

AYRSHIRE JOINT STRUCTURE PLAN AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
2 June 2006

Draft Scottish Forestry Strategy and Consultation on the Proposed Changes to the Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1 To advise the Committee on the publication of the Draft Scottish Forestry Strategy 2006 and the Consultation on the Proposed Changes to the Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme and to seek the Committee's approval for the draft responses to these documents.

BACKGROUND

- 2 The Scottish Forestry Strategy was published in 2000 by the Scottish Executive, with the aim of providing a framework for Scottish forestry. The partners developing the Strategy made a commitment to review it every five years, identifying the 'Priorities for Action' as the area most likely to need updating. Since then, however, the extent of the changes to forestry policy, technology and thinking indicated the need for a wider review, resulting in the production of the new draft Scottish Forestry Strategy.
- 3 Since the Strategy was published in 2000 there have been number of new initiatives launched including the Woodlands In and Around Towns Initiative, the Forest Education Initiative and the establishment of the Scottish Forestry Forum. The action that has probably had the most significant on forestry in the last 5 years is the implementation of the Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme (SFGS), which supports a range of woodland creation and management activities and helps to deliver the priorities set out in the Scottish Forestry Strategy. The review of the SFGS will be published after and in light of the publication of the new Strategy.
- 4 The Scottish Executive, through Forestry Commission Scotland is leading on the development of the draft, new Strategy supported by a steering group of representatives of social, environmental and business interests. The Forestry Commission is also undertaking the review of the SFGS.
- 5 Forestry in Ayrshire is currently steered by the Ayrshire and Arran Woodland Strategy (AAWS), which was published in 2003 and signed up to by the three Councils.

THE DRAFT STRATEGY 2006

6 The draft Strategy is based around eight key themes, which are:

- Climate change
- Business development
- Community development
- Learning and skills
- Access and inclusion
- Environmental protection
- Biodiversity
- Timber

These provide a good balance between the key aspects of sustainable development and demonstrate the recent shift in priorities for forestry, with social and environmental issues being given equal weight to those of timber sales and production.

7 The draft Strategy gives considerable significance to ensuring that people have access to woodlands – with a target that “by 2015 at least a quarter of the population should have access to at least one area of woodland greater than 2 hectares within 500 metres of their home”. This is likely to put greater onus on the Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) initiative, which provides support for communities to develop community woodlands and restore mineral and derelict sites to woodland. The Community Development theme also refers to this.

8 The draft Strategy gives comparatively scant attention to the historic aspects of woodlands and in particular fails to mention the need to protect policy woodlands, which play a significant part in Ayrshire’s heritage and landscape. There is also little in the draft Strategy about the status of Indicative Forestry Strategies, which the AAWS is based on. The AAWS has achieved support across stakeholders and lead to considerable benefits to woodlands in Ayrshire and so it is important that Indicative Forestry Strategies are given greater recognition in the draft Strategy.

9 The draft Strategy highlights the changes to the funding of forestry that will arise from the new Scottish Rural Development Plan, which is due to be published in January 2007. A key feature of this is would be to use Land Management Contracts with landowners to deliver both agricultural and forestry funding, which currently come from broadly separate funding streams.

10 It should be noted that the draft Strategy will largely influence the management of the national forest estate, through Forestry Commission Scotland, which is only a proportion (35%) of Scotland’s woodland. The rest is privately owned and so can only be affected by the Strategy through its direction of grants for planting and management.

CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE SCOTTISH FORESTRY GRANTS SCHEME

- 11 SFGS operates within the framework of national policy guidance, as set out in the Scottish Rural Development Plan and the Scottish Forestry Strategy, and in accordance with EU Regulations concerned with rural development activities.
- 12 Changes to the scheme are being proposed to ensure that the support measures are consistent with the changes occurring in the above policy and regulatory framework and the opportunity is also being taken to look for ways of simplifying the scheme and its administrative arrangements.
- 13 The revised forestry grants scheme is intended to:
- provide measures which support the delivery of the Scottish Rural Development Strategy and the Scottish Forestry Strategy;
 - align these measures with the mechanisms allowable under the EU Rural Development Regulation;
 - simplify some aspects of the administration for both applicants and FCS; and
 - provide a scheme which is capable of being integrated into the Land Management Contract System.
- 14 The scheme will support the following activities:
- creation of new woodlands in accordance with national priorities (as set out in the SFS) and local/regional priorities as set out in Indicative Forestry Strategies and other similar strategic frameworks;
 - the management of existing woodlands to achieve the standards set out in the UK Forestry Standard;
 - woodland improvement activities which enhance the ability of the woodland to deliver forestry policy priorities; and
 - activities which help to improve the performance and competitiveness of the forestry sector and forestry related businesses.
- 15 It is important that the revised forestry grants scheme identifies Indicative Forestry Strategies as steering the creation of new woodland as this gives the three Ayrshire councils more opportunity to influence the schemes to which the funding is allocated. It is of some concern that there is no mention of the Locational Premium Scheme, which in Ayrshire is based around the AAWS and provides an important additional source of funding for forestry.
- 16 Scottish Ministers have indicated a desire to achieve greater integration of the various land management support schemes run by public bodies. The integrating

mechanism is likely to be a system of Land Management Contracts (LMC), which act as a single source for the delivery of funding for both farming and forestry. There is a concern that this will disadvantage non-rural woodland planting, which would currently be supported by the WIAT initiative. The proposed revisions to the funding give this very little attention.

CONCLUSIONS

- 17 The draft new Scottish Forestry Strategy should be broadly welcomed for aiming to ensure that forestry is a multi-faceted resource and that the national forest estate and forestry grants provide real public benefits. The Ayrshire and Arran Woodland Strategy remains in keeping with the direction of the new draft Strategy but it is important that this form of partnership delivery continues to be supported at a national level.
- 18 The proposed changes to the Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme are likely to result in some reduction in funding and the removal of the Locational Premium Scheme. It is important that there is continued funding of schemes such as WIAT, which allows woodland development close to where people live.

RECOMMENDATION

- 19 The Committee are:
 - asked to approve the response to the Consultation on the Draft Scottish Forestry Strategy to the Forestry Commission, as per the attached Appendix 1; and
 - approve the response to the Consultation on the Proposed Changes to the Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme, as per the attached Appendix 2.

Ian Johnson
Manager
Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee

Person to contact: Toby Wilson - 01292 673768

APPENDIX 1

The Draft Scottish Forestry Strategy – response from the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee (AJSPTC) is formally constituted to provide strategic planning, development and transport advice to East, North and South Ayrshire Councils. In 2003 the three Ayrshire Councils, along with a number of other partners, produced the Ayrshire and Arran Woodland Strategy (AAWS) to provide guidance on the means by which the economic, environmental and social benefits of woodland planting and managements and timber processing can best be developed for the area. The document was seen as more wide-ranging than previous indicative forestry strategies.

2. GENERAL COMMENTS

2.1 AJSPTC broadly welcomes the vision, principles and key themes of the draft Strategy, believing them to reflect the important aspects of sustainable development, with social and environmental issues being given equal weight to those of timber sales and production. The draft Strategy appears to recognise that the national forest and public funding should be used to deliver widespread public benefits. One of the best things to have happened to forestry since 2000 is the launch of the Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme, which ensures more public benefits are provided from public funding of forestry through specifying what type of forestry will be funded and having levels of payment dependent on the amount of public benefit provided. It is positive that the draft Strategy recognises the need for rural diversification and that forestry should integrate with other land uses.

2.2 The new Strategy seems to give less emphasis than the 2000 Strategy to the continued expansion of well-designed productive forest and AJSPTC feels that this is appropriate provided that there is enough timber available to meet the needs of wood processors. A review of the grant applications and funding from the Locational Premium Scheme and the Scottish Forestry Strategy in 2005 indicated that a large proportion of new planting and grant funding was going towards well-designed productive woodlands, much of which was non-native conifers. The general feeling amongst the Ayrshire and Arran Woodland Partnership was that this did not fully reflect the aims of the AAWS. It is hoped that the Draft Strategy will guide the review of the Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme to fund woodland planting that provides positive benefits to the public, rather than woodland that is easy to plant and harvest but of little social or environmental worth.

2.3 The draft Strategy seems to be slightly weak on delivery, with it being difficult in some cases to see how the actions and targets will be taken forward. A way of partially addressing this would be to use the format of the 2000 Strategy, which is more specific in allocating actions to various organisations. Clearly a large part of the Strategy will be delivered using grant schemes. AJSPTC understands that a separate consultation is taking place on the proposed changes to the Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme and a further consultation on the Rural Development Programme and yet this is not made clear in the Draft Strategy, which leaves the ‘Delivery’ chapter without an obvious focus.

2.4 AJSPTC welcomes the continued recognition of the importance of the Regional Forestry Forums, as a useful means to engage with regional issues and priorities. Of concern, however, is that the draft Strategy gives little mention to Indicative Forestry Strategies, which were given a key role in delivering the 2000 Strategy. AAWS has achieved considerable success in setting clear goals for the management of woodland in Ayrshire and reducing conflict over planting. This has been achieved by having actions and a supporting map that have been consulted and agreed on by partners at a regional level, along with a funding mechanism in the form of a Locational Premium, to support planting in line with the AAWS. Indicative Forestry Strategies should be given a central role in delivering the Draft Strategy and doing this would help to address the comment in paragraph 2.3.

2.6 AJSPTC believes that effective woodland planting can be delivered through Land Management Contracts and that having an integrated approach to land management, combining farming, forestry and other rural activities can be beneficial. However, it is important that the Draft Strategy recognises that not all woodlands are in rural areas and that other funding streams and support needs to be available for urban and suburban woodlands which will have implications for Local Authorities as woodland owners.

2.7 AJSPTC welcomes the inclusion of references to the need to protect the historic environment and enhancing historic landscapes but feels this could be given more prominence and perhaps would be better placed as one of the sub-headings under the theme of Environmental Protection. Ayrshire has a number policy woodlands, which play an important part in the region's heritage and landscape quality and yet AJSPTC believes that they are currently not given sufficient support. It is hoped they Draft Strategy will give them more recognition and steer funding to be made available for their management and upkeep.

3. SPECIFIC COMMENTS

- The distinctions between the chapters should be made more obvious.
- It is useful to include Appendix 2 to report on progress since the Scottish Forestry Strategy 2000. AJSPTC feels that the current 2000 Strategy has remained broadly relevant, though clearly issues such as climate change and renewable energy have taken on an increasing significance. It is useful to highlight the various strategies which the Draft Scottish Forestry Strategy has links to and this helps to give it a context and prevent it from seeming to duplicated the work being done elsewhere.
- In relation to Key Theme 5: Access and Inclusion, guidance on suitable locations for woodlands could be obtained from the priorities identified within Access Authorities' Outdoor Access Strategies (2.8.4). This would ensure that opportunities were created in appropriate areas. Other indicators in relation to this theme could include the types of usage occurring within woodlands (2.8.9).
- In relation to Key Theme 7: Biodiversity, guidance on the types of woodland to be created (2.10.4) could also be obtained from Local Biodiversity Action Plans and Indicative Forestry Strategies.

APPENDIX 2

Consultation on proposed changes to the Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme – response from the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee (AJSPTC) is formally constituted to provide strategic planning, development and transport advice to East, North and South Ayrshire Councils. In 2003 the three Ayrshire Councils, along with a number of other partners, produced the Ayrshire and Arran Woodland Strategy (AAWS) to provide guidance on the means by which the economic, environmental and social benefits of woodland planting and managements and timber processing can best be developed for the area. The document was seen as more wide-ranging than previous indicative forestry strategies. The Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee (AJSPTC) is only able to comment on certain aspects of the consultation. For this reason there will not be responses to the individual questions.

2. GENERAL COMMENTS

2.1 The consultation on proposed changes to the Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme (SFGS) does not mention Indicative Forestry Strategies, which can be an important and useful mechanism for delivering funding. The Ayrshire and Arran Woodland Strategy (AAWS) has achieved considerable success in setting clear goals for the management of woodland in Ayrshire, increasing the extent of woodland and reducing conflict over planting. This has been achieved by having actions and a supporting map that have been consulted and agreed on by partners at a regional level, along with a funding mechanism in the form of a Locational Premium, to support planting in priority areas in line with the AAWS. The extra funding has allowed Ayrshire to achieve important economic, social and environmental gains, as woodland is expanded and improved. AJSPTC supports a continuation of the Locational Premium based on the AAWS.

2.2 AJSPTC is concerned that the consultation gives little attention to urban and suburban woodland planting and specifically does not mention the existing Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) scheme. AJSPTC believes that WIAT should be continued as it helps to deliver woodland planting and management in areas where large numbers of people are able to enjoy and benefit from it. WIAT can help address problems, such as a lack of attractive green spaces, which may be more acute in urban areas and it is important that this is recognised. Woodland planting and management in urban areas is also distinct from that in rural areas and can potentially result in higher costs because of having to account for vandalism and in some instances more valuable land. If this is not provided for through discrete funding then urban woodland planting is likely to be limited.