

AYRSHIRE JOINT PLANNING STEERING GROUP

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Review of Ayrshire & Arran Woodland Strategy

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PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To inform members of the completion of the “Future Forestry & Woodland Guidance” study and to recommend the reconvening of the Ayrshire & Arran Woodland Partnership and a review of the Ayrshire and Arran Woodland Strategy as a key component of taking forward the National Planning Framework National Development 12 – Central Scotland Green Network.

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

2. Woodland expansion is a key component of the NPF 2 Central Scotland Green Network National Development. Current national advice to Scottish Planning Authorities on woodland and forestry planting and management is contained within the Forestry Commission Scotland publication “The Right Tree In The Right Place”, published in May 2010. This advice follows a full review of the Scottish Forestry Strategy in 2006 and replaces the guidance to planning authorities provided in Circular 9/1999.
3. Locally, the Ayrshire & Arran Woodland Strategy (AAWS), published in 2003, provides guidance for the councils when commenting on woodland planting proposals. The AAWS is incorporated into the Approved Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan under Policy ENV5 and therefore has statutory policy status. Once the three planning authorities have approved local development plans, the Joint Structure Plan will cease to be a material consideration. Consequently the AAWS will lose its statutory status unless incorporated into the local development plans.
4. Both the National Planning Framework II and Scottish Planning Policy confirm the importance of protecting existing woodland and promoting well planned expansion to achieve economic, social and environmental aims. Planning Circular 1/2009 on Development Planning identifies forestry and woodland strategies as a suitable topic for supplementary guidance to the new generation of development plans. Woodland expansion is a key objective of National Development 12 – Central Scotland Green Network.
5. The Ayrshire & Arran Woodland Strategy established a firm foundation for integration of woodland expansion and management with the development plans. However, the

fundamental change in the development plans system and review of national forest policy referred to above as well as significant changes to the forestry grants system and advances in thinking on subjects such as climate change requires that the Strategy should be reviewed and updated.

### FUTURE WOODLAND & FORESTRY GUIDANCE STUDY

6. AJPU were awarded funding from the Central Scotland Green Network Development Fund in November 2010 for a consultant's study to develop guidance for the preparation of a new generation woodland and forestry strategy. The study, undertaken by MD2 and Mersey Forest, reflects the Scottish Government's aspirations set out in *The Right Tree In The Right Place* and provides comprehensive guidance on identification of relevant environmental sensitivities, categorisation of land into preferred, potential and sensitive areas and a staged approach and timeline for the preparation of a new woodland and forestry strategy.
7. The core outputs from the study are:-
  - 1) A *planning analysis* of all relevant documents to identify references to environmental sensitivities that should be considered in the development of the Ayrshire & Arran WFS.
  - 2) Detailed advice on *Strategic Environmental Assessment Objectives* and what will be required in the new FWS to meet these. To facilitate the preparation of a SEA, the relationship between SEA criteria and the environmental sensitivities and between the SEA criteria and relevant policy documents are identified in matrix tables. Furthermore, consultation events were carried out during the preparation of the study through which key stakeholders were able to comment on the range of environmental sensitivities that should be considered and their relative importance.
  - 3) An *Environmental Sensitivity Tool*, developed using the ArcGIS suite of computer modelling tools. This allows all land in Ayrshire to be scored according to the degree to which different types of woodland should be encouraged there. The four main types of woodland (native, mixed, softwood forest and energy forest) are considered in accordance with the advice contained in *Right Tree Right Place*.
  - 4) Five *concept maps* which demonstrate provisional classifications of all land within Ayrshire as Preferred, Potential, Sensitive or Unsuitable for the four types of woodland.
  - 5) Advice on how *climate change* is likely to affect woodland over the first half of this century and what actions should be taken in this regard.
8. The brief for the study emphasised that this piece of work was to set out a process for developing a replacement for the Ayrshire and Arran Woodland Strategy and is to be basis for consultation with stakeholders through a partnership process. The

*Environmental Sensitivities Tool* has been developed in such a way that the relative weighting of sensitivities can be easily varied. This will allow the tool to be used in a constructive manner to facilitate consensus building during subsequent consultation phases.

9. The work undertaken through the study has effectively completed the Data Collection and Analysis and Concept Map stage of the process for preparing a replacement strategy and contributes substantially to the completion of the SEA Scoping stage.

#### DEVELOPING THE STRATEGY

10. The development of a replacement for the Ayrshire & Arran Woodland Strategy is a key action in taking forward the Central Scotland Green Network in Ayrshire. The actions required to develop a revised strategy can be briefly summarised as follows:-
  - a) Reinvigoration of the Ayrshire & Arran Woodland Partnership (perhaps reconvened as a sub-group of an Ayrshire Green Network Partnership)
  - b) Identification of a lead officer (within AJPU) to act as coordinator to the partnership
  - c) Preparation of an Issues Report for wide consultation
  - d) Preparation of a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment
  - e) Preparation of Draft Strategy and consultation thereon
  - f) Publication of final strategy, post adoption SEA statement and Appropriate Assessment
11. Forestry Commission Scotland have indicated that financial resources are available to assist in the preparation of the Ayrshire and Arran Woodland & Forestry Strategy. These resources could be utilised to undertake stages c to e above thus permitting work to commence in early course. With potential significant changes in funding for woodland expansion as a result of the review of the Scottish Rural Development Programme and the emergence of potential new funding sources such as the Central Scotland Green Network Development Fund, it is considered essential that Ayrshire has an up-to-date woodland strategy which is fully in tune with these changes.

#### RECOMMENDATION

12. It is recommended that the Steering Group note the successful completion of the Future Forestry & Woodland Guidance study and that:-
  - a) The Steering Group support the reconvening of the Ayrshire and Arran Woodland Partnership
  - b) Relevant stakeholders be invited to join a reconvened Ayrshire & Arran Woodland Partnership

- c) That as a first priority, the Partnership prepares a replacement for the Ayrshire and Arran Woodland Strategy 2003 with a view to the Strategy being produced as supplementary guidance for the emerging local development plans;
- d) AJPU act as project coordinators for the preparation of a revised strategy;
- e) That the offer of additional financial resources be accepted from Forestry Commission Scotland with a view to commencing work for the preparation of the replacement Strategy in July/August this year.

John Esslemont  
Acting Manager  
Ayrshire Joint Planning Unit

Person To Contact: Alan Edgar 01292 673764 [alan.edgar@south-ayrshire.gov.uk](mailto:alan.edgar@south-ayrshire.gov.uk)