

**AYRSHIRE JOINT STRUCTURE PLAN AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE  
22 JUNE 2001**

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**Natural Heritage Zones Programme- Consultation**

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PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To advise the Committee of the recent consultation by Scottish Natural Heritage on the national Natural Heritage Zone Programme.

BACKGROUND

- 2 The national Natural Heritage Zone programme forms part of a wider exercise, to investigate the natural heritage of Scotland at both the strategic and local contexts. This comprehensive review incorporates a two tier approach that includes a national Overview, which is then developed through six strategic prospectuses. These prospectuses inform 21 distinctive local zones covering the whole of Scotland. Ayrshire falls within Zones 14, 17 and 19. This report focuses only on the Overview and National prospectuses. The local prospectuses are the subject of a separate consultation.
- 3 The national programme aims to develop long term goals for the natural heritage, based on an overarching strategic vision. It does not aim to develop a vision for sustainable development. Rather, it is intended to facilitate consensus between stakeholders on how we relate and use the natural heritage resource. This connectivity is envisaged to occur through new and existing partnerships with translation within current and future plans.
- 4 The national context is set within an Overview detailing national social, economic and environmental considerations. This is then developed into a series of National Prospectuses that review common themes at the strategic level, focusing on national and international issues. There are six of these in total, covering a range of natural heritage settings: Mountain and Moorland, Coast and Sea, Farmland, Forest and Woodland, Freshwater, and Settlements. Within each of these Prospectuses, a vision is set for the natural heritage in the year 2025. In order to ensure the vision is realistic a set of possible actions reflecting current trends is also detailed, along with the stakeholders necessary to action these.

## ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

5 Following an assessment of the Overview and the National Prospectuses a number of comments can be drawn.

(i) General Comment

The drawing together of issues, combined with the exploration of the drivers to social, economic and environmental change at the national level is to be welcomed. This can do nothing but increase stakeholder awareness, broaden understanding of the complex interaction between the natural environment and social and economic change, and set clear objectives to attain a more strategic sustainable form.

(ii) The Form of the Proposed Strategy

In acknowledging the impact of development, SNH are of the view that a more co-ordinated strategy is required that incorporates a higher value placed upon the natural resource. Attempts to re-dress the current balance are noted. However, the broad-brush approach undertaken has failed to provide a clear vision to direct the process. Further, no new mechanisms have been identified and it is unclear whether an assessment of the current mechanisms proposed has been completed to ascertain whether they are sufficient to achieve the long-term vision. These failures are subsequently compounded by the lack of coherent objectives tied to prescribed outputs and integrated within a monitoring and review programme. To deliver a successful strategy a much more concise Overview and National prospectuses may be appropriate, with a short visionary statement linking stakeholder functions with future goals and objectives. This could be managed through a rolling monitoring and review programme.

(iii) The Statutory System

The document is inherently focused only on developing further consensus through encouraging the adoption of similar aims and objectives within the business plans of stakeholders. This has missed a valuable opportunity. Throughout both the Overview and the National Prospectuses there is no acknowledgement of what is currently being undertaken by stakeholders. The statutory functions of the planning system implemented by local authorities and functions completed by other stakeholders such as the Forestry Commission do require recognition.

(iv) Drivers of Change

Although, it is not the intended purpose of the strategy to provide an ‘utopian’ vision or a future ‘blueprint’ for stakeholder collaboration, that is what unfortunately has resulted. Within the structure of the current documents, there is a

failure to review in sufficient depth the influence of possible European Union legislative change. The relationship with the business community and changing structure of the economy has also not been investigated to the level of detail necessary. To reshape the public's attitude towards the natural environment and to allow a balanced judgement of the potential to 'green' the drivers of the economy will require widespread stakeholder consultation and approval.

(v) Practicality of Implementation

A number of failings become apparent when considering the implementation of the consensual strategy. There is no recognition, nor direct linkage between 'possible actions' and current stakeholder activity. This may lead to confusion by individual's outwith the actual process during the consultation.

## CONCLUSION

- 6 The publication of this programme is a timely reminder to all stakeholders of the importance of delivering a balanced approach to sustainable development. However, the success of such a strategy will be a reflection of the ability to bring together differing organisations to accept a common vision. The documents in their current form will make this objective difficult to achieve through the structure and layout of the document combined with failures in research and the practicality of implementation. It is suggested a more coherent approach be adopted, with a concise visionary statement setting the scope of the strategy and implemented through a set of agreed objectives and outcomes. Further clarification and dialogue is therefore necessary with SNH to explore the issues raised by the consultative documents.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7 It is recommended that the committee:
- (a) note the contents of this report;
  - (b) endorse this report as the basis of comment to Scottish Natural Heritage on the Consultative National Heritage Zones Programme.
  - (c) authorise the Structure Plan Manager to liaise further with Scottish Natural Heritage on the issues and concerns raised within the report.

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