

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.

Agree that the terms does not lend itself to ready definition. However, the approach taken by the Royal Society of Edinburgh in its Committee of Inquiry into the future of Scotland's Hills and Islands in 2008 seems to be the most appropriate. This approach, arranged around agricultural parishes, although containing some possible exceptions, is relatively inclusive. It could be argued that some areas included, such as some islands, are not strictly upland, however, they are associated in other respects, in particular in some of the landscape characteristics mentioned, such as remoteness.

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 uplands provide a base for food and drink production (primarily from rearing livestock and whisky distilling) afforestation, recreation, tourism, sport and the production of renewable energy. These important and essential elements contribute to local economies and to the economic capacity of the country as a whole.

There is a degree of social cohesion within many upland communities that provides for a higher levels of attainment in quality of life indices. The uplands contain important ecosystems and many of the country's most important environmental features. These are often dependent upon considerate landscape management and appropriate agricultural practices. In addition, they contain features or the land capacity for carbon capture and sequestration. In that respect they are important in terms of addressing climate change and providing effective mitigation. As such they are particularly important to Scotland, and to achieving its climate change targets.

The uplands also contain and offer the opportunity to maintain and enhance much the countries biodiversity. In addition, it contains many relevant and integrated communities whose relationship with the land provides an important social and cultural dimension within Scotland.

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

The encouragement, support and implementation of appropriate agricultural practices, the reduction of chemicals for instance, provides an important starting point. Finding a better balance in livestock management and the appropriate management and preservation of features such as peat and blanket bog would assist. Similarly, greater development of appropriate tree cover through increased afforestation would be beneficial. The continuing development of renewables and maintenance of biodiversity within the uplands would be of further assistance. The preservation and proper management of natural features and habitats is also of relevance in this context.

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?

Finding a balance between agricultural productivity and environmental protection and enhancement.

Finding a correct balance between agriculture and afforestation;

How to balance the competing interest on moorland, such as game sports and conservation management and the consequences for appropriate management of moorlands;

Enabling economic development without damaging the environment;

Ensuring effective community understanding and participation on in the management of such areas;

Encouraging and enabling access to uplands for recreation and other activities;

How to sustain and encourage traditional valuable but smaller scale forms of land management, such as crofting, within a modern context. Whilst making a valuable contribution to environmental conservation and the retention of rural communities, it lacks the necessary economies of scale to operate within a singular marketing context;

A comprehensive, yet easily understood, guidance on the features contained within the upland and their value to the country and beyond should be set out in an attractive and engaging manner;

The challenge of wilderness perspectives and species reintroduction and their potential competition with established interests has to be considered;

Whether the land ownership system affects the prospects of the proper balances for all features being achieved within upland areas.

While developing a general vision may be appropriate, given the extent of the potential upland areas, some form of regionalisation may merit consideration.

In general there is a need to provide a proper and effective balance for a range of competing interests. Why? In order that important habitats are preserved and the features that are important to the environment in both a national and global context are maintained. And that the public benefits such as the range of biodiversity, carbon sequestration, quality water supplies, food security, recreational access, land management and rural communities continue.

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

All topics should receive consideration at the outset. It would appear that the object would be to remove those that are not viewed as appropriate after due consideration.

Naturally, we would wish to see the value and potential of the crofting system feature within any vision. This is not in an isolated sense, but one that recognises that there are many other topics. In that respect we would also see the management of the more extensive common grazing area, which contain many recognised environmental habitats and features as being of importance. In a similar vein, there needs to be appropriate consideration of high nature value agriculture and its role in upland management. The people dimension should not be underrated, and likewise the importance of the cultural dimension in all its perspectives.

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

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?

Initially this has to be considered as extensively as practicable. It could be that having distilled the main topics that the particular groups become self-evident. Individuals who may have taken time to respond to the consultation or have particular knowledge in certain areas should not be ignored either.

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

Difficult to determine. A more involved process would obviously require some budget and resources. Has consideration been given to such aspects?

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

Initially, it would appear appropriate for SNH to lead.

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

A combination of all would appear apposite. However, modern communication needs to go beyond a heavy text (which may be eminently worthy) to be able to reach and influence the general public.

11. Do you have any other comments or suggest