



southern uplands partnership
living land, living community

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Dear Mark

This is a response from the Southern Uplands Partnership to the call for comments on any future Vision for the Uplands of Scotland.

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 suggest unenclosed land – usually unimproved rough grazing, woodland, heather or bog. This is easy to visualise, relatively easy to map and keeps the scope broad. Artificial boundaries (eg based on altitude or landscape) are bound to be problematic.

What benefits do the uplands provide to Scotland?

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

- Jobs and therefore community in areas where there are few other opportunities, specifically farming, the forestry industry and
- Recreation (walking, cycling, climbing, wildlife watching)
- Field sports generate income (fees, keepers, beaters)
- Moorland “products” (grouse, sheep, timber, peat, wind energy, bracken, blueberry,)
- Support businesses (contractors, hotels, rural shops, gunsmiths,)

Water storage. Woodland, peatlands and bogs can store water and release it slowly thus reducing peak flows and maintain flows in times of drought.

Carbon sequestration. Active peat and native woodland will be absorbing carbon and storing it long-term.

Biodiversity. Natural upland habitats will maintain a wide range of species. Monocultures of heather or commercial timber crops will support much less.

The uplands are also important for their cultural value (history, archaeology, literary and artistic associations, and for the spiritual support they offer to many in the form of inspiration and relaxation.

The uplands also play a vital role in providing a scenic backdrop to many towns and villages, without which these places would be much less attractive as places to live or work.

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

Carbon sequestration and water storage must be the key roles.

Land use needs to maximise the amount of carbon kept locked-up or sequestered long-term. This would include peatland restoration and increased native woodland cover.

Land use should also seek to maximise ability to hold water- to reduce risks of flooding. Woodland, wetlands, bogs and peatland all play useful roles in water retention and flow-reduction.

Uplands also play a role in renewable energy generation – in the form of wind, hydro and solar energies, and of course they can also often produce biomass as a fuel.

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 key objective of an upland vision might involve encouraging land use decisions and practices which maximise multiple objectives. It should be possible, for example, to manage land for production whilst conserving biodiversity and maximising carbon sequestration and water retention. Too often a single management objective may be pursued without regard to the varied potential the land offers. Rather than discussing topics in the abstract, the upland vision should identify best practice.

The upland vision should also address the issue of significant changes in land use and management and the way in which such decisions may be influenced. Current policy favours continued afforestation which is likely to take place in the uplands. How can the realisation of planting targets be achieved in a way that is compatible with existing land uses and the varied potential of the land? How and where should the development of broadleaved or mixed woodland be encouraged?

Better knowledge will allow better decisions to be taken on what land use is appropriate where. Future sustainability will require application of the polluter-pays principle. Thus land-users that release carbon, or that increase risk of flooding should pay for the damage they do. Likewise, polluters will need to pay for the pollutants such as CO₂ and methane that they produce (or cause to be produced) to be cleaned-up.

There is an opportunity here to help reward land managers for appropriate land uses and to penalise them for negative ones. The upland vision should help to move our knowledge base forward to the stage where such costs and benefits can be fully evidenced and applied.

This will have to include the costs and benefits of all current and proposed land-uses.

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

We don't really know how climate change will alter the nature and character of the uplands. It may very well affect the land we can cultivate, the crops (and the trees) we can grow and the relative profitability of different land uses, including what we now call sustainable energy production. Not only these, but also the ability of the environment (most notably peat) to absorb CO₂ and mop up flood water - properties that would ameliorate slowly, but could deteriorate very quickly. So worth putting a bit of effort into scenario building (if we still call it that) - possibly more worthwhile than a 'vision'.

Considerable effort has been expended in assessing the ecological services provided by the uplands. How can this knowledge and these data be communicated at a local level and used to influence land use and land management decisions?

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

No comment.

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?

Obviously land owners are of particular importance as they own the resource and would need to be engaged at an early stage. The thinking behind the land use strategy and land reform policy suggests a need to increase public understanding of land-use options. Any vision for the uplands offers a chance to have a broad debate which should further develop public understanding of the issues and the options. This debate should thus involve communities living in or adjacent to the uplands and empowering them to believe that they can influence land use and management. It should also include the recreational users of the uplands to encourage mutual understanding between the users, their desires and the needs of landowners.

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

We suggest this task needs to be undertaken by an organisation that is seen to be neutral and without vested interests. This should encourage all stakeholders to engage and maximises the chance of developing a vision that can be shared.

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

We suggest that the role could be undertaken by different organisations in different parts of Scotland.

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

11. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

The Southern Uplands Partnership would be keen to be involved in helping to develop such a vision in future.

Yours sincerely

Pip Tabor
On behalf of the SUP Board.