

IMAGINING OUR FUTURE WOODLANDS: MOVING FORWARD IN SCOTLAND AND IN GALLOWAY

Following the successful day of presentations and discussion in St John's Town of Dalry on 24 February 2023, this note distils the key points and what participants feel needs to be done.

We set out to address two questions:

- 1. How do we positively balance the needs of the differing land use interests in redesigning existing forests/woodlands and planning new ones?**
- 2. What practical recommendations would you make that could help deliver this?**

There are many perspectives with continuing polarisation between different interests. The prime need is to move from confrontation to dialogue and from consultation to engagement of all parties, central government and its agencies, local councils, the industry and communities of interest nationally, regionally and locally.

Headlines from the day's discussions were:

- ✓ More trees in all forms are part of our global future. Issue is not just commercial forestry but also individual trees and woods using the full range of native species.
- ✓ Need more sensitive approaches to planting and management of woodlands and forests, a greater variety of species and greater variety in the layout of planting, and of woodland and forest management.
- ✓ Greater recognition that landscape, scenery, beauty and amenity as they are important for people and place for communities in decisions about planting and management of trees, woods and forests.
- ✓ More engagement for all communities, in active dialogue locally and nationally, but this must be meaningful not just on consultation about planting proposals but throughout the cycle of decision making on woods and forests management.
- ✓ More integration of government policies and greater integration of policy and financial support mechanisms on the ground to overcome the existing barriers and 'silo mentality'.

The key outcomes of the discussion were as follows.

National government level

1. More innovative regime for forest and woodland expansion and management with new and novel funding mechanisms and approaches to community engagement. Scottish Government needs to move out of silos of thinking and action in defending traditional sectors to more integrated policy and action.
2. Trees are not built into future farming therefore need to change the regime and through that to change attitudes and behaviours of farmers to embrace trees on their farms. Any change needs to ensure that farmers have annual income and enable to exploit market opportunity. For example, by removing the 'dependency culture' under the CAP to one that stimulates trees planting and management on farms. The following propositions should be seriously investigated: divert government grant aid from commercial tree planting to provide income stream for farmers for investment in trees; use a public interest test to stimulate on farm tree planting similar to that for biodiversity in National Planning Framework; rebalance planting grant to 50/50 conifer/broadleaf; bring forestry down the hill, therefore creating woodland opportunities on farms for better animal and human health and business.

3. Creating "Green Economy" jobs in establishing and maintaining woods on farms. Need is for Scottish Government to stimulate and support a tree farming culture, where timber growing is part and parcel of farming, as in Sweden, for example where small growers belong to timber marketing cooperatives which ensure that their members are not disadvantaged by being small producers. There is also a need for farmers to look beyond the farm gate.
4. Rethinking the policy approach by placing the carbon cycle at the centre using the well known approach of biogeochemical cycles. This will restore the broken carbon cycle, help to make landscapes more complex and connected, overcome uniformity and benefit the circular economy. This means that there needs to be a greater focus on soil health and hydrology, on more hard wood species, integration of forestry and farming, restoration of wetlands and integration of forestry and land in education and administration.
5. Government should explain rationale and reasons for planting targets and what it means in practice on the ground.
6. Government needs to change the consultation regime forestry and woodlands planting and management immediately to recognise the legitimacy of community roles and the need for active engagement and dialogue for all of those with legitimate stakeholder interests.
7. Government should urgently review regulations on planting and management to ensure best environmental practice and to make sure they are fully enforced and those who disregard them are penalised appropriately.
8. Education about trees, woods and forests at secondary and tertiary levels needs new approach to recognise need for integration into the environmental systems context. Should be a new curricula at National 5 and Higher to embrace this. At further education level, need greater focus on skills offers and apprenticeship schemes.
9. Government forestry administration has overlap and duplication and lacks clear separation of regulation from financial support and encouragement of the industry. This was the mistake not rectified in establishment of Scottish Forestry. Urgent need to separate the conflicting functions of industry support and financial support from regulation.

Civil society

1. Civil society should accept the value and benefit of the need to produce more home grown timber to reduce financial and environmental costs of high timber import volumes and as a substitute for higher energy intensive materials used especially in construction, such as concrete and steel. But this requires government to demand and industry to deliver higher standards of husbandry and for government to ensure that there is more effective enforcement of conditions and guidelines on those who disregard them.
2. Civil society should have greater cognisance of the variety of uses of harvested timber, particularly in for example modern kitchen units and recognise that there is lots of waste material from harvesting.
3. Civil society should challenge poor forest practice to government and the industry, and should blow the whistle and report to authorities bad practices on planting and management.
4. Needs to be recognition by government and the industry that civil society nationally and locally has a legitimate interest and role to play in the decision making about tree planting and management. Bottom up approaches to force change at the top level in grant schemes and land use strategy are urgently required. Need to change from consultation whose contents are ignored to participation and engagement approach.

Forest industry level

1. Dense Sitka spruce plantations are past and superannuated says forest industry specialist and wants the industry to accept this in practice.
2. Concern that spruce plantations classify themselves as forestry when they are so different from "real woodlands".
3. Need more disease resilient forests and tree species.
4. Industry should become more open to dialogue with other interests.
5. The industry should use other media to promote the importance of trees and why commercial timber production is in the national public interest. This should include new ways of doing things about trees, woods and forests to demonstrate to sceptics the benefits of trees.
6. Industry should learn from other European countries, particularly on the link between farmers and foresters.
7. Forestry and timber industry needs to be less defensive and make greater effort in recognising the issues that others are concerned about it and address them in a positive manner.
8. A dramatic change in management operations is needed from clear fell to more landscape and environmentally friendly nuanced approaches.
9. Access onto private forest land should be more welcoming as under the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.
10. Greater range of species mixes should be investigated, despite the industry's view that 'Sitka is a winner for production.'
11. More focus is needed on leaving trees to reach natural rather than commercial maturity.

Regional and local levels

1. Develop a variety of engagement methods to suit local and regional circumstances: full involvement throughout from planting proposals to land management. Where there is a local will and capacity to deliver the land ownership option should be pursued.
2. Transformational change at the landscape scale could be achieved through reviving and updating local woodland and forest strategies in the context of the Regional Land Use Strategy development currently underway.
3. Restructuring woodlands and forests should recognise different stakeholders who are seeking diverse outcomes .
4. Establish local partnerships of all interests to agree the way forward in plans and action.
5. Opportunity for state-owned Galloway Forest Park to better reflect the wishes of Scotland's people, by starting a 30 year transition away from being an 80% spruce forest, to being a more diverse forest with majority native woodlands and broadleaves.

Notes compiled by Roger Crofts

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