

A Strategic Vision for the Uplands

A Scoping Exercise

1.0 Preamble

1.1 The Friends of the Ochils would wish that the following responses are read in conjunction with the detailed response submitted by Drew Jamieson. We are fully aware of that response and have had the opportunity to assist with the editing of it. Drew is a member of the Friends of the Ochils and has undertaken the writing of numerous documents on the Ochils and similar hill ranges, a number of which have been submitted along with his response to this Scoping Exercise. We do not intend to repeat the many valuable and pertinent observations submitted by Drew – rather deal simply with issues that reflect the position of the Friends of the Ochils and our experiences over a number of years of dealing with matters relating to the Ochils.

1.2 The Friends of the Ochils is an independent Scottish charity protecting the landscape and character of the Ochils hills and glens. We have over the past ten years or so responded to many planning applications involving the hill range, including numerous applications for windfarms, the Beaully to Denny powerline, a major quarry, solar farms and commercial forestry. We have done so in accordance with our primary objective of “protecting and conserving the landscape, wildlife and natural beauty of the Ochils, and their historical and social character.” We have also responded as appropriate to numerous consultations on such matters as Main Issues Reports, Local Development Plans and Supplementary Guidance documents that deal with issues relating to the Ochils.

1.3 Over that period, we have become increasingly frustrated with the lack of a coordinated, integrated approach to the management of the Ochils and would welcome a more holistic, coordinated approach to the Ochils. Our comments below draw both on our experiences over the past ten years and on the responses given by Drew Jamieson.

2.0 Where are the uplands?

2.1 Drew Jamieson’s analysis indicates the difficulties encountered when attempting to describe the broad characteristics of the uplands. However, whatever criteria one uses in many geographical areas, the boundary between the upland and lowland areas is often fairly obvious. For the Ochils for example, the southern boundary along the Hillfoots in Stirlingshire, Clackmannanshire and PKC is readily definable. In other areas it is less so, particularly where the hills gradually merge in to more lowland areas such as in the eastern parts of the hill range. However, whilst it is always possible to debate the precise boundaries, in general terms it is normally possible to arrive at a consensus. Often that consensus has been used to define the boundaries of designated areas such as Special Landscape Areas (SLAs).

3.0 What benefits do the uplands provide to Scotland?

3.1 Drew Jamieson has outlined the key benefits that result from the uplands but also indicates that there will be differing perceptions of the benefits that accrue from the uplands. However not all perceived benefits are mutually compatible. It has been our constant experience that one person’s benefit is another person’s dis-benefit. For example, a quarry which provides sand and gravel might be at the expense of important habitats or the enjoyment of the landscape by visitors. However, what has frustrated the Friends of the Ochils over the years has been the lack of a strategic, coordinated approach to so many of the issues that we have had to deal with in relation to the hill range as a whole. Such an approach would help interested parties to at least view key issues from a

wider perspective and from the point of view of other interested parties. However, we don't underestimate the difficulties in arriving at a shared vision for the uplands but, even if disagreements remain, it would be better than the present dis-connected, fractured, uncoordinated approach to the uplands.

4.0 How should the vision be developed?

4.1 Drew Jamieson details the wide range of stakeholders who have an interest in the Ochils and no doubt similar lists could be drawn up for other upland areas. Over the years it is our experience that many of these bodies have found themselves on opposite sides of the table in dis-agreement with each other when dealing with the many planning applications etc relating to the Ochils and the surrounding areas. There is therefore a history of these parties experiencing the confrontational, adversarial, nature of such procedures.

4.2 Even when less confrontational procedures are applied for example to the drawing up of Local Development Plans and associated supplementary guidance, cross border issues have not always been dealt with in a spirit of cooperation and openness and certainly not as a priority.

4.3 We therefore believe that organised events that bring interested parties together in a more cooperative environment would be the obvious starting point and Drew Jamieson gives helpful examples of such events. Each party would not be there to 'fight their corner' but to share views in an open and constructive manner. No doubt 'red lines' might emerge but even knowing what these red lines actually were would be advantageous to interested parties. And who knows, a sharing of ideas etc might result in a shift in those red lines!

4.4 We agree totally with Drew Jamieson that SNH is best placed to lead on this process.

4.5 The Friends of the Ochils would wish to see establishment of a vision that made use of the full range of all available media. Furthermore, we are very attracted to the establishment of an Ochils Land Use Partnership set within an Ochils Land Use Framework. The nature of the Ochils and the present somewhat fractured approach to their management by the wide range of interested parties detailed in Section 7 of Drew Jamieson's response might even make the Ochils a suitable candidate for a pilot! However, we recognise that initially agreement is necessary on the development of a vision and we trust that the above comments, read alongside with Drew Jamieson's response, assists that visioning exercise.

Stuart Dean. Chair, Friends of the Ochils.