



Scottish Natural Heritage
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba

All of nature for all of Scotland
Nàdar air fad airson Alba air fad

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

Introduction

In March 2016 the Scottish Government published Scotland's second Land Use Strategy, which provides a high level vision for land use in Scotland from 2016 to 2021 (<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Environment/Countryside/Landusestrategy>). The Strategy set out a Vision, Objectives and Principles for Sustainable Land Use, and contained a number of policies and proposals which provide a programme of action for the next five years.

Proposal 5 indicated that the Scottish Government would “scope the potential to develop a strategic vision for the uplands, exploring the multiple benefits they provide and how they can contribute to climate change targets”. A strategic vision would be a high level aspirational statement about the benefits that we want the uplands to provide for Scotland, both now and in the future, and the balance of land uses that we need to achieve this.

Several key messages emerged from consultation on the draft Strategy, including:

- strong support for this proposal, with 84% of contributors agreeing that a vision could help to determine land use priorities in the uplands;
- recognition of the diversity of upland land use and the need for clear links to other policies relating, for example, to moorland, forestry and wild land, and;
- a view that the uplands should be clearly defined for this purpose.

A more detailed review of the responses can be found at <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/03/6371>.

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has been commissioned to lead this scoping process and report to Ministers by the end of 2016. ***It is important to emphasise that we are not attempting to develop a vision at this stage. The aim of this process is to consider what a vision would need to address, how it could be developed and who should be involved. This will allow Ministers to decide whether or not to proceed with the development of a vision for the uplands.***

As part of the scoping process it will be important to obtain the views of key stakeholders, and we would therefore welcome any thoughts on how this task could be approached. Some key questions to consider are listed below.

SNH
August 2016

General response from SRUC's Hill & Mountain Research Centre

We feel it important to emphasise, right from the start, that in the vast majority of cases the management of any one enterprise within Scotland's uplands cannot be viewed in isolation from the enterprises that surround it. Ultimately it is the economics of those enterprises – driven as much by the aspirations of the land managers and owners as by policy and regulation - which will dictate the types of management that are practiced in the uplands.

In addition, climate change is happening now and will continue to impact adversely on upland land use practices and production. The drive for increased renewable energy production, for a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from farming and forestry, for greater capture of carbon in peatlands, for the establishment of new woodlands, and for reductions in flooding and flood risk in the lowlands are only a few of the many challenges currently affecting Scotland that wider society will be looking for land managers – and especially upland land managers – to help tackle effectively.

It is just as important to emphasise that the majority of upland land use management decisions of any one enterprise cannot be viewed in isolation from the wider economic and social context of that enterprise. As highlighted by Heggie & McCracken (2014), Scotland's rural areas (many of which are within the uplands) also face major social and economic challenges, e.g. limited economic regeneration and employment opportunities; lack of sufficient affordable housing; high energy costs for business and homes; poor transport infrastructure; an ageing population; increasing youth out-migration; increasing elderly in-migration.

Successfully addressing any one of the economic, environmental or social challenges facing Scotland's upland rural areas will require ensuring that the right things happen, at the right time, in the right places, at the right scale. However, the decisions and actions implemented to address any one of these issues also have the potential to complement or conflict with decisions and actions taken to address each or all of the other concerns. The major challenge facing Scotland's uplands is therefore how best to ensure that the needs of land managers and communities in those areas are taken into account and integrated effectively with the need to manage natural resources sustainably. There is therefore a need to ensure that actions are planned in an integrated way, taking into account the spatial locations and scale at which all the actions need to be addressed.

Heggie, R. & McCracken, D.I. 2014 The importance of integrated spatial planning in rural areas. In: Skerratt, S., Atterton, J., Brodie, E., Carson, D., Heggie, R., McCracken, D., Thomson, S. & Woolvin, M. *Rural Scotland in Focus 2014*, 90-101. Rural Policy Centre, Scotland's Rural College, Edinburgh.

Response to specific questions

As indicated in SNH's covering letter above, the Scottish Government wants to “*scope the potential to develop a strategic vision for the uplands, exploring the multiple benefits they provide and how they can contribute to climate change targets*”. It is stated that such a strategic vision “*would be a high level aspirational statement about the benefits that we want the uplands to provide for Scotland, both now and in the future, and the balance of land uses that we need to achieve this*”.

Such a high-level aspirational statement would be laudable to produce. But to really be of value, such a statement also needs to include some high-level consideration of what then needs to be done in order to achieve such as vision, especially given, for example: the limited production potential in the uplands and the impact of this on enterprise viability; difficulties associated with existing transport infrastructure and remoteness from markets; that many rural communities in upland areas are disconnected from the land management that surrounds them; that many land managers in upland areas are disconnected from the benefits their land management brings to other businesses in the uplands (and more widely) through attracting tourists; ongoing climate change constraints; and the need for any one enterprise to consist of integrated land uses in order to increase viability and hence resilience to future economic and climatic shocks¹.

Without such a high-level consideration of the challenges and opportunities facing the uplands, and what needs to be (or could be) done to address these, it is questionable what use the type of high-level aspirational statement described in the covering letter would be on its own. Also, given the diversity of the uplands, further questions are the degree of detail it should include and whether it should be complemented by more detailed regional visions, action plans etc.

¹ Many of these topics were discussed earlier this year at a conference in Edinburgh where one session focused on the challenges of integrating different land uses in the uplands. Details of the presentations in that session and further reading is available at: http://www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120470/sruc-sepa_conference/1637/sruc_and_sepa_conference_2016_-_conference_programme/2

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 rationale behind the interest in the development of a vision for the uplands is to help with the recognition of what types of land use and land management change are required to deliver the range of benefits which society wants or needs to see delivered from the uplands. So any definition needs to ensure that it incorporates all parts of Scotland with upland characteristics and does not draw a false division between one part of one enterprise and any other component part.

Hence a definition based on altitude and/or terrain roughness might only cover the c. 40% of Scotland which is mountainous but would remove the other c. 30% of Scotland where land of upland character – and hence where land use is subject to the same or very similar constraints as on the mountains. Similarly, a definition based on “above the hill dyke” or “beyond the limit of enclosed farmland” would falsely divide enterprises into different component parts and fail to recognise that land management decisions take into account those different components and are not mutually exclusive.

The most obvious and sensible way to define the uplands in the context of this vision is to use a combination of criteria based on vegetation cover, climate and land capability classes, i.e. base the definition on those factors which most constrain land use and land use management decisions. This should ensure, in most cases, that entire enterprises are captured by the definition and also be broad enough to ensure that the rural communities within and near to these enterprises also fall within the definition.

Such vegetation, climate and land capability descriptions already exist, are an accepted approach when talking uplands in Scotland, and would not require lots of additional work to develop the definition. That would mean that the development of the strategic vision could concentrate on what society wants the uplands to deliver and what needs to be done to achieve this. Nevertheless, given that the definition would frame the vision, the process establishing the definition must be consultative (see answers to questions 7-10).

What benefits do the uplands provide to Scotland?

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

As has been widely established, the uplands of Scotland provide a wide range of public benefits. These include productive benefits such as food, timber, water, biodiversity, cultural assets and iconic aesthetic qualities e.g. highly valued landscapes. Traditional land uses such as game management, hill-farming and forestry are important for local economies and also important for the viability and identity of local communities. Recreation and tourism supported by the Scottish uplands are of national economic significance. Therefore ensuring good public access to the uplands, in a way that is sensitive to other land uses and biodiversity, is important.

For rural communities, the Scottish uplands offer opportunities for a high quality of life. There is considerable value attached to sense of place, belonging to a community, local cultural history and connection to the land. There are several examples of community initiatives and community-owned assets that bring considerable social and economic benefits to upland areas.

The regional and local diversity of different parts of upland Scotland needs to be recognised for the unique sets of benefits they provide and have the potential to provide for Scotland as a whole.

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

Renewable energy developments have an important role in reducing the impacts of climate change, and upland Scotland is already host to many wind and hydro developments. An integrated approach is required to identify optimal sites for further renewable projects while considering the value of areas for other forms of climate change prevention such as peatland restoration and woodland/forestry creation. Peatland restoration/management and woodland planting are also likely to help mitigate local climate change impacts both through natural flood management and through providing increased carbon sequestration. There is also potential for increased planting to provide biofuels.

A diversified approach to land use should be more widely supported and embedded in the uplands; single use management, which may be more susceptible to climate change, should be avoided. Thus,

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the vision should explore opportunities for more integrated land use including, for instance agroforestry, renewable energy, biofuels, local food production, and tourism. To reduce climate change impacts, we need to be prepared to alter the boundaries of conservation designations in response to changes in species range/movements and changes in habitats.

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?*

Scotland's upland area is finite. That, together with the fact that single sector land uses (e.g., farming, forestry, game management, tourism) will not be sustainable into the future, means that an upland vision needs to address the best approaches to integrating different land uses into enterprises in order to ensure that this (a) helps increase the economic viability of each enterprise and thereby its resilience to future economic and climatic shocks but also (b) ensures that the collective gains to society in terms of ecosystem services at the landscape level are more than the sum of the individual enterprise parts.

The development of such a vision will require a sufficient level of detail to recognise the complex distribution of costs and benefits from different land uses for different parts of society and at varying spatial scales. This is linked to values and motivations held by land managers, communities, NGOs, and the wider public. Developing a widely accepted shared vision for the uplands will require that all stakeholders recognise the range of values that underpin upland land use and work towards establishing common ground, from which shared priorities for the future of the uplands can be established. Such a process should help stakeholders move from entrenched perspectives on some issues, thus reducing conflict. Compromise is essential for achieving more equitable outcomes for land use; this should be recognised in stakeholder processes during the development of the vision. The vision should acknowledge the need to make trade-offs between the benefits that derive from competing land uses and to support approaches to doing so that incorporate a range of perspectives and aim for a balance of benefits (e.g. public and private), aligned with local potential and priorities.

The vision should be underpinned by high-quality training and knowledge exchange. There is a great deal of high-quality research and practitioner knowledge related to upland management. A vision that emphasises the role of knowledge and evidence should be empowering for all involved, as it will need broad input from stakeholders and should be linked to valuable training opportunities in upland land use.

The vision should be based on an understanding of the public benefits which are derived from upland management practices, thereby recognising the roles of managers themselves (whether public, private, NGO or community).

The vision should include potential mechanisms to enhance the delivery of particular benefits and consider innovative ways of achieving this while minimising conflict. Recent research that UHI and SRUC have carried out suggests that upland managers place a particularly high priority on the need for tools to deal with conflicting objectives. Academics/scientists should have a role in this process.

The vision should contain desirable outcomes related to current upland challenges, bringing together different strands, e.g.

- community development (e.g. positive community demographics)
- environmental sustainability
- provision of public benefits
- economic viability
- social capital

The vision should account for regional and local diversity in the challenges and opportunities that face the uplands. Choices in different parts of the uplands should be based on both the capacity of each area to deliver important public benefits e.g. carbon storage, biodiversity conservation, and the values and objectives of local communities and managers. The vision may contain recommendations for types of stakeholder forums and enhanced modes of consultation that may allow such decision-making to take place at appropriate spatial scales, which will need careful discussion and definition.

Many of these issues of direct relevance to those living and working in rural areas have been highlighted and discussed in the *Rural Scotland in Focus* series produced by SRUC since 2010: http://www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120428/rural_scotland_in_focus

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

See above where the need to consider the challenges and opportunities facing the uplands, and what needs to be (or could be) done to address these is highlighted as being essential in such a vision statement. A number of planning documents should be considered, such as those related to wild land and the location of infrastructure.

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

The topics to include should be driven by what society's aspirations are for the uplands. These are already very broad and so it would be difficult to imagine any topic that would be excluded.

Indeed, we would turn the question on its head and highlight that it is essential that the vision does not just cover land management per se but must also fully consider rural communities and their needs. Only then will such a vision encompass the full range of social, environmental and economic challenges and opportunities facing Scotland's uplands.

The creation of an upland vision needs to be a bottom-up participatory process involving all stakeholders. Any topics or issues identified during this process will then be addressed in a transparent way so that the vision developed is viewed as valid and a real reflection of the input of those who took part. There are controversial issues on which consensus will not be established; these need to be carefully handled. Processes are needed which encourage stakeholders to move away from the status quo on certain issues and consider the bigger picture of the uplands as a resource and asset valued by many for different reasons.

It is likely that the vision will be more enduring if it does not refer to the current policy landscape which is subject to regular change. Instead, the details of the vision should be used to inform future policy development – as mentioned above when we refer to the need for the vision to consider the challenges and opportunities facing the uplands, and what needs to be (or could be) done to address these.

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 will be essential to ensure that the full range of stakeholders living and working within upland areas are engaged in the process. This will include rural communities and not just land managers. Others from outwith these areas will also need to be involved to ensure that the vision fully reflects society's aspirations for the uplands and the aspirations of those living and working in the uplands. Truly participative approaches will be required to engage fully with all stakeholders involved.

A regional approach would be required in order to capture regional/local specificities that will influence a future vision and ensure that it is relevant at different spatial scales. Regional deliberative fora would provide relevant and accessible opportunities for stakeholder participation; it seems sensible that this should be conducted through the proposed regional land use partnerships described in the Land Use Strategy. An overall vision could be developed from the results of the regional processes together with a national-level process.

Key stakeholders should be engaged through representative organisations (e.g., Scottish Land & Estates, NFUS, NTS, JMT, SWT, RSPB, Community Land Scotland, Mountaineering Scotland), umbrella organisations (e.g., Scottish Environment Link, Moorland Forum, Scottish Consortium for Rural Research), and relevant government agencies (e.g., FCS, National Park authorities) to ensure that the process is conveyed as important and unifying. Community groups should also be approached. Deliberation tends to be more effective when stakeholder groups are mixed, as this increases opportunities for knowledge exchange and learning. There is considerable information on what types of regional stakeholder activities work well, from the land use pilots and other land use partnership projects. This information should be collated and made accessible to participants.

A range of participatory and deliberative decision-making tools could be used in engaging and creative processes to develop a vision, e.g. scenario development, multi-criteria decision analysis, valuation, participatory mapping, story-telling. There is a large volume of academic literature on the effectiveness and applicability of these methods. The involvement of academics will be important in designing and implementing effective participatory approaches.

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Lessons should be learned from the considerable number of previous vision development exercises conducted. Existing visions such as that for the Cairngorms National Park, which is widely recognised as a successful model of integrated land use, should be considered and built upon, in consultation with those involved in their development. It will be important to avoid 're-inventing the wheel' by repeating a process in similar ways and in the same areas. Information should therefore be collated from other vision development exercises.

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

As described above, regional-level deliberative fora with broad stakeholder participation would be required. To make the process engaging and useful for stakeholders, exchange of knowledge (from research and other projects/initiatives) should be part of the process. The participatory processes should be viewed as a way of developing local social capital that can be capitalised on in the future. Knowledge sharing should be a key part of this.

This is likely to be a complex, time-consuming and iterative process (i.e. involving the need to consult the same stakeholder groups a number of times as the vision develops). But without such an approach there will be limited buy-in from those who will be expected to deliver the vision or live within the uplands.

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

Neutral facilitators/researchers should design and run participatory processes to avoid pre-existing perceptions of bias from government agencies or other organisations. The process should be supported by stakeholders representing key interests in the form of a partnership steering group that should be diverse but not too large, including SNH, FCS, NFUS, SLE, JMT, SWT, RSPB, Community Land Scotland, Mountaineering Scotland etc. (see answer to question 7).

It will be key to ensure that such a steering group is familiar with the full range of social, environmental and economic challenges and opportunities facing the uplands of Scotland

Staff within UHI's Centre for Mountain Studies and SRUC's Hill & Mountain Research Centre and Rural Policy Centre would be happy to contribute to that process.

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

All of the above would be required to help inform the participatory process and the development of a shared vision based on outcomes expected by society. A mixed approach is likely to be most effective. A regional approach may involve a mapping element, but this depends on the issues at stake. High-quality and engaging visual communication tools should be employed in both the development and the dissemination of the vision, for example the use of maps, interactive web applications and possibly film-based methods.

11. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

None. Our comments cover all the additional points we wanted to make.

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11th October 2016

ENDS

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.

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