

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.

We consider that the discussion in the annex is useful and helpful. We see merit in the second point referring to land above the limit of enclosed farmland.

However, this definition is land-based and if we refer to the national Land Use Strategy (LUS), which originated this work, then a more people-based vision might be more appropriate. The LUS vision (to 2050) is:

“A Scotland where we fully recognise, understand and value the importance of our land resources, and where our plans and decisions about land use will deliver improved and enduring benefits, enhancing the wellbeing of our nation.”

(<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Environment/Countryside/Landusestrategy>)

The LUS vision is thus focused towards human attitudes, and the expected outcomes of “plans and decisions about land use”

What benefits do the uplands provide to Scotland?

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

Social – access to nature/wildlife with proven health benefits, space for active outdoor pursuits, appreciation of the scenery and wild landscape

Economic - currently, the main economic sectors are services (public and private, mostly local but some regional/national/international, such as tourism), cattle and sheep farming (both heavily subsidised), and energy generation (with new renewables receiving major fiscal and planning support). There is a little manufacturing and mining. Bigger enterprises are often owned or financed from outwith the uplands, meaning dispersion and uncertainty of management. The “benefits” and “well-being” attached to these various sectors vary widely. A “vision” should seek to identify which sectors and characteristics should succeed in the longer run; clearly there is much dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs. However, assuming no major disruption to international and perhaps national trade (e.g. rampant protectionism, or transport fuel shortages), the economic sustainability of benefits will depend primarily on external demand.

Environmental – natural flood management, habitats for a wide variety of species, carbon sequestration, preservation of soils

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

Peat conservation and restoration – carbon sequestration

Woodland, preferably deciduous/native, expansion

Natural flood management to reduce severity of future increased flood events

Wind farms = renewable energy (although we should recognize that siting is highly important if we are not to lose the other environmental benefits and we need to recognize that we are approaching the limit of the grid to cope with intermittent power)

Additional hydro renewable energy but remaining capacity is probably negligible

Pumped storage to address intermittency of renewables

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?

Reafforestation & peatland restoration vs. sustaining current levels of grazing by sheep and deer

Development such as wind farms, recreational facilities and tourism facilities vs. the tourist appeal and health benefits of wild and untouched scenery

Artificial drainage vs. natural flood management

SLE desire to be left to “steward” the land in their way vs. the wider public benefits of more regulation, e.g. deer numbers

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

The uplands of Scotland are essentially a badly degraded landscape, largely bereft of native trees and in poor ecological health. Report after report highlight limited areas of native woodland, areas where peat is in poor shape, and large areas where the vegetation is in an unsatisfactory condition and lacks diversity. Communities physically close to upland areas are often too dependent on activities which require few jobs and on seasonal tourism.

We suggest that SNH should start from the point where the overarching vision is to bring the uplands back into good ecological health. We all know what that means in terms of deer numbers, grouse moors and upland sheep farming. This is not to suggest that these activities should cease, but that they should be carried out in ways that support improvements in the ecology of the uplands. The benefits of environmental recovery include greater carbon sequestration, the reduced likelihood of flooding causing major downstream damage, greater diversity of wildlife, and an enhanced experience for a wide range of visitors. Efforts to rehabilitate the uplands in these ways are likely to bring as many or more jobs than many of the traditional activities pursued there

Another issue to consider is zoning. This concept is critical, as almost all the land defined by SNH as 'wild' is also 'upland'. There needs to be a strengthening of the protection of these areas from infrastructure developments without giving the impression that anything goes in upland areas not defined in SNH's “wild land” map.

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

No comments

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?

Landowners, public interest, local authorities, recreational groups, NGOs, local communities

We think that it is important to emphasize that communities of interest' outwith an area are as important as communities which are physically within or close to the area. Often,

external communities are the economic life blood of local upland communities.

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

We think that SNH are best placed to sort this out.

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

SNH

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

A vision needs to be descriptive, using as few words as possible. It is unlikely to be articulated in sufficient detail that maps and diagrams are helpful

11. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

No

