

Woodland Crofts Partnership response to Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019-2029: A Consultation Draft

The Woodland Crofts Partnership

The Woodland Crofts Partnership (WCP) is a partnership of 4 third-sector organisations, seeking to promote and develop woodland crofts. It comprises the Scottish Crofting Federation, the Community Woodlands Association, the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust and Woodland Trust Scotland. We welcome this opportunity to comment on Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019-2029: A Consultation Draft (the Draft Strategy).

The Scottish Crofting Federation is the only member-led organisation dedicated to promoting crofting and it is the largest association of small scale food producers in the UK. Its mission is to safeguard and promote the rights, livelihoods and culture of crofters and their communities. Tel: 01599 530 005, www.crofting.org

The Community Woodlands Association is the direct representative body of Scotland's community woodland groups. It helps community woodland groups across the country achieve their aspirations and potential, providing advice, assistance and information, facilitating networking and training, and representing and promoting community woodlands to the wider world. Tel: 01309 674 004, www.communitywoods.org

The Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust is a registered charity helping rural communities secure long term solutions to their local housing needs. It represents a wide range of interests including communities, local government, landowners, crofters and housing associations. By helping rural communities meet their needs for additional affordable housing it plays an important role in actively supporting their long term viability. Tel: 01463 233 549, www.hscht.co.uk

Woodland Trust Scotland is part of the Woodland Trust, the UK's leading woodland conservation charity. Its vision is a UK rich in native woods and trees, enjoyed and valued by everyone. In Scotland it is currently leading the Croft Woodlands Project. Tel: 01738 635544, www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

Our response represents the collective view of the Woodland Crofts Partnership, however individual partners of the WCP may be submitting their own responses on behalf of their members.

www.woodlandcrofts.org

Introduction

Overall, we support the aims of the Draft Strategy, and its Vision and Objectives. However, it is quite a high level document, often written in a way which runs the risk of being 'all things to all men'; that said there are some notable omissions. Amongst these is the lack of reference to 'forest culture' nor any great sense that, without using such a term explicitly, there is a goal to foster a culture of 'forestry for and with people' (as the predecessor strategy itself stated). With a goal to increase woodland cover to over a fifth of our land area, and the potential for timber & woodfuel use to contribute significantly to climate change mitigation, this is a concern: trees, timber & woodlands need to be mainstreamed in people's lives.

The Draft Strategy includes limited detail as to *how* objectives will be achieved, issues overcome and priorities addressed. Anecdotally, we understand that the Draft Strategy is intended to be higher level than its predecessor, though this is not stated within it nor in the supporting information. Notwithstanding this, the implementation/delivery section is light on detail and with the work on monitoring & indicators still to come, the concern is that such important elements may become an afterthought and not subject to the same level of consultation, which we believe to be essential.

More generally, we feel there is insufficient emphasis on a more locally-focused approach to forestry, delivering benefits to the communities who actually host the forests. This can be a key way to deliver the 'inclusive growth' mentioned several times within the Draft Strategy, references which we very much welcome. Too often in the past most of the benefits of forestry have accrued in areas remote from the forests themselves; a more local approach would bring both sustainability and rural development benefits.

In relation to this, we are disappointed that there is no reference to woodland crofts in the Draft Strategy, nor to similar models of small-scale forest tenure.

Woodland crofts integrate small-scale woodland management with other land management activities, and offer opportunities for housing and business development, thereby contributing to livelihoods and lifestyles – and delivering against all 3 objectives of the Draft Strategy. They are supported by Scottish Government (for example being referenced in recent Programmes for Government), by Forestry Commission Scotland, by the Crofting Commission, and by various Local Authorities in the crofting areas, such as Highland Council and Argyll & Bute Council.

Woodland crofts and similar models represent a resilient approach to forestry, where risks are spread and income streams diversified – an approach which more traditional forestry needs to do much better at. Resilience is of course essential to adapting to climate change, which rightly is prominent in the Draft Strategy.

In conclusion, woodland crofts will help deliver the vision outlined in the Draft Strategy. Due to the smaller-scale, more intensive approach employed, their development will not impact on the 'traditional' forestry sector. Indeed, they can add value to it by offering solutions to 'problem' woodlands where an industrial approach is found wanting, and are well suited to the management of native woodland, especially on sensitive or designated sites. They also generate new entrants for the industry 'grown' from their 'family forestry' approach. They can also play their part in woodland expansion, where woodland crofts are established through planting bare land.

Answers to consultation paper questions

Q1. Do you agree with our long-term vision for forestry in Scotland? Please explain your answer.

Yes. However consideration might be given to introducing a 'pen picture' of what the 50 year vision might look like on the ground. This was a feature of the predecessor strategy, which worked remarkably well to capture the imagination.

We have a couple of concerns about the supporting bullet points. Firstly, the use of the term 'modern forestry' – this is not really a descriptor that is intuitive, and is also closely associated with the industrial forestry sector who arguably developed it. This is not particularly helpful, and implies traditional models of woodland management – and wider land use, eg crofting – are not supported.

Secondly, there is no explicit reference to people in the bullet points. Forestry *for* people, ought to be referenced in this list as a key underlying rationale.

Q2. Does the strategy identify the right objectives for forestry in Scotland over the next 10 years? Please explain your answer.

Yes. Though it has to be noted that they are extremely general and as per later comments (see Q17), could be interpreted to mean all things to all men, especially without greater detail elsewhere in the strategy on implementation.

We also consider that climate change is worthy of explicit mention in the second objective. A number of very significant climate change reports, both UK and international, have been published since this Strategy consultation first opened, and collectively they serve to emphasise that the issue must be central to every aspect of public policy from this point on.

Q3. Do you agree with our assessment of the major issues likely to have the greatest impact on the achievement of our objectives? Please explain your answer.

Our main concern is that nowhere in discussing these issues is there mention of the potential role that woodland crofts, and similar models could play. Woodland crofts can deliver well against many of them, as we outline below. Further thoughts on their potential relevance to the Draft Strategy are given in our answer to Q17.

4.1 Wood fibre supply and demand

Unfortunately this section is almost completely focused on an 'industrial' approach to forestry and makes a number of assertions which are open to debate. There is also no recognition of the spatial aspects of supply and demand, whereby processing is currently centralised in large-scale plants, whilst much of the forest resource is remote from them, leading to considerable - and arguably unnecessary - timber transport.

A more balanced view would recognise the merits of a more distributed approach to processing and adding value-locally, based on newer, smaller scale technologies. This would enhance sustainability and provide greater local benefit.

4.2 Rural land-use, productivity and integration

Woodland crofts need to be explicitly highlighted and encouraged (plus similar non-crofting models) in this section, as perhaps more so than any other model they integrate woodland management with food production, business development and housing. Such a holistic approach helps support lives and livelihoods and helps retain population in rural areas.

4.3 Economic development: national, regional and local

Given that forestry is by and large located in rural areas, much greater emphasis needs to be given to economic development in those same areas. The smaller-scale, local forestry sector contributes disproportionately towards supporting jobs given its size, as highlighted by recent research from the Forest Policy Group (<http://www.forestpolicygroup.org/blog/the-economic-contribution-of-small-scale-woodland-businesses-in-scotland/>). This therefore provides a real opportunity for sustainable growth as the sector is currently under-developed, probably in part due to limited official encouragement.

Such growth would help deliver more benefits from forestry within rural communities, and woodland crofts can be a platform for the development of small-scale wood using businesses. This would go some way to address the reality that – as this section notes in relation to timber transport – too often in the past communities have suffered the impacts of commercial forestry, but received few of the benefits.

4.4 Innovation and new technology

The opportunity for new technology to support more local processing needs to be highlighted here. Clearly local processing minimises transport of lower value round timber, through ensuring products are either used locally or exported in higher value form, providing greater sustainability. Equipment such as small-scale bandsaws, planer-thicknessers & moulding machines, kilns etc already bring capabilities to small-scale businesses which were previously the preserve of larger operations. The development of devices such as hand-held acoustic tools for strength grading will extend the possibilities further.

As mentioned in 4.3 above, such equipment can be readily owned or shared by woodland crofters giving real opportunities for business development based on adding value to local timber.

4.5 Developing future foresters and upskilling the existing workforce

Woodland crofts can help address this issue in a number of ways and should therefore be included here. Most importantly, woodland crofts provide a 'nursery' for growing the new generation of forestry workers. Young people brought up on a woodland croft will be imbued with a 'forest culture' (see more in Q17 on this) and will often have a degree of forestry skills and experience. Such people will instinctively be aware of the opportunity to build a career based on using those skills.

Increasing the numbers of woodland crofts will also help bring forestry work from being a remote and often unseen activity to one of everyday life. This awareness and understanding will enable youngsters from the wider community (and not just crofting families) become familiar with forestry activities and the career and employment opportunities they bring.

4.6 Climate change

There is something of a blind spot in this section, as whilst forestry is recognized as instrumental to tackling climate change, there is no real discussion that *how* we do forestry can also be significant in terms of climate change impacts.

The use of renewable energy *within* forestry, reduction of fossil fuel use not least through reducing 'timber miles', the relative effects on soil carbon of clearfelling vs low impact silvicultural systems – all of these issues and more deserve much greater prominence in a Forestry Strategy that puts climate change at its heart. And our contention is that models such as woodland crofts can deliver low carbon forestry – indeed low carbon living – par excellence, as they score very highly against these issues.

4.7 Tree pests and diseases

The increased threat of pests and pathogens as a result of climate change as well as global trade needs to be addressed not just through surveillance and biosecurity but through changes in forestry practice, eg greater diversity of species and age structures. The greater resilience such approaches bring does however require greater – and more regular - management input. As such they lend themselves to personal stewardship as found in woodland crofts and similar models.

4.9 Enhancing our natural assets and improving their biodiversity value

4.10 Environmental and landscape quality

Both these issues have in common a requirement for high quality management. In depth knowledge of sites, regular management input, and attention to detail all yield results in terms of biodiversity gains and environmental protection. As such, as in 4.7 above, personal stewardship models such as woodland crofts are particularly appropriate.

4.11 Well-being

As noted in this section, there is considerable evidence that engagement with woodlands can promote physical and mental health. By extension, 'woodland living' is an inherently healthy lifestyle and one which the Strategy should explicitly support. This could be in the form of woodland crofts, where people actually live in or very close to woodland, or other forms of tenure where presence in the woodland is more occasional yet still significant.

Many aspiring woodland crofters see an opportunity for using woodland as the basis of therapy in various forms, both formally and through a more informal 'retreat' approach. Along with forest schools, bushcraft or other outdoor activities, such non-traditional woodland enterprises have potential to deliver economic benefit from woodlands which in conventional economic terms may be considered to be of little or no value.

4.12 Equality and empowerment

We welcome the Draft Strategy's reference to land reform, but are concerned that it appears to have been conflated with community ownership alone, rather than also including a goal to diversify the extremely concentrated pattern of private ownership in forestry.

The Draft Strategy quotes from the Scottish Government's Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement, but – worryingly – omits the second part of the sentence in question, reproduced here in full:

“There should be a more diverse pattern of land ownership and tenure, with more opportunities for citizens to own, lease and have access to land.”

An expansion in the number of woodland crofts, under both community and private ownership, is a key opportunity to contribute to land reform, and the Draft Strategy should highlight this. More generally, it also needs to reflect the full scope of the above principle from the LRRS.

Finally, it seems odd to discuss equality issues without reference to gender, in a very male-dominated industry and in light of recent efforts to improve this gender balance.

Q4. Do the ten priorities identified in table 2 capture the areas where action is most needed to deliver our objectives and vision? Please explain your answer.

We support these priorities, but qualified by our comments in Q3 regarding particular aspects of them eg No.5 should include other forms of ownership (and leasehold tenure) than simply community ownership; the need for sustainability should focus more on the manner in which forestry is carried out (No.1); and so on.

We are not persuaded that the 'Objectives' column adds to this table: arguably all priorities contribute to some degree to all objectives, and if that contribution is not to be quantified in some way there seems little point simply including ticks for all.

Q5. Can you provide any examples of delivery mechanisms that have previously been effective in delivering similar objectives and priorities?

Q6. For any delivery mechanism examples given in answer to question 5, please explain why they worked well?

Former grant schemes: whilst both schemes had their faults, both the Woodland Grant Scheme and Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme worked well and offered a more balanced mechanism for delivering these objectives and priorities than the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS). They were seen to be more accessible and less bureaucratic than FGS, provided better support for management activities and in particular gave more effective support to smaller scale projects, not just larger ones. There is a sense now that the funding 'pot' has become less equitably shared, both in terms of the balance between new planting and management operations, but also the proportion of funds going to fewer, larger ownerships rather than many, smaller ones.

Funding intermediary support services: direct funding for trusted, non-profit intermediaries to deliver support to community and other owners with a social purpose in pursuit of Strategy objectives can be particularly effective, where a market based approach can be challenging. It reduces the burden on beneficiaries both in terms of needing to develop expertise in all areas and in terms of requiring to secure funding separately for advisory support for each new project.

Q7. Do you think the proposed progress indicators are the right ones? Please explain your answer.

We believe there are insufficient indicators proposed to meaningfully track progress of the Strategy objectives.

Q8. Do you have any suggestions for other indicators we could use to measure progress (especially ones which draw on existing data)?

Notable omissions from the current list include the lack of indicators on private forest ownership; on women in forestry; on small scale forestry businesses (say < 5 employees); on timber transport (ie 'timber miles'); on fossil fuel consumption per tonne of timber produced etc. In particular we would like to see an indicator for number of new woodland crofts created.

Q9. For any indicators suggested in answer to question Q8, please explain why you think they would be appropriate.

Private forest ownership – in order to track diversification of ownership as per the Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement

Women in forestry – to track progress towards achieving gender balance

Small scale forestry businesses – to track the growth of this sector, given its disproportionate contribution to delivering jobs

Timber transport/road miles – to track progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions

Fossil fuel consumption/tonne – to track the reduction in carbon intensity of timber production

Woodland crofts – to track the growth in number in the face of significant demand for them, and as a measure of land reform progress

Woodland Crofts Partnership

November 2018