

AYRSHIRE JOINT STRUCTURE PLAN 2005

Comments from Forestry Commission Scotland 20 August 2004

Comments limited to issues where there is a direct impact on forest and timber industry or where a contribution can be made.

The Ayrshire and Arran Woodland strategy, incorporated into this document is recognised as providing the detailed guidance on the policy for woodlands within Ayrshire.

Q1 Vision. Reference is made in 1.5 to Ayrshire's potential to contribution to the growth of Scotland. Something of this outward looking vision could be included in the Structure Plan vision. E.g. Ayrshire's forest and timber processing capacity makes a significant contribution to the industry in Scotland as a whole. Ayrshire is a centre of excellence for skills in papermaking, chipboard manufacture and sawmilling

Q3 Strategic aims. Broadly support the seven strategic aims outlined.

Q6 Core Investment areas and Investment corridors. Trees and woodland can make a significant contribution to the quality of the environment around towns and along the investment corridors.

The A77 and A713 and A714 provide links to the south with Dumfries and Galloway. A corridor on one or more of these routes would strengthen the links between the rural south of Ayrshire and western Galloway. There are certainly strong links within the forestry sector between the growers in the south and the processing capacity in Ayrshire.

Q9 Rural areas. Supply of raw material for processing and value added within Ayrshire

Q10 Housing. Opportunities for developments using Ayrshire timber in the construction and/or heating are welcomed and could be encouraged.

Q11 Transport. Link to the A&A Woodland Strategy and timber transport issues, particularly in the south of Ayrshire, where there are opportunities for rail links and a need for road improvements to allow timber to flow to the processing sites further to the north of Ayrshire. Inclusion of bypasses for a number of communities welcomed as some of these are on key timber haulage routes. Improvement of access to the M74 also welcomed to improve flow of timber products to markets in the south.

Q12 Community regeneration Trees and woodlands can make a contribution to community regeneration through improving the environment, providing places for recreation and an opportunity for community based projects. Woodlands can also be an important component in the restoration of former industrial sites such as opencast coal sites. East Ayrshire Woodlands have demonstrated the benefits woodland can bring in these areas as well as highlighting the challenges and the need for long term commitment.

Q14 Affordable housing. Strategic planning policy should allow for release of small areas of woodland in localities defined by Communities Scotland as having a social

housing need that cannot be satisfied through available development land. Social housing site selection should take account of the impact of housing development on the landscape, forest environment and forest users, particularly recreational use. New social housing sites in or near forests should be selected so as to minimise the need for upgrading of public roads and the requirement for additional utilities, wayleaves or the use of timber roads in forests, in order to reduce cost and impact on forestry operations

Q17 Timber. There is still a strong demand for timber throughout Scotland and Ayrshire. The challenge is the low prices that the processors are able to pay the growers for the raw material. Local added value and local markets for the end products will help to improve the overall economy of the timber industry. The implementation of the AAWS will help to promote the industry. Ayrshire is a centre of excellence for skills in papermaking, chipboard manufacture and sawmilling. Beyond this, there are good examples in Ayrshire, which can be built upon, of companies adding considerable value to home grown softwood (and to imports) in the form of timber framing and construction units (e.g. roofing).

Q19 Windfarms. In certain circumstances forests can accommodate wind-farms without significant detriment to the forest environment, internal forest landscape or long term timber producing capability. Wind-farms can provide the opportunity to restructure forests early, through targeted creation of new open space and premature felling and restocking designed to reduce average tree height and improve wind-flows over a forest. Forests frequently occupy relatively high and remote ground where wind-farm developments can be located away from population centres. Forests may also have suitable HGV access and can benefit from wind-farm road infrastructure. Forest areas can to some degree absorb construction impacts such as borrow pits excavation and construction activities. Biodiversity and recreation mitigation measures funded through wind-farm developments provide an important opportunity to increase the value of individual forests to society given careful design and retention of the wider forest.

Major wind-farm development proposals have been submitted to the Scottish Executive for Whitelee Forest, and an application of a similar scale is expected at Kyle Forest near Dalmellington in later 2004. These proposals have been worked up with assistance from Forest Enterprise Scotland with careful attention to the foregoing issues and are acceptable to local forestry managers. Smaller scale proposals may also be suited to forest areas although each case should be taken on its merits.

Q20 Biomass. There is a timber resource and also sawmill products which are potential raw materials for energy production. These are not waste products. Brash (comprising branches etc) is not a preferred material for energy production from the forestry perspective as it has a role both during harvesting operations to protect the ground and contains most of the nutrients which are released back into the soil as the material decays on site. Former industrial sites have a place in short rotation coppice (SRC) but are not universally suitable. SRC could provide an opportunity for farm diversification in the appropriate sites. There is also a significant potential for the development of small scale community wood fired heating systems, and possibly for larger scale energy production.

Q 21 Tourism

In recognition of the special features of forestry on Arran, Forest Enterprise Scotland has developed a strategy to improve the amenity and biodiversity value of forests so that they can increasingly support tourism. The process involves a gradual and sensitive replacement of commercial timber species with a form of 'open woodland' in the national forests of the island. Continued investment in forest roads for the removal of the existing first rotation timber will, over a period of c. 25 years, install an important access network on the island that can be further linked with paths and cycle tracks during replanting operations. This network will be designed, as far as practicable, to reduce timber traffic on weak public roads used by tourist traffic by creation of an internal strategic timber transport network. The first 3.3 km phase of this project is now being funded through a 3 year EU funded North Ayrshire Council / Forest Enterprise Scotland infrastructure project. Following harvesting, native tree species will be favoured during replanting and natural regeneration will be used where appropriate. The internal and peripheral area of open space will be expanded and over time a more accessible and open forest will be developed. The strategy provides a basis for forestry that additional funding streams can assist, especially in relation to access provision and ecological enhancement.

Given its close proximity to large populations in Ayrshire and the Glasgow and Clyde Valley area, Whitelee Forest offers an important opportunity for new informal forest recreation and associated small businesses. Proposals for an extensive network of tracks connected with the Whitelee wind-farm and early forest restructuring will contribute significantly to the amenity and access potential of the forest. Whitelee Forest is therefore well placed to accept investment suited to a large scale and lightly populated landscape.

The Galloway Forest Park, managed by Forestry Commission Scotland, stretches from the southern parts of East and South Ayrshire into Dumfries and Galloway. It is a major visitor attraction for Southwest Scotland with a range of facilities including Visitor Centres, Forest Drives and long distance cycle paths. There needs to be greater linkage, in marketing terms, between such hinterland attractions and the more developed tourist industry of the Ayrshire coastline.

Q24 WFD. The acidification of water courses is due primarily to atmospheric pollution falling in areas with base poor geology which lacks a buffering capacity. The presence of conifer forests, particularly at the higher elevations, in areas sensitive to acidification can aggravate the situation because of the efficiency with which the trees scavenge pollutants from the atmosphere. As decline in the level of pollution through the control of emissions will be the most significant factor in reducing acidification of water courses. In the interim forest proposals in acidified areas undergo an assessment as to their likely impact prior to any approval being granted. (Ref Forest and Water Guidelines 4th edition). Owing to its geology, Ayrshire is relatively free of watercourses that are known to be affected by surface water acidification of atmospheric origin.

Q25 Mineral resources. Woodlands can play a part in the restoration of mineral sites following extraction.

CRT 18/08/04

Incorporating comments from Michael Wall and Rob Soutar