

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 definition will depend on the purpose of the vision. If the vision is expected to be a relatively loose document, drawing together a range of issues and ambitions and helping shape future decisions, then the definition can also be loose.

If the vision is expected to have practical, local effect, e.g. in development control applications, or in the award of agricultural subsidies, then the definition will need to be tight, and capable of being plotted on a map.

The question of whether or not to include local communities in the vision should also be considered. A geographical, altitudinal or ecological definition may exclude those communities who have a close relationship with the uplands.

For the National Trust for Scotland, we value the uplands of Scotland for their conservation interest, their natural beauty, their relative wildness, the range of species and habitats they support, their living cultural inheritance, their value as a place of resort and recreation, and the working practices that have shaped and sustain our uplands.

We would therefore want an upland vision definition to encompass: landscape, species and habitats, agriculture and forestry, recreational use, other relevant uses (e.g. energy), and communities (bringing in issues of infrastructure, access, services, etc.).

What benefits do the uplands provide to Scotland?

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

This will come back to the definition, but at a minimum: existence value, landscape for public enjoyment, species and habitats, land-based industries, and contributions to the wider environment (carbon storage, water catchments, etc.).

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

In terms of adaptation, uplands in good condition make an obvious contribution to managing changing rainfall patterns. Effective upland management may also help species move and adapt to a changing climate.

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?

The proposal for an upland vision has emerged from the Land Use Strategy action plan, itself a strategy intended to inform decisions at regional level about the balance between different land uses. The purpose of having a specific Upland Vision, that will sit alongside regional Land Use Strategy plans, needs to be drawn out.

Is this intended to help inform partnerships in developing their own land use plans? Is it intended to inform development control plans (National Planning Framework, Strategic Development plans, Local Development Plans)?

On many of the issues, the Upland Vision will need to incorporate a national perspective, considering issues in the round, for it to be useful, e.g. forestry expansion, or increasing our renewable energy capacity.

Currently, there are land use issues that are common to rural areas across Scotland, though they are particularly prominent in the uplands:

- Forestry expansion
- Maintaining open spaces for their biodiversity and landscape value
- Maintaining and restoring our peatlands
- Maintaining and enhancing our priority species and habitats, given climatic change and other land use pressures
- Upland agricultural practices and their sustainability
- Sport shooting and associated land management
- Upland track creation
- Renewable energy, both wind and hydro
- Business and community infrastructure and services

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?

For the Upland Vision to be useful, it will need to incorporate all relevant issues.

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?

Land owners and land managers in the uplands.

Communities and businesses immediately adjacent to the uplands, who may not be captured by a tight geographical definition.

For the conservation and recreational value of the uplands, it will be important to include those with an interest in the uplands, who are not necessarily resident in the immediate area. Relevant communities of interest and sectoral representatives could help supply these perspectives.

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

This will need to begin with a clear understanding of the purpose of the vision and how it will be applied. This can be followed by building the evidence base, possible stakeholder groups to agree the main issues and approaches, and a lead body to draft and consult on the vision.

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

At the moment, SNH. If the vision is being developed over a longer period, it could become a task for the new Scottish Land Commission.

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

As with Question 1, this will depend on the purpose of the Upland Vision. A relatively loose document, intended to help inform thinking, could use only a narrative. A tight definition, intended to direct planning or agricultural subsidy decisions, would require accurate mapping.

11. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

The abandonment of Natural England's upland vision "*Vital Uplands: A 2060 Vision*" (launched in 2009 and withdrawn in 2012) should be an object lesson for us.

It may be better to have a more focused document, that has wider acceptance, than a more ambitious document that fails to find its audience.

BREXIT and the likely exit from the Common Agricultural Policy also make it more difficult to plan for upland land use. In the long term, a revised system of land management support could mean new approaches in the uplands, but this is likely to take several years to emerge. In the meantime, the vision could help establish consensus on the social, economic and environmental benefits we derive from the uplands, and which we particularly want to support in the future.

SNH
August 2016

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.