



Scottish Natural Heritage Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba

All of nature for all of Scotland
Nàdar air fad airson Alba air fad

Scoping a strategic vision for the uplands – key questions for discussion

Introduction

In March 2016 the Scottish Government published Scotland's second Land Use Strategy, which provides a high level vision for land use in Scotland from 2016 to 2021 (<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Environment/Countryside/Landusestrategy>). The Strategy set out a Vision, Objectives and Principles for Sustainable Land Use, and contained a number of policies and proposals which provide a programme of action for the next five years.

Proposal 5 indicated that the Scottish Government would “scope the potential to develop a strategic vision for the uplands, exploring the multiple benefits they provide and how they can contribute to climate change targets”. A strategic vision would be a high level aspirational statement about the benefits that we want the uplands to provide for Scotland, both now and in the future, and the balance of land uses that we need to achieve this.

Several key messages emerged from consultation on the draft Strategy, including:

- strong support for this proposal, with 84% of contributors agreeing that a vision could help to determine land use priorities in the uplands;
- recognition of the diversity of upland land use and the need for clear links to other policies relating, for example, to moorland, forestry and wild land, and;
- a view that the uplands should be clearly defined for this purpose.

A more detailed review of the responses can be found at <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/03/6371>.

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has been commissioned to lead this scoping process and report to Ministers by the end of 2016. ***It is important to emphasise that we are not attempting to develop a vision at this stage. The aim of this process is to consider what a vision would need to address, how it could be developed and who should be involved. This will allow Ministers to decide whether or not to proceed with the development of a vision for the uplands.***

As part of the scoping process it will be important to obtain the views of key stakeholders, and we would therefore welcome any thoughts on how this task could be approached. Some key questions to consider are listed below.

Where are the uplands?

1. What broad characteristics should we use to define the uplands? Some possible approaches are summarised in the annex to this note.

What benefits do the uplands provide to Scotland?

2. What are the key social, economic and environmental benefits that the uplands provide for Scotland?
3. How can upland land use help to prevent or reduce the impacts of climate change?

What should an upland vision include?

4. A strategic vision could inform decisions about the balance between different land uses in different parts of the uplands. What are the key choices that an upland vision should address, and why?
5. Are there any other topics or issues that should be included in an upland vision, and if so why?
6. Are there any topics or issues that should be excluded from an upland vision, and if so why?

How should the vision be developed?

7. Which stakeholders do you think it would be particularly important to involve, and how? Would particular approaches be needed, for example, to reach particular groups?
8. What are your views on the process that might be needed to bring together the key interests and develop a shared vision?
9. Who would be best placed to lead this process?
10. What form should a vision for the uplands take (visual or descriptive, maps, diagrams or text)?
11. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

Annex: Where are the uplands?

Introduction

Many parts of Scotland could be said to have an upland character, including the extensive hills and moors of the Highlands & Islands, the lower hills of the Central Belt and the rolling landscapes of the Southern Uplands. During consultation on the draft Land Use Strategy, a number of respondents suggested that any vision should be based on a clear and widely agreed definition of the uplands. This short note considers some ways in which this could be achieved.

General considerations

A suitable approach to defining the uplands must be clear and robust, and attract broad support across different land use sectors. The chosen approach will need to work at an appropriate level for strategic decision-making and avoid fine-grained debate about the status of small marginal areas. The definition should also be easy to understand without a map, but should lend itself to mapping if needed (at a level of detail that is consistent with its purpose).

Many communities are closely linked to upland areas and rely on the benefits that the uplands provide, and there might therefore be a case for including these communities within the definition of the uplands. This might not, however, be straightforward in practice, as different communities form a continuum and relate to the uplands in a wide variety of ways. While these links are perhaps clearest for small rural communities, some major cities, such as Edinburgh, could also be said to have strong links to nearby hills such as the Pentlands. An alternative approach might therefore be to use a relatively narrow and robust physical definition of the uplands and ensure that the vision clearly captures the importance of this resource to a wide range of communities.

Some possible approaches

- The simplest way to define the uplands might arguably be to base this on **altitude**. This would be easy to map, although it would not be easy to identify a single threshold altitude that makes sense in all parts of Scotland. This is particularly true in the north-west, where land with an upland character often extends down to sea level.
- The uplands are often defined as land lying above the **limit of enclosed farmland**. This approach might attract reasonably broad agreement and could be based on existing data. This boundary is usually also fairly obvious on the ground.
- It is possible to envisage various other ways in which the uplands could be defined, for example according to upland **vegetation cover**, **climate** or **land capability** classes (<http://www.soils-scotland.gov.uk/data/lca250k>).
- It might be possible to define the uplands on the basis of landscape qualities, for example based on **landscape character types**, although some further work may be required to achieve this in a consistent way across Scotland. There might also be scope to use other landscape criteria such as **remoteness** or **ruggedness** of terrain, although these would not necessarily capture all of Scotland's uplands.
- There might be some scope to use administrative boundaries such as **local authority areas** or the **Less Favoured Areas** (LFAs) that are used to help target agricultural

support, although these approaches might tend to include areas that are not necessarily upland in character.