

Strategic vision for the uplands consultation

Plantlife Scotland response

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## 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.

It would not be a helpful definition if the uplands were defined arbitrarily by altitude, as is noted in the discussion in the annex. There are areas in the north of Scotland that could be described as upland in character due to vegetation, soil or landuse, but are at a low altitude. A simple definition could be the unenclosed land beyond settlements, although exception may have to be made for single farmsteads with their inbye.

## What benefits do the uplands provide to Scotland?

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

Environmental - carbon sequestration and flood alleviation through peatland restoration and management; plant and fungi diversity through low nutrient inputs and un-intensive management; water storage in snow patches

Social - opportunities for enjoying looking for rare and unusual arctic/alpine plants; climbing, walking and skiing.

Economic - a diverse vegetation provides a range of habitat types for a range of wildlife to live in, supporting wildlife tourism.

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

By making the uplands more 'spongy' to slow water flow through catchments, especially small catchments, and by providing space within extensive habitat types for plant species to migrate to their optimum environmental conditions. This in turn makes upland ecosystems more resilient to climate change and home to a diversity of wildlife.

## 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 big challenge for biodiversity conservation, itself dependent on effective wild plant conservation, is the combination or exclusion of impacts on vegetation of wild and domestic herbivores, deer management objectives, afforestation, natural woodland regeneration and fences. Muirburn and wild plant diversity. Wild or self-willed land and natural processes, and semi-natural processes involving human activity. The uplands represent a huge part of Scotland's land area, all of it providing ecosystems services and all of it managed to a greater or lesser extent. An upland vision needs to provide the



spatial context for appropriate land use decisions that maintain current and future ecosystem services through conserving species diversity and habitat mosaics.

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

Spatial Planning at a strategic level that builds ecological connectivity and ecosystem resilience to change

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

Not for wild plant conservation.

**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?

It is important to include communities of interest as well as communities of place.

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

Sensible round-table discussions with a clear timetable and a clear output that Parliament supports and enables action to deliver the vision. SNH should be nominated the lead body for delivering this vision working with partners.

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

SNH seem the appropriate body to provide the secretariat, but the process may benefit from being chaired by a person respected by the different sectors involved - an honest broker, if you like. This person would need to have experience of land management and have made valued contributions to upland management and environmental sustainability.

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

That is a design question. Working out the content that is acceptable to most is the initial process.

11. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

No.