



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

A response on behalf of Scotland's Moorland Forum

Note

This response has been prepared after discussion with some members of the Forum at the Chairman's working Group on 14th October 2016. It has also drawn on the views expressed in some responses submitted by member organisations of the Forum. It is believed to be representative of a Forum view, but it has not been circulated for comment to all Forum members.

WHERE ARE THE UPLANDS?

1. What broad characteristics should we use to define the uplands?

The Moorland Forum has considered it to be unhelpful to define moorlands and uplands. The Forum has operated with a fuzzy boundary in mind and this has proved to be effective.

Nature does not recognise such artificial boundaries, and as stated in the annex to SNH's letter, in parts of Scotland, upland vegetation exists at sea level. Therefore, the approach adopted in the second bullet point is the preferred option (... land lying above the limit of enclosed farmland...).

The Forum sees the uplands as embracing the communities that live in these areas, who carry out the management activity that achieves society's aspirations for the uplands.

WHAT BENEFITS DO THE UPLANDS PROVIDE TO SCOTLAND?

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

The benefits can be described by considering the key ecosystem services supplied by the uplands, for example:

Social:	Access and recreation activities, spiritual and cultural value.
Economic:	Food and fibre from livestock (upland agriculture), timber production from woodland, land for sporting activity (deer stalking, grouse shooting and fishing), landscape value and its links to tourism.
Environmental:	Upland species diversity, habitat diversity for the benefit of soils, carbon capture and storage, water (quality and quantity).

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

The maintenance of the upland peat stocks as a store of carbon is a key issue for the uplands. This is linked to the better management of peatland to capture and then store more atmospheric carbon and reduce the emission of greenhouse gases. Increased woodland cover in the uplands, and on the upland fringe, has a similar effect.

As a host for renewable energy developments, the uplands have an important role in reducing 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?

Addressing the balance between different land uses is likely to be too detailed for an upland vision. This concept strays into the remit of the Land Use Strategy and even this strategy has yet to provide a clear indication of how it may be possible to guide the balance between different land uses.

A valuable role for the Vision might be to address the aspirations of the local communities and local interest groups and to encourage them to come together and make decisions about the future.

The [Upland Solutions project](#)¹, which was run by the Moorland Forum 2008-2011, compared two case studies about local perspectives in different parts of Scotland; it illustrates the nature of the issues that a Vision will need to address.

The Vision should provide some indication about how it is to be delivered. It should be recognised that delivery will require investment. If this is not available from public funds, mechanisms will need to be in place to encourage investment from other sources. For investment to take place the Vision will need to provide a degree of certainty about future uplands policy.

The economics of land management are an important consideration and shape the choices that landowners and managers make. It will be important to recognise the roles of the owners and managers of the land and the need for most of them to achieve some financial return to cover the costs of ownership and management.

The ability to achieve a financial return from landownership and management activity should not be seen as exploitation; it should be encouraged, as it will justify investment that will provide benefit for the uplands.

Discussion will be required about how public financial support for land management should be targeted. Should it be linked purely to the supply of public goods, which have no market value, or will some form of basic payment, perhaps area based, be required to maintain incomes in the uplands and keep communities viable. Should payments be made for businesses that are not directly connected to land management?

¹ <http://www.moorlandforum.org.uk/reports/upland-solutions-project>

The Forum has been addressing the concerns about the loss of skilled people in the uplands. The Vision should cover training needs, supported by appropriate opportunities for knowledge exchange.

The Vision will need to provide an approach to take account of the regional and local differences between different parts of the uplands. A one-size-fits-all approach will not work.

Management of the uplands depends on people and people depend on the support available in their communities. The Vision should support local communities by protecting the environment, local employment opportunities and improving infrastructure, transport and communication links

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

As there are multiple land uses and multiple land users in the uplands, conflicts are bound to occur. The Vision should consider introducing a process to resolve conflicts.

There is increasing support for operating at a larger scale to achieve greater benefits. An approach that operates at a catchment / landscape scale is likely to achieve greater benefit than an initiative that is hemmed in by artificial, unnatural boundaries.

Open moorland and landscapes should be recognised as a valid land type alongside afforested land and land designated for other purposes. For example, land managed for conservation, agriculture, grouse production, recreation, forestry or deer stalking should all be recognised as valid land uses. All uses are important for social, environmental and economic reasons. However, it must be recognised that a balance is required between different land uses and the Vision should identify how a balance is to be achieved and maintained.

The Vision should address how to achieve a better connection between users and providers. Users might cover those taking recreation in the uplands but also the remote consumers of the ecosystem services (for example the supply of water) provided by the uplands.

The development of the Vision should be prepared to move beyond the existing and traditional issues and identify new opportunities. The Vision may need to adopt a bold approach to proposing ways to move beyond a stereotype view of the uplands.

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

No, with the exception of trying to guide the balance between different land uses, the vision should be all-inclusive.

HOW SHOULD THE VISION BE DEVELOPED?

7. Which stakeholders do you think it would be particularly important to involve, and how?

All stakeholders should be engaged in the process – both those living and working in the uplands and those with other interests in the issues.

There should be an emphasis on local people to develop local solutions to meet the aspirations of their communities. The involvement of locally elected councillors would provide a link to local democracy.

A connection should be made to the proposed regional land use partnerships described in the Land Use Strategy.

To make progress, some form of Steering Group will be required. It will not be possible to include everyone directly in the process, but the Group should aim to involve a cross-section of interest groups that is representative of the full range of interests.

It will be essential that those not directly engaged do not feel disenfranchised. Good communications will be an essential part of the process.

An early task for the Steering Group will be to make proposals for the desired form of the vision – length, structure, format etc.

7.1 Would particular approaches be needed, for example, to reach particular groups?

To make sure that no-one can argue that they have been left out, the views of the various interests should be sought, before any drafting is done.

Based on the Moorland Forum's experience gained during the Understanding Predation project, it would be wise to consider early one-to-one meetings between a representative of the Steering Group and some organisations that might not otherwise wish to engage.

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

As stated in the response to Q7, a Steering Group of some description will be required. This risks criticism for not being all-inclusive from the outset, but a smaller group will be necessary to provide the necessary focus and leadership to develop momentum for the process.

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

The Moorland Forum is willing to play a role in developing the Vision. The Forum has a cross-sector membership that is used to working together and discussing issues of this nature.

However, it is likely that an independent structure would be needed to achieve the development of a successful vision. The Forum may have a role in helping to establish the

structure and facilitating the operation of any group or committee that is formed to develop the Vision.

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

All these options have their attractions and the best choice will depend on the length and complexity of the Vision that is decided upon. A relatively short vision, with a dependence on text with some visual information might be a starting point for discussion.

11. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

The Vision should be all embracing and seek to provide linkages between other single-issue strategies. The Vision should not seek to identify upland activity in isolation but it should aim to provide a framework to integrate all activity. The Vision should recognise the inter-dependence of the different activities in the uplands.

An objective, pragmatic approach to the development process should be adopted. If the Vision becomes too far removed from practicalities, from local people or aims to deliver too much, it will lose impact and effectiveness.

The management objectives of local people, their communities and all types of owners and managers of land must be taken into account. The Vision should celebrate the many reasons and cultural traditions associated with land ownership and management. It should also recognise that there are many valid ways that the uplands can be cared for and developed. The diversity that this produces adds value to the landscape and provides benefit for the plant and animal species that live in the uplands.

Regulation is important but there should be an acknowledgement that the objectives set for the regulation will only be achieved when the managers of land understand the objectives and can see their relevance. Regulation must be supported by good guidance.

The uplands are not just about traditional management practices. The Vision must encourage a more dynamic approach that embraces all opportunities including: renewable energy schemes, tourism, access and recreation, and novel enterprises that will make use of the natural capital in the uplands. The Vision should therefore consider how we could invest collectively in the future.

Conflict between the many and varied users and uses in the uplands is a barrier to progress. The Vision should establish a mechanism to address conflict, where it is identified. However, the Vision should also recognise that it will not be possible to resolve all conflicts and that it may be necessary for different interests to learn to live together.

The Vision should be inspiring and promote opportunities for positive change, where change is necessary, and where change is not required, it should promote the current aspects of the Scottish uplands that make them world renowned.

Collectively, we need to make the most of the uplands, which are such an iconic part of Scotland.

Simon Thorp
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