

## **East Lothian Council Response**

### **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.

The Ash Landscape Character Assessment for the Lothians, 1998, commissioned by SNH, has the Lammermuirs as 'Uplands' or 'Upland Fringe' and the ridges as 'Lowland Hills and Ridges'. Individual hills in the plain were sometimes mentioned in the commentary. The East Lothian Local Landscape Review retained this identification. In the East Lothian context, it is therefore our view that the Lammermuirs and some parts of the foothills do constitute uplands, and so should be included in the definition, while ridges such as the Garleton hills, or individual hills such as Traprain or North Berwick Law do not.

Upland areas identified should be reasonably extensive. The definition should avoid including individual small hills or small ridges as features. Using altitude alone may lead to problems with regard to this; landcover might also indicate that some of these smaller areas or individual features are 'upland'. The definition chosen should include the areas that are commonly considered as upland; perhaps relative difference in height between the upland and surrounding area is part of this.

The limit of enclosed farming may also have some problems in that areas which are within uplands, and would probably generally be considered uplands, could be excluded. The area around the Whiteadder Reservoir in East Lothian is one such area. Rivers valleys could also be problematic, as well as conifer plantations planted over the intuitive upland/lowland divide.

What is chosen as the boundary is linked to what the vision includes, in particular whether land used for marginal enclosed farming should be included within the visions. Farms may include an element of both enclosed and unenclosed land; is it better for these to be included as a unit?

### **What benefits do the uplands provide to Scotland?**

2. What are the key social, economic and environmental benefits that the uplands provide for Scotland?

Landscape value is important in defining the character of the area and even those who do not visit the uplands may appreciate this. Their value as a recreational resource for walkers and cyclists is important. Due to their accessible location, uplands in East Lothian provide potential for people to have an upland experience without the need to travel far from home.

The major land uses in the East Lothian Lammermuirs are management for grouse shooting, wind farming, and water infrastructure along with some agriculture and commercial forestry. The Lammermuirs also have unique ecological habitat value and contains scheduled flora and fauna. The uplands are also important as the backdrop to East Lothian in landscape and visual terms, which is important for the tourist offer.

Water management is also important, both for supply and as flood attenuation.

### **3. How can upland land use help to prevent or reduce the impacts of climate change?**

- A. Peat is important as a carbon store, and undisturbed, peatland continues to accumulate carbon. To mitigate climate change, upland land use should avoid damage to peatland and allow restoration. Heather moorland burning releases carbon and can exacerbate peat/soil erosion (in addition to potential effects on water quality).

- B. The role of the uplands in water supply is important. This interacts with climate change in that if rainfall drops (pun unavoidable) how should water supply issues be resolved? Will more infrastructure be needed, which again affects the uplands, or can it be addressed in other ways? Related to this is if rain falls in more concentrated bursts, run-off from the uplands may cause flooding downstream. More woodland planting may help mitigate this through slowing down run-off. River system modifications may also have a role here.
- C. Upland land use could allow and plan for migration of species where warming requires them to move further uphill/northwards (where possible).
- D. Use of land for windfarms and other renewable energy sources.

#### **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?

- A. A main land use of the East Lothian Lammermuirs is management of the moor for grouse shooting. Although primarily a small section of the population benefit from this in recreational terms, there is also some economic benefit to the area. It also means the moors are managed in a particular way, which now forms part of their character though it also has adverse impacts (some species and habitat, water management, carbon emissions). Whether this is the best approach to moorland management for society as a whole is debated. Other uses may be more economically productive or have more public benefit.
- B. Windfarms can help address climate change but there are landscape effects which can impact on recreational value (both improving in some ways by increasing access and detracting by reducing the perception of wildness and visual amenity). Any upland vision would need careful assessment of the balance to be struck.
- C. The role of farming in the uplands, particularly sheep. Sheep are now part of the character of the many parts of the uplands. Their role can be both positive and negative in terms of habitat management depending on the intensity and period of grazing.
- D. Commercial forestry – what level of commercial forestry should be encouraged/aimed for, what species should be planted, and are the uplands the place for it?
- E. Climate change impact on species – as the climate warms, ecosystems and species may migrate upwards.
- F. The vision should encourage landowners to promote public access to the uplands. Encouraging public access in the hills will have obvious health and wellbeing benefits for the public as well as economic benefits.

Linking these issues is the question of where public money is being spent and what on: is the public getting the best result for this money in terms of the services that uplands could provide? Are some of the public benefits that the uplands could provide so important that restrictions on some current upland activities are justified?

#### **5. Are there any other topics or issues that should be included in an upland vision, and if so why?**

It should be recognised that uplands such as the Lammermuirs are highly significant on a local level and this local importance should be given weight in an upland vision. The recreational, ecological and landscape of these hills as uplands is important locally and should not be lost in a comparison with the larger and more extensive Highlands.

#### **6. Are there any topics or issues that should be excluded from an upland vision, and if so why?**

Some issues may be reserved matters (for example defence). Consideration would have to be given to how or if these could be included.

**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?

- A. Lessons could be learned from the demise of Natural England 'Vital Uplands' strategy. Farmers and landowners may have very different ideas about the use of their land to those that are looking at it from outside. If the vision is to be successful, either farmers/landowners have to be persuaded or have an incentive to sign up for it, or a robust approach would have to be taken. How the freedom of people to do what they wish with their land interacts with public benefit from the uplands may need to be addressed.
- B. Groups and individuals that recreate in the uplands also need adequate representation, as do those with an interest in biodiversity or landscape.

**8. What are your views on the process that might be needed to bring together the key interests and develop a shared vision?**

There should be recognition that it may not be possible to produce a vision which is acceptable to all stakeholders.

**9. Who would be best placed to lead this process?**

- A. SNH may be seen as having too much of a role in natural heritage protection. One option might be to have a panel commissioned by Scottish Ministers along the lines of the independent Planning Review. .

**10. What form should a vision for the uplands take (visual or descriptive, maps, diagrams or text)?**

- A. Brief and to the point. It must show that demonstrable positive change is the intended outcome.

**11. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?**

It is important that the vision be relevant for all areas of uplands including East Lothian.