

Coillte questioned on Dartrey deer culling policy

CALL FOR 40MPH COOTEHILL TO ROC-KCORY SPEED LIMIT

CONCERNS about the level of deer culling in Dartrey were raised at Monday night's meeting in Cootehill in which Coillte met with members of the public on the issue of proposals to fell an number of historic oak trees.

Save the Oaks Committee Chairperson David Forster wanted to know when the shooting of deer in the forest was going to be stopped. He said it was now rare to see even one deer while walking the woods. Mr Forster knew there were concerns about deers causing a hazard to traffic, but said many of the accidents were being caused by drivers who could just as easily kill human beings on the side of the road.

By **MICHAEL McDONNELL**

Coillte District Manager PJ Fitzpatrick pointed out that he had received numerous corn blains from the public about the dangers being posed by deer straying on the Cootehill to Rockcorry road. A lot of accidents involving deer had already taken place, and he was afraid that a person would be killed while trying to avoid hitting one.

Other people at the meeting expressed concerns about the cruelty of using dogs to hunt the deer.

Committee member Cormac McCaul asked about the safety of people who were walking in the forest while deer hunting was in progress. People were out walking on Sundays, in spite of the deer hunting signs that were in place. Mr Fitzpatrick pointed out that one of the conditions imposed by Coillte in return for keeping forest walks open to the public was that people were expected to take heed of the warn-

ing signs. He said the deer hunting season would be over by the end of next month.

In response to Mr Forster, he could not say how many deer were going to be culled next year. He pointed out that Duchas (the Heritage and Wildlife Service) rather than Coillte was the body with primary responsibility for the deer.

DEER SHOULD NOT BE "ANNIHILATED"

But Mr Forster claimed Duchas did not seem to want to know anything about the deer in Dartrey, and were not monitoring the shooting that was going on. He agreed that there were times when the numbers could be reduced, but that did not mean that the deer should be annihilated.

Mr Fitzpatrick said Coillte was working with Duchas and Monaghan County Council in relation to the deer issue. He refuted a suggestion from the floor that Coillte had a "policy" to get rid of the deer. Coillte now had a policy to create additional open grazing spaces within the forest for the deer.

Mr Forster said that similar grazing patches in Portumna were used to make it easy to shoot the deer, but Mr Fitzpatrick strongly rejected the idea that Coillte had anything like that in mind.

A speaker from the floor said one of the reasons people walked in the woods was to see the deer. She knew they were a hazard on the road, but annihilating them was not the answer.

Cormac McCaul suggested that if deer lawns were to be introduced, one of them could be put

in place at the top of the hill on Black Island, where the beautiful views around the Dawson Mausoleum (the "Temple") were now being blotted out by a growing crop of conifer trees. The Coillte manager said he would be prepared to look at any such proposals as the opportunities for cutting the trees arose.

SPEED CONCERNS

Mr McCaul also argued that motorists, including motorcyclists were travelling too fast on stretches of the road adjacent to the forest. He said there should be more signs up to warn about the dangers of deer crossing the road.

Patrick Cassidy of Cootehill Heritage Association asked if repairs could be made to the wall surrounding Dartrey, as the deer fencing that had been put up along the road in recent years was very unsightly. But Mr Fitzpatrick said the wall was a listed structure, and Coillte could not just go in and start making repairs to it.

Cootehill town councillor Martin Fitzpatrick said a management plan should be in place not only for the oak trees but for the deer in the forest. It seemed to him that the only management of the deer was to cull them if their numbers grew too big. Nobody cared about them in the meantime.

Coillte's Forest Manager George Byrne said it was qualified people who had been licensed to shoot the deer (a licence to cull 100 was issued for this year).

There was general support at the meeting to a proposal by committee member Andrew McCaul for a 40 mph speed limit to be put in place along the entire five-mile stretch of road in question.