

This application **should be rejected outright** on the following grounds:

Specific issues

1. The proposed scheme is not in keeping with the UNESCO designated Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere Reserve. The proposed planting site is within the 'Buffer Zone' of the reserve determined to protect the nearby core areas of the Rhinns of Kells from unsympathetic land use.
2. The proposed planting will severely affect the 'sense of place' of the nearest town, St John's Town of Dalry, by producing a negative visual background scene from many parts of the village. It is therefore not in keeping with the long stated Scottish Government policy of protecting local 'sense of place
3. The effects on the 360° view from Waterside Hill will be highly detrimental in almost all directions. Limiting the level of planting to below the top of the hill will not resolve this negative point.
4. The well-known and recorded biodiversity interest, particularly of moorland birds, will be lost at a time when the Scottish Government is placing high priority on maintaining biodiversity and seeking to stop biodiversity loss as part of its obligations under the international Convention on Biological Diversity.
5. The planned planting is listed as 100% conifers, when there are already broadleaf species on the hill. It is surely therefore in breach of the well-known and long standing planting guidelines of the Scottish Government.
6. The planting will restrict access along the statutory Long Distance Route *The Southern Upland Way* and reduce access to the best viewpoint in the locality used by many local residents and by visitors.

General issues

1. The environmental assessment of the proposals are totally inadequate and the case should not have been accepted by Scottish Forestry given what is clearly stated in the agency's strategy documents.
2. The lack of consultation by the land owner and his agents is shameful in the extreme. This is not in keeping with the Scottish Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement (see next point).
3. Scottish Forestry should have insisted on full public consultation with adequate timescales, especially in the light of the restrictions placed on meetings by the Scottish Government due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Scottish Forestry are clearly in breach of the Scottish Government's policy on consultation and engagement with local communities, "*in the context of the Scottish Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement, this means ensuring that more people, as communities and individuals, can benefit from land related opportunities. This includes opportunities for economic growth, cultural and social development, and environmental improvements*".
4. Scottish Forestry's timescales are totally unacceptable in terms of government policy. They accepted the application on 30th August 2019, but only set a 5 weeks and 2 days consultation period from 9th June 2020. Is this not case for the Ombudsman to review?
5. Any claims that this scheme will benefit climate change mitigation can be readily challenged scientifically. The Crichton Carbon Centre is a locally based expert group who can provide the government with objective data.

An alternative

1. The local community and experts resident in the area, of whom there are many, should be invited to develop a scheme which safeguards the environmental, including ecological, cultural, access and visual aspects of this important area. This could comprise of reinforcing the deciduous trees already in the area, provide a link to the deciduous woodlands across the valley, and bring biodiversity benefits and far greater carbon sequestration benefits than the scheme proposed.

Professor Roger Crofts CBE FRSE FCIEEM FRSGS

13/07/20

ⁱ [ps://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-land-rights-responsibilities-statement/pages/4/#:~:text=In%20the%20context%20of%20the%20Scottish%20Land%20Rights,growth%2C%20cultural%20and%20social%20development%2C%20and%20environmental%20improvements.](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-land-rights-responsibilities-statement/pages/4/#:~:text=In%20the%20context%20of%20the%20Scottish%20Land%20Rights,growth%2C%20cultural%20and%20social%20development%2C%20and%20environmental%20improvements.)