivalent organisation, many of the gains so far are likely to be lost, including the partnership, communication and, to an extent, co-ordination between diverse organisations with deer management interests.
- 5.2. However, there are also clear challenges that must be overcome for an organisation such as the Deer Initiative to be effective:
- Funding and resources remain a major constraint on operations and in particular a greater staff resource needs to be applied to local deer liaison. The organisation cannot meet partner expectations at current funding levels. It can provide a national repository of advice and best practice, but it cannot promote sustainable deer management in a practical sense to landowners and other deer managers across England and Wales without additional resources being applied. These resources could come in part from a reduction in other Deer Initiative activities but ultimately will require a degree of additional funding.

- If deer populations continue to increase over time (as expected) resource requirements will also increase further.
- The benefits of deer management are a mix of public and private benefits, and a balance needs to be struck between payment from national Government, local government and private beneficiaries. Funding is largely from national Government sources at present but this is at odds with the policy climate of devolution and local choice.
- There needs to be a mechanism for gradual disengagement of the Deer Initiative from well-established DMGs as the numbers of DMGs continue to grow, to prevent it being spread too thinly.
- The private sector is capable of delivering deer management advice and care must be taken to allow such enterprises to flourish rather than to centralise deer management advice in an organisation which receives public funding.
- The Deer Initiative, given its current and likely resourcing, needs to be realistic about the extent of general advice it can provide to the wider public and the degree to which it should attempt to be central to all aspects of deer management. Partner organisations have many times the Deer Initiative's staff and resources, and should be the first point of contact for most general enquiries, subject to an agreed allocation of roles and communication of these roles.
- A limited number of key potential partners are not fully engaged with the Deer Initiative for various reasons, notably the NFU (England), Defence Deer Management, the RSPB and some other major landowners.

Delivery and funding options

- 5.3. A range of options for funding and delivery of the Deer Initiative have been proposed or could be envisaged.
- 5.4. The option of maintaining the status quo unchanged is not likely to meet the overall expectations of the partners, although substantial progress has been made in recent months following a restructuring and reprioritisation process.
- 5.5. The initial proposal in the 2000-05 Business Plan of funding the core Deer Initiative through a perpetual capital trust (PCT) has been attempted and proved to be impractical. The amount of funding required was estimated in the Initial Progress Review (Firn Crichton Roberts, 2001) as being £8 million to generate £400,000 annually from a 5% return on investment. The donations required were simply not available. In addition, if the Deer Initiative became largely independent of external funding there is a danger that it would become less responsive to Government priorities, although it would still be accountable to its trustees.
- 5.6. The option of absorbing the Deer Initiative into a Government agency such as the Forestry Commission is considered inappropriate by most consultees. The rationale for a nominally independent Deer Initiative remains. For better or worse, many land managers are suspicious of direct Government intervention in their affairs and would prefer to seek advice from an independent source. In addition, central Government

acting alone is unlikely to fund the Deer Initiative to the level required to give effective national coverage. A future Deer Initiative should continue to work closely with agencies and share resources with them as much as possible, while still retaining its independence.

- 5.7. The **proposed approach** is to provide a further funding period for the Deer Initiative, which is still essentially in a pilot phase, to allow the benefits of the recent re-organisation to take hold. Providing this proves successful a longer-term funding core funding commitment is proposed, along with a spreading of funding and in-kind contributions more widely across the beneficiaries of sustainable deer management. The approach should include:
- Reducing the number of work areas to a manageable set focused on providing practical advice and assistance.
 - Fully exploring the options for regional and local funding for deer liaison officers and for cost recovery from clients over time
 - Requiring an improved performance reporting system
 - Encouraging partners in the strongest terms to fully commit to making the Deer Initiative work or risk losing it.
- 5.8. The model for the Deer Initiative presented in the Future of the Deer Initiative document (Draft, March 2004), which arose in part out of a workshop in 2003 of partners and related organisations, contains many elements in common with the approach presented here.

Functions and objectives

- 5.9. The following functions are suggested for the Deer Initiative, providing it with a somewhat narrower remit than currently:
1. **DMG assistance and monitoring**
 - Assisting existing DMGs to operate effectively and facilitating the establishment of new DMGs in high priority areas. This includes assistance with deer census and deer impact assessment and development of an initial deer management plan. Outside of the DMG context, direct assistance to individual landowners should be kept to a minimum, with a preference for redirecting such enquiries to private sector deer management advisors.
 - Monitoring the effectiveness of DMGs as a means of achieving sustainable deer management.
 2. **Deer management information:**
 - Providing basic information about deer management (first stop shop) primarily directed at landowners and land managers, including local government, who want to manage deer on their land or land they are responsible for.

- Holding deer awareness seminars in a standard format as used recently in the Eastern and Southern regions.
- Directing inquiries other than from landowners and land managers to partner organisations. This arrangement needs to be formalised by written agreement and highlighted on partner websites and other promotional materials.

3. **Best practice:**

- Developing and promoting best practice in deer management with partner organisations. The Deer Initiative should also liaise with partner organisations over training standards but should no longer seek to be the recognised endorsement for training as this is the role of Deer Management Qualifications Ltd, which the Deer Initiative was instrumental in establishing.

4. **Public education:**

- Developing public education materials about why deer need to be managed, how they are managed and who to contact for further information. This will require a combined approach by partners through a working group.
- Public relations awareness-raising about the Deer Initiative itself and the services it can provide, targeted at landowners and managers through partner communications with their members.

5. **Partner co-ordination:**

- Mobilising the resources of partners, through the Deer Initiative Council itself and through greater use of issue-based working groups. The latter should develop memorandums of understanding or similar agreements for formal approval by relevant partner organisations, to ensure buy-in by the latter.
- Working groups are likely to be required on best practice, signposting (directing enquiries to appropriate partners) and public education in the first instance.

6. **Partner support:**

- Providing information and advice to partner organisations where required, and vice versa.

7. **Advice to Government.**

- Providing policy advice to the relevant partner agencies in the first instance (Forestry Commission, English Nature, CCW, Defra and Highways Agency), and directly to Ministers only in the event that the consensus view of the Deer Initiative and that of the agency cannot be reconciled.

5.10. Some current work areas are not included in the above.

5.11. Venison market promotion may be appropriate in local cases, working with other organisations (such as Heartwoods) but development of wider venison market structures and quality assurance systems are most likely beyond the means and

- expertise of a small organisation. There is a conflict here in that DMG representatives rated the lack of strong venison markets as the most significant barrier they face in managing deer. There is a clear need for market development but the Deer Initiative's specialist expertise is practical deer management and it does not control the venison supply chain. While the Deer Initiative's involvement should not be ruled out, it is not necessarily the best organisation to develop venison market structures. Further research would be useful on options for market promotion.
- 5.12. Similarly, co-ordination of research is not an area where the Deer Initiative can have major influence so it should not be a key priority. Research programmes are the responsibility of other organisations (who are mostly Deer Initiative partners) and the Deer Initiative may have opportunities to advise, but its main focus should be local deer management.
- 5.13. Finally, the Deer Initiative has made a significant contribution to helping develop training programmes but there does not appear to be a strong need for this to continue to be a key priority given the existence of Deer Management Qualifications.

RECOMMENDATIONS

(A) Recommendations on funding

- **Recommendation 1:** Government should, at minimum, continue to fund the core costs of the Deer Initiative for a further three years. Funding should be increased to ensure that full-time Deer Liaison Officers can be provided in at least the three current regions of England, as well as in Wales.
- **Recommendation 2:** Core funding should continue to be directed through the land management departments and agencies (Defra, Forestry Commission, English Nature and Countryside Council for Wales), reflecting the conservation, forestry and agricultural benefits of sustainable deer management. The balance of funding is currently heavily weighted towards the Forestry Commission (England and Wales) and this may need to be redressed.
- **Recommendation 3:** The Highways Agency should consider making a direct contribution to the core costs of the Deer Initiative over the same period in addition to its valuable funding of the Deer Collisions research. This would enable more resources to be directed to local deer management.
- **Recommendation 4:** Funding agencies should evaluate the Deer Initiative at the end of the three year period. If adequate progress has been made, including demonstrated reductions in deer impacts, funding should continue on a five year cycle with an interim evaluation at the mid-point of the cycle. If significant further progress has not been made funding agencies should consider alternative models for the delivery of sustainable deer management, including delivery through existing agencies or the separate statutory agency model.
- **Recommendation 5:** The Deer Initiative, with support from partners, should prepare a summary of the conservation, rural development and road safety benefits from effective deer management. This should be used as a basis for

seeking regional and local contributions towards the costs of further Deer Liaison Officers.

- **Recommendation 6:** The Deer Initiative should investigate options for developing a standard charging regime for deer management advice provided to individual land owners and managers, and to DMGs after an initial two years of assistance.
- **Recommendation 7:** The Forestry Commission Wales and CCW should continue to fund Deer Initiative activity in Wales at the current level over the next three years, subject to evaluation at the end of the period.
- **Recommendation 8:** The Forestry Commission Wales and CCW should note the likely increased funding needs of the Deer Initiative in Wales over the coming five to ten years as deer populations increase and should investigate the possibility of local funding contributions in areas where deer are present.

(B) Recommendations on Deer Initiative activities, priorities and partner contributions

- **Recommendation 9:** The Deer Initiative's range of activities should be focused more clearly on priority tasks, as described in this report, and other activities should not be undertaken without formal approval from partners.
- **Recommendation 10:** Greater commitment should be obtained from Deer Initiative partners to work together in promoting the Deer Initiative to landowners, land managers, stalkers and the wider public and to develop consistent information resources for these groups. This will require the preparation of a formally agreed communications strategy with clearly allocated targets and roles.
- **Recommendation 11:** The Deer Initiative should consolidate its current resources in existing regions and geographic expansion should only be undertaken if additional funds can be accessed to support this. If resources allow expansion, the South West should be targeted as a priority area.
- **Recommendation 12:** Partner resources should be made better use of where possible, as is already happening to an extent with the Forestry Commission. Written agreements (memoranda of understanding) should be developed by the Deer Initiative and its partners to ensure that responsibilities are clearly allocated. Possibilities for resource sharing such as co-location of offices with the Deer Initiative partners should be investigated.
- **Recommendation 13:** The next phase of the Deer Initiative should be promoted through the launch of the Strategy for Sustainable Management of Wild Deer (currently under development by Defra), and endorsed by Ministers. The publicity campaign should make clear who the key contacts for deer management are. A major focus of this promotion should be towards landowners, which will require the active support of organisations such as the NFU, CLA and FTA. The

websites of partner organisations should also provide a consistent description of responsibilities and contact organisations.

- **Recommendation I4:** The Chair of the Deer Initiative should be charged with gaining greater recognition of the Deer Initiative by landowner and land manager groups and to ensure that all partners are fully engaged with the Deer Initiative. The Chair should also continue to encourage partner representatives to seek compromise solutions and take these back to their organisations for formal ratification.
- **Recommendation I5:** A specific effort should be made to re-establish an active relationship with the NFU (England) and develop a relationship with Defence Estates and other major landowners such as the RSPB.
- **Recommendation I6:** The Deer Initiative should be required to develop a new operational plan as a matter of urgency, including agreed performance targets, and should be required to report on progress again on a six-monthly basis. The operational plan should be reviewed annually.

APPENDIX I
The Deer Initiative Accord

The Deer Initiative Accord

The Deer Initiative Accord Principles

The aim of the Deer Initiative (DI) is **“to ensure the delivery of a sustainable, well managed wild deer population in England”**. The DI is a partnership comprising a wide range of statutory, private and voluntary organisations, and individuals with an interest in wild deer and their management.

Throughout the Accord the term ‘deer’ is used to describe the six species of deer commonly found in the wild in England; that is, Red (*Cervus elaphus*), Roe (*Capreolus capreolus*), Fallow (*Dama dama*), Sika (*Cervus nippon*), Muntjac (*Muntiacus reevesii*) and Chinese Water Deer (*Hydropotes inermis*).

The signatories to this Accord and other members of the DI recognise that wild deer, both native and introduced species, are an important part of England's natural resources and play a major role in the economy, environment and history of England. In addition they recognise that many individuals provide a significant contribution in many forms towards managing deer populations, either through their recreational or professional activities. They will endeavour to actively facilitate and support these efforts insofar as they are compatible with the policies of their own organisation, and so long as the principles outlined below are upheld.

Signatories to the Accord have agreed to the fundamental principles stated below and to encourage others likewise to make such a commitment as an integral part of their deer management approach and priorities.

Principles

□ A sustainable and balanced population of wild deer in England

We will work to ensure that populations of wild deer are in sustainable balance with the natural resources available to feed and shelter them throughout the year.

□ A humane, responsible and sensitive approach to the management of wild deer

We will work to prevent deer populations growing to exceed a sustainable balance with the environment and natural resources by planning the delivery of active deer management programmes, which will often include culling. Such management should always be undertaken legally and in a humane, responsible and sensitive manner.

□ An experienced and knowledgeable capability in deer management

Achievement of best-practice knowledge and skills is a pre-requisite of deer management. We will encourage and promote the development and delivery of accredited training for all those with deer management remits and interests.

□ An informed public understanding of wild deer management

The presence of deer in an area can add greatly to people's enjoyment but deer can also cause various problems. Their management may therefore pose a dilemma. Information needs to be provided to extend the understanding of the general public of the nature, role, contributions and

impact of wild deer populations throughout England. In educating the public about wild deer management, the benefits of planned and humanely carried out deer management may be explained. We will work to improve knowledge, and encourage and promote better public understanding as an integral and essential component of deer management.

❑ **A partnership approach to reducing the adverse environmental and economic impacts of deer**

The full benefits and objectives of the management of wild deer in England will require the active contribution to a nation-wide deer management programme by all public, private and voluntary organisations associated with wild deer populations. We will achieve this through the provision of financial, in-kind and operational support to The Deer Initiative and The Deer Initiative Limited (DI Ltd), and a commitment to the Accord objectives and principles.

Deer Initiative Ltd Objectives

The objects of the DI Ltd are ***“the advancement of education in the management of the wild deer population in England and benefit to the natural environment and the public through the development of strategies and best practice for its management.”*** It will execute this by supporting the Deer Initiative Council Members in their deer management activities and in their pursuit of the DI strategic priorities; promoting the principles of the Deer Accord; and contributing to enhanced deer management throughout England. Signatories will endeavour to support the objectives of DI Ltd, through the relevant policies and activities of their own organisation, in partnership with other signatories. The objectives are as follows:

- Maintain the DI's position as the Government's preferred means for co-ordinating the delivery of deer management throughout England
- Advise Government on national needs, support and priorities for deer management and its appropriate standards
- Act as a central focal point for improved communication with the public on all matters connected with wild deer and deer management
- Seek to become the recognised endorsement for best practice in deer management and training
- Develop and promote best practice in all aspects of deer management
- Co-ordinate the mobilisation of deer management resources in DI member organisations
- Identify and promote relevant practical research on wild deer and their management
- Become the prime 'first stop shop' for all matters connected with wild deer and their management, and transfer knowledge, skills and activities to other organisations
- Encourage and support networking amongst landowners, stalkers, specialist and professional deer related organisations, government departments and agencies, local authorities, land managers, and environmental and animal welfare organisations
- Develop links with similar organisations in other countries and to thereby share experiences on effective communication messages and deer management methods.

APPENDIX 2
List of consultees

Deer Initiative Partners and other organisations

Forestry Commission (England)
Forestry Commission (Wales)
Forest Enterprise
Forestry and Timber Association (FTA)
Country Land and Business Association (CLA)
Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO)
English Nature
Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)
Highways Agency
Defra European Wildlife Division
Defra Rural Development Service
Welsh Assembly Government (EPC)
National Trust
North West Association of Deer Management Groups
Royal Society for the Protection of Animals (RSPCA)
National Farmers Union (England)
Game Conservancy Trust (GCT)
Woodland Trust
British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC)
British Deer Society (BDS)
Coed Cymru
Defence Deer Management

The Deer Initiative

Chairman
Technical Director/Deer Liaison Officer Central Region
Deer Liaison Officer Eastern Region
Deer Liaison Officer Southern Region
Wales Project Development Officer

Deer Management Groups

27 groups by questionnaire
12 groups by interview

