

# The Community and Social Aspects of Forestry

---

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

This paper has been prepared by the Forestry for People Advisory Panel. It sets out:

- An overall vision for the development of social forestry;
- Opportunities for further development; and
- Cultural and institutional issues.

### Vision

Local involvement in decision making enables communities to influence and take control of their destiny and address their priority needs. Forestry has been highly catalytic in initiating this process in communities and in delivering outstanding community benefits relating to sustainability, biodiversity, environmental and social justice, economic development, training and education, health and rural development. Community engagement delivers, and should therefore be core business for Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS).

Our vision includes:

- *Value for money* – Public funds for forestry should support public and community benefits including cross compliance with other policy objectives;
- *Social inclusion* – The forestry sector must engage with wider social issues such as deprivation and antisocial behaviour, working to its strength in delivery;
- *Environmental justice and urban forestry* – Forestry can help address environmental degradation particularly in urban and post industrial areas;
- *Broadening management responsibility for forests* – FCS should assist more and different types of people and communities to own and manage forests;
- *Timber production* – Timber production as an essential and integrated part of all forest management;
- *The private sector engaging with communities* – More farmers, land owners and individuals engaging with their communities and contributing to the local forest culture and helping to strengthen their communities; and
- *National and Regional perspectives* – A strong national vision and policies supported by regulation and incentives, meshing with tailored local strategies supported by local partnerships and resources.

## **Developing Opportunities**

The following nine opportunities have been identified to enhance social forestry:

- *Developing links to communities* – FCS (including management of the national forest estate by Forest Enterprise Scotland {FES}) engaging with communities as core work;
- *Addressing wider social agendas and community planning* – the forestry sector taking steps to utilise forestry in addressing mainstream social issues;
- *Promoting health* – developing a greater role in preventative and recuperative health and special needs groups;
- *The private land-based sector* – developing the private sector as an active part of communities and strengthening the local forest culture;
- *Jobs in forestry* – developing opportunities for local people to access forestry jobs;
- *Opportunities to live and work in woods* – New opportunities for people to manage and make a living from forest land including forest crofts and smallholdings;
- *Forest Schools* – as a key mechanism for education and engagement;
- *Rural Development Forestry* – Support for forest based community and local businesses; and
- *Supporting community groups to do environmental work* – New support for local communities wishing to undertake environmental work.

The following 5 opportunities have been identified to develop the forest resource in a way that will benefit communities:

- *Encouraging native species;*
- *Promoting hardwoods;*
- *Promoting European larch and Douglas fir;*
- *Coppicing; and*
- *Promoting diversity.*

## **Developing Cultures and Institutions**

Our paper identifies a continuum along which progress will be needed in the development of institutions and cultures to meet the vision.

We then focus on:

- *Decentralisation* - and the need to shift more power to a local level;
- *Technical support* – an evolving role for FCS in supporting communities;
- *Forestry education and training* – the evolving training needs of professional foresters and of communities and individuals;
- *Forestry R&D* – a re-orientation to address social priorities; and
- *Measuring success* – more innovation to measure social outcomes.

## **Questions**

Finally we pose a series of key questions that we invite consultees to consider in formulating their responses to the consultation.

---

## **1 Introduction**

This topic paper has been produced by the Forestry for People Advisory Panel, an independent panel established by the Forestry Commission (FC) in October 2000. The Panel is made up of people with experience of land use, forestry and community forestry. It has worked with the FC, and more latterly FCS, and has been highly influential in front-edge developments in social forestry over the past 5 years.

This paper has been prepared against a background of major developments by FCS in the field of community forestry, including the establishment of the National and Regional Forestry Forums and in 2005, the ground-breaking National Forest Land Scheme. The Panel applauds these developments which bring benefits to many communities in Scotland. As successes and confidence build, the Panel believes there is a real opportunity to develop and embed this work, extending community benefits still further.

We have divided this topic paper into three sections:

- in the first we set out an overall vision and philosophy for the development of social forestry in Scotland;
- in the second section we set out the opportunities for the further development of social forestry, and highlight how the physical forest resource could be developed to expand the benefits of forestry; and
- in the third section we highlight issues relating to the cultures and institutions which effect delivery of social forestry, and make proposals about how these should be developed.

We conclude with some questions which are intended simply to stimulate readers in considering the principles, structure, and content of a revised Scottish Forestry Strategy.

## **2 Vision and Philosophy**

### **2.1 Why Social Forestry?**

The Panel fully supports the view evident in much public policy today that when local people are involved in making decisions about their local area, real benefits begin to flow. In the early stages of involvement benefits might be fairly simple – a new play area for example - but when relationships mature and communities grow in confidence they can begin to take control of their own destiny. They can become organised in developing a visionary future for their community, and priorities are likely to be wide reaching, including jobs, the environment, services, housing and health. Most importantly, communities are uniquely placed to bring in resources and develop partnerships with many different players and local businesses.

Forestry has been shown to be an effective catalyst in getting communities started and initiating capacity building, with many excellent examples across Scotland. It also provides a wide range of opportunities for community betterment and can achieve cross cutting policy objectives, including sustainability, biodiversity, environmental and social justice, economic development, training and education,

social inclusion, health improvement and rural development. Community engagement in forestry should therefore now become core business for FCS and we strongly believe that this is entirely compatible with economic and environmental aims. We believe that FCS already leads the field in this area and should develop its role as an exemplar in the future.

## **2.2 Vision**

### *2.2.1 Value for Money*

In a climate where forestry harvesting is very often uneconomic, it is essential that public money for forestry is directed towards delivering benefits to taxpayers in an integrated way, and not simply to supporting an uneconomic activity. In our future vision for forestry therefore, all work undertaken within FCS, including work done directly by FES and work in support of the private sector, should lead to wider public and community benefits. For private forest owners there should be tangible incentives to support social and community work backed up by effective standards and regulations. Cross compliance with other policy objectives should be a requirement of grant aid and a checklist of public benefits against which all work is monitored should be established.

### *2.2.2 Social Inclusion*

Forestry offers opportunities to further many social policy objectives, such as working with vulnerable people and antisocial behaviour which, if not tackled, will result in escalating costs to society in coming years. FCS must be committed to getting involved in these areas and be proactive in developing partnerships to address them. This includes partnerships with social and economic agencies as well as environmental agencies where programmes to achieve environmental outcomes have not generally been socially orientated. Local initiatives and good practice in some parts of Scotland must be rolled out in national programmes.

### *2.2.3 Environmental Justice and urban forestry*

There are many pockets of urban and post industrial Scotland where lives are blighted by a poor environment such as dereliction, industrial wasteland, lack of space for recreation, open cast mining, vandalism, poor housing and infrastructure, and littering and dumping. Forestry is ideally placed to play a key role in such areas but it needs to engage with and embrace these issues in a spirit of partnership if it is to become an effective part of the solution. Given limited resources, a suitable balance must be struck between rural and urban areas, taking account on one hand of the importance of land based industries for rural communities and, on the other, of the number of individuals living in urban areas who can benefit from woodlands.

### *2.2.4 Broadening management responsibility and FCS facilitation role*

We believe that it is important that the role of actually 'doing' forestry is broadened. Specifically we would like to see more woodlands owned and/or managed by communities, by farmers and by ordinary individuals and families – particularly those in rural areas wishing to work the woodland as a sustainable business and source of income. Clearly FCS and FES have specific technical expertise and it will therefore be necessary for them to develop a role in facilitating others to engage actively and productively in forestry.

### *2.2.5 Timber production*

The Panel believes that timber production and utilisation (of both softwood and hardwood) is central to maximising community and social benefits from forestry, helping to strengthen local economies and support sustainable woodland management which should be an integrated aspect of almost all forest management. We also recognise that timber production will take many forms and we have focused on those that are likely to provide higher levels of community and social benefit (section 3.2).

### *2.2.6 An active private sector engaging with communities*

We envisage an active and expanding private sector of farmers, estate owners and individuals establishing and caring for woodlands and engaged in forest based businesses and we wish to see these private interests closely engaged with their local communities. We envisage that this will help to support a healthy local forest culture including community awareness in forestry, forest-based jobs, use of locally sourced wood and a generally high value placed on the local forest resource. It will also support the vibrancy of communities by helping to maintain populations, quality of life and economic activity.

### *2.2.7 National and Regional Perspectives*

Our national forestry strategy must identify strong top-down national priorities backed up by national standards (including standards for community and social aspects), and attracting national resources that local communities can engage with. However it must also be recognised that there is a richness of regional diversity across Scotland and different areas have different forest resources and priorities. Local partnerships are needed to develop a series of robust bottom up regional strategies underpinned by national and regional resources for delivery.

## **3 Developing opportunities**

### **3.1 Opportunities to Enhance Social Forestry Benefits**

#### *3.1.1 Developing links with communities*

Engaging with communities is core work and continued development is needed, building on best practice and taking account of the increasing role that communities wish to play in both rural and urban areas. This should now be moving to centre stage within FCS. Staff responsibilities, staff skills and training, and resource allocation should all reflect this development.

#### *3.1.2 Addressing Wider Social Agendas and Community Planning*

For forestry to come of age FCS must not shy away from the bigger social issues such as deprivation, antisocial behaviour and housing. It must allocate resources to these issues utilising its outstanding ability (through its land resources and staff) to achieve real outcomes on the ground and in communities. This will require significant time and staff commitment to participate in local processes, particularly Community Planning, in order to build co-operative initiatives, dovetail services and promote joined up delivery. This time investment will enable resources to be targeted more accurately to achieve value for money.

### *3.1.3 Promoting Health*

Forests can play a major supporting role in preventative and recuperative health programmes and this should be developed for the benefit of communities suffering the worst health problems. In addition forests can play a positive role in special needs such as mental disability and the elderly. Crucially, FCS cannot address this agenda without solid partnerships with key national and local players. FCS has a role as a catalyst for new developments, and in the provision of forest resources and expertise.

### *3.1.4 The private land based sector*

A highly active and locally integrated private land based sector (including farmers, estate owners, forestry advisors and wood processors) is crucial to the existence of strong local forest culture which will in turn help support the social and economic fabric of communities. Initiatives are needed which will encourage private forest-based businesses to engage with their communities and play their role in community development. In particular land based business often have access to resources (such as machinery) that would be invaluable in community projects. CAP reform and the introduction of the new Rural Development Regulation release grants through the Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme (SFGS) for farm based forestry initiatives such as local value adding, wood-fuel and new environmental measures. These, along with existing grants and farm diversification incentives, provide an outstanding catalyst for this type of initiative.

### *3.1.5 Jobs in Forestry*

Timber and jobs are social issues when considering fragile rural communities that lack access to resources and work. More initiatives are needed to enable local people to access the economic opportunities relating to forestry and timber, both through FES and in the private sector. These initiatives must address long-term community sustainability. They will need to nurture and bring on young people and local businesses, and address skills, age and gender issues.

### *3.1.6 Opportunities to live and work in woods*

We envisage in the future that many more people will be involved in managing forest land – not only communities, but also individuals or syndicates with an interest in running a forest-related business and generating income from a small forest holding. These enterprises support local wood-chains and help to create a culture of local wood use. New mechanisms for extending such opportunities include the proposed Forest Crofts concept. FES, farmers and communities that own woodlands might also be in a position to lease or sell forest plots to individuals where clear benefits will arise. Houses built on forest plots provide a real opportunity to demonstrate sustainable housing, use of local materials and innovative, low cost design. Visionary planning guidance will be required.

### *3.1.7 Forest Schools*

Forest Schools are a key support mechanism for education and engagement. As well as complementing the Early Years and 5-14 Curriculum, Forest School particularly suits children who fail to achieve in the more formal classroom setting. Disaffected young people and those with emotional or behavioural challenges are seen to benefit from the Forest School ethos and practicality. The concept also proves effective with adults who seek reintegration into the workplace - long term

unemployed, people with mental health problems, young single parents. We believe FCS should do more to build on success to date. This will entail engagement in local partnerships, with community groups, careers services, local enterprise companies and social services.

### *3.1.8 Rural Development Forestry*

The establishment and growth of small wood chain businesses in rural areas should be actively encouraged by FES and the Local Enterprise Companies. This includes community businesses - a small sector that scores very highly in the delivery of outcomes. It also includes small private businesses where there are clear opportunities for local wealth creation. The range of business opportunities that will help strengthen communities include forest contracting, saw-milling, biofuel supply, production of building components, building in timber, production of furniture and fittings, craft work and provision of non timber products and services. The work done by the Woods Work partnership provides some pointers for how this might be achieved.

### *3.1.9 Support community groups to do environmental work*

Improving the environment is central to the concerns of community groups who generally recognise a wide range of social, environmental and economic benefits arising from such work. Priorities might include expansion and management of the full range of native woods, habitat restoration, forest habitat networks and management and interpretation of biodiversity resources. Additional financial support is needed for this type of work, particularly because community groups cannot access agri-environment grants available to landowners doing similar work.

## **3.2 Opportunities for the development of the Forest Resource**

The performance of woodlands in delivering social benefits will vary greatly depending on the physical attributes of the woodland – the species and the management system that it is under. In essence, social benefits will arise when the woodland provides attractive and ecologically rich areas for human enjoyment and when it provides trees that are suitable for utilisation in a way that will benefit communities. The following attributes have been found to be particularly valuable and these should be given priority in the strategy.

### *3.2.1 Native species*

Native woodlands provide attractive natural environments for recreation and enhanced landscapes. With sound ecological management and good silviculture they can also provide a highly sustainable timber resource. Many community forestry groups focus on the management and expansion of native woodlands to improve their environment, attract visitors to the area and provide a local wood supply.

### *3.2.2 Hardwoods*

Broadleaved woodlands are generally popular in the landscape and for their recreational value, but few landowners appear to manage broadleaves for timber and timber quality is generally poor. Nonetheless hardwoods lend themselves very well to small scale timber processing and value adding, which can be important in supporting local communities. There is an opportunity to expand and improve the quality of the hardwood resource over the coming years and to increase the scale of the hardwood sector.

### 3.2.3 *European Larch and Douglas Fir*

European larch and Douglas fir, unlike other commercial conifers grown in Scotland, have moderately durable heartwood. As a result, with appropriate detailing, they are suitable for exterior uses such as cladding, roofing and fencing as well as some structural components – products that can be successfully manufactured and supplied by small-scale businesses. Ironically, these two conifer species are becoming increasingly difficult to source and there is a strong case for extending establishment in suitable areas.

### 3.2.4 *Coppicing*

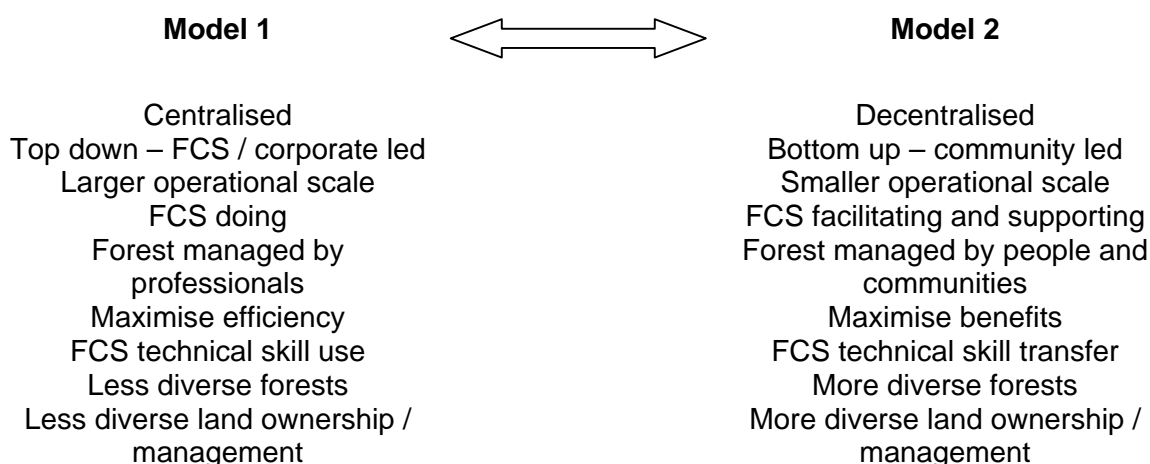
While coppicing is rarely practised in Scotland it can provide material for a range of craft-scale uses which can add to business income streams. By its very nature, coppicing provides a simple, easy, efficient and accessible form of forestry with a low skill uptake curve. It therefore lends itself to education and training and furthers the concept of developing a greater forest culture in Scotland.

### 3.2.5 *Diversity*

Diverse woodlands involving interesting mosaics of different species and structures provide a more attractive package for a wide range of community benefits and are to be encouraged. Silvicultural techniques providing continuous cover or small felling coupes are particularly valuable.

## 4 Developing Cultures and Institutions

We have proposed a future in which all Scotland's communities benefit from forestry and have put forward our suggestions for specific developments. This will create pressure for further shifts in our forestry institutions and culture, which will be necessary to allow communities to take centre stage and for the benefits to flow. The chart below illustrates a continuum between 2 models of forestry, which are not mutually exclusive. In order to develop a rounded and balanced forestry sector for the future, we believe that it is necessary to progress towards and embrace the attributes of model 2, whilst retaining valid benefits of model 1.



The following key areas will require particular consideration:

#### **4.1 Decentralisation**

In a socially focused model, steps must be taken to enable communities to assume real responsibility for forestry in their area, if that is what they wish, in order to make serious interventions that will lead to greater community sustainability and well-being. This will need to be done at a pace and level appropriate to the community and it will need to be positively supported by FCS. It is unlikely that any single structure for greater devolution will suit all circumstances – partnership structures that might be effective include a local rural partnership, a local trust or a Community Council or Local Authority. Structures must be consistent with greater integration at the local level, and strong links with Community Planning partnership will be important.

#### **4.2 Technical support for communities and individuals**

FCS has a major role to play in providing support to communities and individuals engaged in local forest management. As communities assume more responsibility the principle role of FCS and FES staff will be to further locally-set agendas, working with local partnerships. This might include technical forestry advice, support in marketing produce, work to develop the local wood-chain and direct forest management responsibilities.

#### **4.3 Forestry education and training**

As the forest culture gradually becomes more socially orientated it is clear that the demands on forest education will change. In the first place professional foresters will need enhanced levels of training in community facilitation as well as in a more diverse range of silvicultural techniques and timber markets. Adaptations in forestry schools will be needed and methods to disseminate hard-won good practice in FCS will need to be established, to support both the wider state and private sectors. In addition there will be an increasing requirement to provide a level of forestry training to community members and individuals becoming involved in forest management.

#### **4.4 Forestry Research and Development**

Forestry research will need further reorientation to address social priorities. Areas of key importance will be technical research on productivity relating to community-scale production, production of hardwoods, and alternatives to clear fell situations. Significant development effort will also need to be allocated to planning and testing new social initiatives.

#### **4.5 Measuring Success**

We believe that the outcomes of the socially orientated programme we have put forward, in the form of long term benefits to society, will far out-perform existing programmes. New methods of measuring outcomes to demonstrate and capture this reality will need continued innovation and work. In addition forestry statistics will need to be reviewed to ensure monitoring information is adequate for social forestry, and information gathering will need to be adjusted.

## **5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, our vision is of a strategy which directs us towards a more diverse, and therefore stronger, forestry sector, able to deliver benefits for people across Scotland, both directly (timber and other products, jobs, environment, etc) and indirectly through cross-cutting links with other public policies (health, housing, education, social inclusion, etc).

We close with some questions which are intended to stimulate thinking about fundamental principles, structure, and specific directions of the new Scottish Forestry Strategy. Consultees are not being asked necessarily to respond directly to these questions, merely to consider the issues we raise in formulating their responses to the consultation.

1. Are people at the centre of the Scottish Forestry Strategy?
2. Should the Strategy be presented by splitting it down into sectors (social, environmental, economic) or split in a different way to promote integration eg local / regional / national?
3. How can the private sector (farmers, estate owners, forestry advisors, wood processors) be encouraged to engage with local communities and deliver social benefits?
4. Should planting and restocking grants continue to be given for production forestry or should public funds be directed to planting and restocking for broader public benefit?
5. Should there be additional incentives to establish species such as European larch and Douglas fir which are not always favoured by large scale production forestry, but can be attractive to local processing and markets?
6. Should public and private forestry engage in deeper social issues – such as equality, social deprivation and exclusion of minorities? How?
7. Should there be partnership regional forestry strategies? How should these integrate with other local strategies and what should be their status?
8. How can rural communities and individuals be supported to take up economic opportunities in forestry?

**The Forestry for People Advisory Panel  
June 2005**