

Scottish Forestry Strategy Review

Public Meeting: 2nd September 2005, Strathpeffer Pavilion

Report to Forestry Commission Scotland on the Meeting

The Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) is reviewing the success to date of the Scottish Forestry Strategy. The Strategy was published in 2000 as an integrated framework for the long-term development of forestry, and was designed to be reviewed after five years. This was the first such strategy for forestry in Scotland and the Scottish Executive is interested to gather views of its value, progress and direction.

A series of public meetings have been held around the country in addition to a general invitation from the FCS to submit answers to a series of questions about the strategy and forestry in Scotland. This report summarises the outcomes of the public meeting for Highland Conservancy held in Strathpeffer at the start of September 2005.

After a presentation from FCS on the working of strategy over the last five years and the changing context within in which forestry operates, participants discussed the issues facing forestry under three headings:

- A: Successes and otherwise, since 2000
- B: What should now be our top priorities?
- C: What needs to happen to deliver B.

Following the workshops, participants were invited to offer specific anonymous comments against the questions in the consultation document. These were also collected and are provided, along with other general comments coming out of the meeting at the back of this report.

The key outcomes of these discussions are summarised below with the more specific comments listed at the back of this report. The lists of comments have been categorised to some extent under collective headings, and this exercise has highlighted a background question regarding the division of the strategy into economic, social and environmental areas of activity. Opinion during the meeting questioned the validity of this division and its ability to delivery some of the more integrated and wide-ranging goals. An example was the emphasis on diversity, particularly regarding the forest industry, seeking opportunity for smaller scale activities in addition to the big business enterprise. That said, overall the meeting reflected a partnership approach between FCS and the participants, focusing on real opportunities of what forestry can deliver, rather than on criticism of current practice.

A) SUCCESSES, and otherwise, SINCE 2000

There was strong acknowledgement that having a strategy was a good thing and recognition that it is only five years since its development so it is still relatively early to measure success or failure. Nonetheless successes were identified, uppermost of which was the growing constructive relationship between Forest Enterprise and communities, and the greater access that communities now have to forest areas. The greater recognition of broader benefits of forestry, particularly with regard to recreation facilities and biodiversity were also acknowledged. The main shortcoming noted by all groups was the lack of movement on a diverse high quality productive forest. The nature and quality of the future, expanded resource is fundamental to a diverse range of other priorities highlighted (such as local use,

rural development, continuity of supply) but the delivery mechanisms do not yet seem to be in place to stimulate serious activity. Bound up also in this point are questions of forest habitat network development, maintaining a skill base in rural areas, tackling deer and rhododendron management.

B) WHAT SHOULD NOW BE OUR TOP PRIORITIES

It would be fair to say that the priorities that were raised reflect a fairly strong view that diversity and local use are very important in the Highlands. Forest products range from timber through to access for non-car owning members of society, and include contributing to alternative energy supplies and providing protection from the excesses of climate change. To achieve these it was recognised that it is necessary to address resource management issues, such as deer, rhododendron and silviculture for quality timber, and to promote and facilitate much wider involvement in forestry by all.

Serious concern was raised across the board at the meeting about the future supply of quality broadleaf and conifer timber for local use. The diversification of the forest resource and the management of good quality productive timber were seen as key priorities. Hand in hand with this go the need to promote forestry widely, selling its role as a healthy, revitalising environment.

Fundamental to all these roles is the function of the forest as a habitat, and the need to develop habitat networks to safeguard and care for the plants and animals dependent on them was emphasised. There is still much to do with regard to core forest areas but at the same time it is important to also care for and manage minor and transition areas such as tree line woodland and aspen stands.

C) WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN TO DELIVER B.

Fundamentally the strategy needs to think long-term and focus attention on the future forest, building greater diversity into the timber resource and industry, continuity of supply and a functioning and integrated forest habitat network. Solutions to current issues should be developed in the context of this longer-term vision. This focus will provide the stimulus for increased incentives for delivery and justification for such integrated management within the national forest.

One of the key current Highland issues is timber transport and resolutions need to be found that take account of such issues as diminishing oil supplies and skilled labour force, as well as the international timber market. The development of a woodfuel industry is considered to have a role in this, as well as contributing to broader environmental benefits.

Promoting the place of forestry in delivering many benefits that are relevant to all of society is considered key to its future. Plain English and positive language are key tools for achieving this, as is the development of a forest culture through education and promotion, particularly amongst other land uses, such as agriculture. The stark contrast between the attitudes of Scottish society to forestry compared with that of a more highly forested Norway was provided as an example.

Diana Gilbert
7th September 2005

COLLATED LISTS OF COMMENTS FROM WORKSHOPS

A) SUCCESSES, and otherwise, SINCE 2000

Successes

- Existence of a strategy

Integration

- The allowance of grazing in woodlands within Forestry grants
- “Crofter Forestry”
- Better integration between processors and growers
- SFGS stewardship grants
- Decreasing investment in establishing purely commercial woodland
- Use of forests for recreation

FCS Partnership Working

- Greater opportunity to work constructively with Forest Enterprise, in particular with access to grazing land in FCS management. (Glenurquhart Land Use Partnership).
- Community involvement
- Provision of recreational facilities

Raised Awareness of:

- Woodfuel energy
- Timber for housing
- Wildlife
- The environment

Other Comments/Failures/Shortcomings

- Lack of diversification in the forest
Lack of focus on timber quality
Reduction in productive woodland
Lack of new productive woodland
- Effective relationships with FE are not consistent across all areas, issues include slow response to approaches from individuals and communities. (Difficult to determine whether this is lack of resources or commitment)
- Managing/tackling deer issue
- Strategy not effective, significant initiatives still occur outside the strategy (e.g. Invergordon pulp mill proposal)
- Conflicts - lack of integration with recreational uses
- Outcomes for “local” people – environment, economic

B) WHAT SHOULD NOW BE OUR TOP PRIORITIES

Advocacy/Communication

- The strategy should promote forestry widely.

Diversification

- Promote & facilitate diversity in scale of businesses involved in the industry.
- Greater variety of quality timber trees, broadleaf and conifer particularly those with local value. (Forest products)
- Develop innovative solutions to timber transport issues in the Highlands.
- Facilitate regional distinctiveness.

Forest Products

- Make a significant contribution to alternative renewable energy supplies
- Develop continuity of supply across a diversified resource. (Diversification)
- Increase the use of forests for healthy recreation. (Integration/Community Involvement)
- Develop forests for protection against climate change. It is perceived that forests will provide shelter against some of the effects of climate change.

People/Community involvement

- Full community engagement by FCS generally. In particular FES must continue progress in developing community involvement.
- Development of a forest culture (especially in relation to integration with farming)
- Improve delivery mechanism for similar objectives across government bodies such as a “one stop shop” approach for FCS, SNH, SEPA, SEERAD, DCS (Integration)

Integration

- Take full account of other natural resource interests in forest planning
- Deer management.
- Integrated rural development (Forest Products/Community involvement)

Biodiversity

- Deliver Forest Habitat Networks
- Promote the role for forestry in species re-introduction programmes.
- Address the issue of Rhododendron.

C) WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN TO DELIVER B.

Advocacy

- Use plain English and less jargon.
- Express outcomes as benefits to people
- Use positive language to promote the wide influences of forestry.
- Trees and woods enhance the ‘wilderness experience’ for tourism (advocacy)

Diversification

- FES procurement procedures should not prejudice small contractors (e.g. assistance with meeting new demand for higher public liability insurance).
- Greater emphasis, through grant support, on development, planting and management, of quality timber. (Forest products)
- To resolve the timber transport issues, we need diversification and new solutions taking account of the future decreasing oil supply, including sea transport and more local use. This includes the need to take account of:
 - The dwindling labour force and loss of skills, including management (resulting from a trend towards larger contractors travelling into the area).
 - The relative values of home produced and imported products. (Forest Products)
- A more diverse forest may cope with climate change better.

Forest Products

- Develop woodfuel to contribute significantly to renewal energy supplies.
- Increase the area of well-managed productive hardwoods using incentives (FES?)
- Cultivate (and sell) the relevance of forestry in the urban and peri-urban environment – focus initially on existing initiatives. (Forest products/Integration)
- Facilitate access for non-car owning urban/peri-urban dwellers to forests.

People/Community involvement

- Greater commitment and/or resources available to allow FCS (including FES) to engage more effectively (consultations, facilitation) with community interests, as a mainstream activity.
- Provide education to develop the forest culture
- Reduce bureaucracy and simplify incentive system (e.g. SFGS) to promote delivery.

Integration

- Take ‘water’ in catchments fully into consideration in all planting and management plans
- The impact of forestry positive and negative, particularly expansion on other land uses/interests (particularly designated sites, wooded or otherwise) needs to be recognised and taken into account.
- Recognise the role forestry can play in improving the condition of some sites. (Forest products/community involvement/advocacy)

Biodiversity

- Deliver Forest Habitat Networks.
- Develop thinking on FHN to ensure they include all woodlands, transitions and minor types, such as high altitude scrub and aspen.
- Develop and deliver a Rhododendron strategy.

D) ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/OBSERVATIONS;

Need an effective evaluation process in order to track the success of past and current initiatives.

What impact will Land Reform have on the ability to integrate land use – who decides on priority?

E) INDIVIDUAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Question 6: Should there be any new priorities for action?

Answer: Forestry Training:
Inverness College is at risk, fewer young people are becoming involved in forestry which indicates a skills shortage developing.
Capacity building within local communities where interest has been shown in taking over management of forests.

Question 8: Should the SFS be focussed primarily on increasing benefits of forestry to the people of Scotland?

Answer: Yes, if it means all the benefits.
What else?

Question 9: Should woodlands play a greater role in helping Scotland deal with climate change?

Answer: A thousand times YES! By planting more trees; push biomass for fuel.

Question 10: What should be the role of forestry in sustainable rural development?

Answer: Forestry can provide an environment in which people can live and work.
Planning should encourage woodland parkland in new housing schemes/business parks, or allow new house and industrial/business development within existing woods where appropriate.

Question 13: How could the overall economic potential be increased?

Answer: Involve small businesses, for example sawmills and manufacturers in woodland management.

Question 17: How can the forestry sector be better integrated with other land uses?

Answer: Higher grants for farm and croft planting of trees and fruitwoods.

Question 18: How should we determine the appropriate extent and distribution of woodland – how much, what type and where?

Answer: National land classification based on economic criteria.