

DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY AREA TOURISM PARTNERSHIP

RESPONSE TO FORESTRY CONSULTATION (CLIMATE CHANGE BILL)

Background

The Forestry Commission is a very important player in the tourism product of Dumfries and Galloway having invested in and developed the multi-use of its forests to a huge extent over the last decade. The Seven Stanes mountain-biking facilities at Kirroughtree, Glentool, Dalbeattie, Ae and Mabie are the most familiar manifestation of this but the forests are used for a whole range of recreational purposes with tourism value eg walking, including guided walks and access through the forests to the open spaces and hill tops of Galloway Forest Park, car rallying, horse riding and dog sledging.

The Forestry Commission is a key partner in implementing the area tourism strategy and is currently reviewing its visitor centres and tourism facilities with a view to further investment.

Consultation response

The concerns of the members of Dumfries and Galloway Area Tourism Partnership are in relation to Question 2, the proposed leasing of Forestry Commission plantations to private timber firms.

1. Public forest represents a huge asset to the tourism industry of Dumfries and Galloway and we note with concern that 'tourism' as such is never mentioned in the consultation document
2. We are concerned that the transfer of forests to private sector management would jeopardise existing recreational use and mitigate against new recreational and tourism development over many decades.
As evidence, we would point out Dumfries and Galloway already has very extensive private commercial plantations none of which have been pro-actively developed for multi-use.
3. We are not convinced that public access and enjoyment of the forests could be adequately protected via lease conditions or statute, in the absence of a commercially attractive income-stream. For example the existing use of the Forestry Commission estate for car rallying, an important contributor to the tourist economy, would be threatened and could not be guaranteed by existing access legislation.
4. The Forestry Commission is now sensitive to the 'road view' ie it attempts to safeguard and enhance views from the public roads in planning its harvesting and planting operations. Any transfer to private operators should take cognisance of landscape aspects.
5. We are concerned that the reduction of the income stream to the Forestry Commission from its commercial forests may diminish its ability to maintain existing recreational facilities in the forests which it retains.

6. We would welcome proposals which encourage greater private-sector involvement in the forest estate but which take cognisance of the concerns which we have expressed. The short consultation period has provided limited opportunity for more creative thinking on our part but we would suggest that there could be merit in encouraging more partnership working between the private sector and the Forestry Commission to introduce private sector finance and expertise into recreational developments in the forests. Some of our members are currently working with the Forestry Commission on the Seven Stanes developments but are reluctant to continue their engagement due to the uncertainty about the future.

Joan Mitchell
Chair Dumfries and Galloway Area Tourism Partnership

21st January 2009