

National Park Authority response to Forest Strategy

In accordance with the recent request from Morag Williamson, I am replying to the consultation on Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019 – 2029 directly to you. This reply, on behalf of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority, has been prepared at officer level.

We welcome the production of the new Strategy, recognising the important role it plays in the devolution of forestry in line with the Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Act 2018.

We particularly welcome the holistic scope of the objectives of the strategy and its positioning across the breadth of the National Outcomes. This makes it conceptually easy to relate to our National Park Partnership Plan 2018-2023. We are currently preparing a Trees and Woodlands Strategy for Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park, in close collaboration with FCS staff. We are aiming to get approval from the National Park Board in March 2019 to issue it for public consultation in April & May 2019. We see our Trees and Woodlands Strategy as a key tool for helping to implement our National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) - which includes a target of 2,000 ha of woodland expansion by 2023, Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and Scotland's Forestry Strategy. In relation to the latter it will add a focus that relates to the Outcomes in our NPPP and a spatial element in relation to woodland management and creation opportunities in the National Park.

In response to the questions in the current consultation, our comments are as follows.

Question 1. We agree with the long-term vision for forestry in Scotland. As noted above, it integrates well with our NPPP.

Question 2. Yes, the strategy identifies the right objectives. They are necessarily written at a high level. This will require translation into more localised and sector-specific objectives and actions. Our Trees and Woodlands Strategy will play a part in this.

Question 3. Generally we are content with the assessment. There are three specific points we want to highlight that are pertinent to delivery:

Section 4.2 We welcome the recognition in the strategy that the role of forestry has to be considered in relation to other land uses. We are very aware that woodland creation is often seen as an alternative to farming due to a combination of many factors including land tenure, grant incentives and rules, auditing requirements and established ways of thinking. This leads to barriers to engaging farmers in woodland establishment. Practical steps to make farming and forestry more integrated would be very beneficial.

Section 4.7 This highlights a very real area of concern. We are very conscious of the current and predicted impacts of current pathogens on the future of woodlands and forests in the National Park. We would encourage further efforts, including use of grant approvals, for retaining a diversity of species being used for productive forestry. At present, Sitka spruce remains generally the most productive and popular species for producing a timber crop in the National Park and there are obvious risks to long term sustainability and supply if problem pathogens for Sitka were to arrive here in coming decades.

Section 4.8 This highlights sustainable deer management and we agree that this is essential. In practice, achieving sustainable habitat outcomes very often requires consideration of the combined browsing pressure of deer and other large herbivores including sheep and in several locations feral goats, and consideration of the interactions between them. Very often reductions in hill flocks are followed in due course by increases in deer numbers and an

increase in deer movements. We would welcome further focus on a more holistic consideration of this. For example, we have noted that Deer Management Groups can provide a forum where discussions on these matters can happen.

Question 4. No comments.

Question 5. We are aware of an inaccurate perception in parts of the forestry sector that our National Park is a 'problem' area for woodland creation, despite many new areas of woodland being created since the Park was established. We are developing our Trees and Woodlands Strategy and the promotion of it in ways that we hope will address this. Given the statutory purposes of National Parks in Scotland, woodland schemes here do need to deliver multiple benefits. We think that targeted funding incentives would be useful here, such as uplift for native woodlands and well-designed and well-sited mixed woodlands that deliver landscape, biodiversity and social benefits.

Question 6. No comments.

Regards

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