

Scoping a Strategic Vision for the Uplands – Key Questions for Discussion

Angus Council Response

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.

As indicated in the briefing note, it is agreed that upland character commonly extends to sea level in the north-west Highlands. This typically correlates variously with farming and vegetation types, but also sometimes with landscape character classification. An approach simply based on altitude would therefore be too narrow.

The basis for the definition should be led from identifying the challenges/opportunities and characteristic of these types of areas and these informing the terminology, rather than necessarily using the term uplands which tends to lead to identifying areas which fit within this. Clear identification of characteristics may also need to apply any regional variations to reflect the landscape of that area (e.g. so whilst altitude could be a factor there may be regional variations of this).

A combination of a possible first preference as a suitable means to defining the uplands would be by using upland native vegetation cover and upland community structure. This would be followed by, climate and land capability classes and finally the consideration of uplands as land lying above the limit of enclosed farmland.

However the definition should also include upland livestock farming areas (which commonly takes place on agricultural class 4 or lower) much of which may be enclosed pasture. These areas often have significant potential to address climate change, forest expansion and flood mitigation objectives. This would also include unenclosed hill and moor, but such areas are often more enclosed than generally considered. For example, the Cairngorms Moorland Demonstration Project included the reinstatement of historic but moribund fencing in otherwise unenclosed landscapes to manage grazing.

Upland livestock areas, such as in the Angus Glens, often have extensive areas of native woodland remnants, which have substantial potential for regeneration and expansion. We therefore consider that a broad description be developed, which encompasses the above, but is capable of being mapped in broad terms by using a combination of agricultural land class; vegetation, and climate. This could possibly include agricultural class 4 land or poorer, as well as upland semi-natural vegetation cover and pasture.

The Landscape Character Assessment suite for Scotland is currently being reviewed. This review should lead to greater consistency and standardisation of classification across Scotland. It may therefore offer a verification check, and a possible tool to describe the diverse aspects of the definition of upland across Scotland, but is unlikely to provide a mapped area in their own right. Similarly, wild land mapping could also function as a verification check.

Lastly, within upland areas there are pockets which may not fit the definition. Descriptions and the eventual strategy need only accept that they exist, concentrate on addressing upland issues and opportunities.

What benefits do the uplands provide to Scotland?

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

In no particular order;

Carbon storage

Natural Flood Management

Refuge for species with range changes due to climate change

Overall national species diversity (in healthy, functioning upland habitats)

Diverse cultural identity

Diverse land use practice

Niche tourism activities e.g. mountain biking, wildlife watching, hill walking

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

Increasing tree cover in appropriate places e.g. contour planting and appropriate riparian planting can increase the permeability of soil reducing run off and peak flows. This can aid in natural flood management in downstream areas of a catchment.

Agro forestry encourages mixed land use and this can also reduce run off and can provide microclimates that are of benefit to livestock and native species facing variable, extreme weather.

Increased forest and woodland cover will assist with carbon sequestration.

Increased natural ecological coherence will aid climate change adaptation and all land use practices should where possible contribute positively to this.

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?

An upland vision needs to emphasise the absolute need to balance our approach across social, economic and environmental benefits and dis-benefits, and by doing so represent a balanced vision for those directly (e.g. landowners and farmers) and indirectly affected (users of land and those neighbouring or downstream).

Key choices would reasonably include the balance between:

- Upland livestock farming and woodland expansion.
- Sporting deer management and woodland expansion.
- Grouse moorland and woodland expansion
- Muirburn and the creation of habitat mosaics

The Angus Glens Birchwoods study published by Tayside Native Woodlands in 1998 and the first Cairngorms Forest and Woodland Framework published by the Cairngorms Partnership in 1999 both demonstrate the substantial opportunities for woodland and forest expansion in the Angus Glens.

The vision should reflect where we would like to be, for example: *“Healthy upland ecosystems, functioning in as near a natural state as possible, will provide the balance needed for species and habitats to flourish. Healthy ecosystems will provide human inhabitants with the ecosystem services we depend on from upland areas, more so when these systems function in as healthy state as possible.”*

We should be bold, recognising that both the needs of biodiversity and humans are not presently being met.

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

Learning from countries with healthier ecosystems? Can we manage our countryside like our neighbours e.g. Norway. Healthy numbers of birds for sport but living in healthy forest settings and functioning peatlands existing where they naturally would exist alongside wet woodland?

Including a specific reference to Natural Flood Management will cover Flood Risk Management Planning and River Basin Management Planning and Shoreline Management Planning topics (see reference to ecosystem health above).

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

n/a

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, NGOs, representative organisations and voluntary partnerships with an interest in both conservation and recreation
Ecosystem services approach to focus on multiple benefits for all.
A focus on the economic development potential of various land management practices e.g. agroforestry, ecotourism diversification.

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

Is the CNPA Nature Plan vision what we should be aiming for?
Focus on future that fulfils everyone's objectives

SGP and nature exchanges e.g. Arch network etc. – Education that informs land managers those other/non – traditional methods may work well in Scotland

The process as with the vision should be balanced. It should be tailored to enhance the opportunities and value of participation by stakeholders. How stakeholder contributions are to actually be used also needs to be clear and consistent.

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

To get buy-in to the process and provide a vision that parties can take forward there is a strong need for this to be fostered through a committed (ideally voluntary) partnership approach from stakeholders who could include NGOs, local communities, land management, local authorities and SEARS members. This could work well within the current focus of community empowerment.

A partnership approach and action plan delivery ideally led by NGO's or area officers employed by regional groups could also be appropriate. Rotating voluntary secondments within partnership membership could be away of delivering actions and coordinating work. A revolving chairing of the group by organisations/individuals could be considered.

An alternative options is for this to be led by Regional Land Use Partnerships, through SEARS members (SNH, FCS and RP&S) and local authorities. For this to work well this would need to be in close partnership with stakeholders (local communities, land management and recreational interests) so the balance between these parties would need to be closely considered.

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

Where we are now – where we want to be – how to get there – maps, illustrations, action plan

Should a vision not focus solely on how we picture our uplands in the future e.g. *In 2040 our uplands are healthy functioning ecosystems. They allow species and habitats to flourish and support the diversification of economic opportunities in rural communities. The visible improvement of ecosystem health has increased climate change resilience. Healthy uplands provide refuge for species vulnerable to climate change and can reduce the impact of severe weather events in communities far beyond their reaches.*

Where we are now, where we want to be (vision) and how to get there are all important. Should this baseline data inform the basis of action plans and strategies? Maps, infographics and illustrations are fantastic when you have the resources to secure the data and then use i.e. e.g. Land Use Strategy pilot data and CNPA peatland maps. Will the resources be there for developing regional mapping opportunities and recording good practice?

11. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

n/a