

Scotland's third Land Use Strategy consultation

Covering statement

About the Institute

The Institute of Chartered Foresters is the Royal Chartered body for foresters and arboriculturists in the UK. It represents a huge breadth of membership and this diversity and range of expertise is one of its greatest strengths. It has almost 1,900 members who practice forestry, arboriculture and related disciplines in the private sector, central and local government, research councils, universities and colleges throughout the UK, rural and urban settings, practical forestry and consultancy, at all scales from the individual tree to vast estates, and in all specialisms including conservation, recreation, wood production and urban planning.

The Institute regulates standards of entry to the profession. It provides support to its members, guidance to professionals in other sectors, information to the general public, and educational advice and training to students and tree professionals seeking to develop their careers in the forestry and arboricultural industry.

Our Support for the Land Use Strategy

The Institute welcomes this update to Scotland's Land Use Strategy. The current Land Use Strategy provides a vital underpinning to Scotland's Forestry Strategy, which the Institute strongly supports.

We particularly welcome the strong recognition of the significance of trees, woods and forests in delivering the vision of the strategy in all landscapes (except off-shore). The inclusion of urban landscapes more explicitly in this updated strategy is clearly of great importance as we re-imagine urban living post-pandemic – especially the importance of carefully integrated green infrastructure.

The need for an integrated approach to land use that incorporates trees, woodlands and forests, as well as other vital natural assets such as soil, biodiversity and freshwater, is clearly recognised and advocated by our members, so we applaud the new landscape-based approach. However, we believe that it will need considerable additional work to ensure that it is meaningful to stakeholders (for example in clarifying the distinction between marginal, semi-natural and upland landscapes, and explaining the overlapping nature of the categories). Given the statutory and parliamentary time constraints on meaningful consultation, we would encourage the Government to be much clearer in the Strategy about the approach to the implementation plan – including engagement with local, regional and national stakeholders.

As regards the cross-cutting themes, we believe that commercial activity and the economy need to be more explicitly referenced. The growth of the bio-economy and changes in global supply chains will affect all primary industries post-Brexit and post-pandemic.

As the representative body for tree experts across the commercial, public and voluntary sectors, the Institute is keen to work with the Government (and subsequent administration) to develop the strategy further, to develop an effective implementation plan and to ensure

that strong and meaningful links are maintained with the Forestry Strategy. We would welcome an early discussion with officials about how best to achieve this.

Online questions

Do you feel this vision still reflects the outcomes we need to achieve?

Yes. This meshes well with Scotland's Forestry Strategy and provides a good basis for the rest of the Strategy.

Do you think any of the objectives need updating?

- 'Land-based businesses working with nature to contribute more to Scotland's prosperity': A specific link to the Green Recovery would be helpful here. Also a recognition of Scotland's land contributing to the long-term global climate emergency.
- 'Responsible stewardship of Scotland's natural resources delivering more benefits to Scotland's people': This objective could make a stronger link to the international perspective, particularly in relation to the biodiversity crisis.
- "Urban and rural communities better connected to the land, with more people enjoying the land and positively influencing land use": no changes.

Do you think the landscapes are an effective way to communicate Scottish Government policy?

We support this approach which addresses the challenge of sectoral silos and helps to ensure that vital connections between complementary and conflicting land-uses are surfaced and explored. In this regard, the landscapes approach is more fundamental than simply communicating policy. That said, the rationale for the selection of the different landscape types and the fact that they overlap would benefit from clearer explanation.

The landscapes as currently described do not effectively communicate Scottish Government policy, as they miss some of the important linkages between current national and more local policies, and key national policy drivers are not adequately described (e.g. rural support post-Brexit). We strongly welcome the explicit references to the Forestry Strategy in some of the landscape types, however, this is inconsistent (e.g. no reference in the semi-natural landscapes section).

Under each landscape we have identified three sub headings: Climate Change, Biodiversity and Communities. Do you feel these capture the crosscutting themes that are important to all of Scotland?

The (bio)economy and green recovery post-Brexit and post-pandemic should also be included as a specific cross-cutting theme, especially with regard to the development of new business models and finance streams. For the Climate cross-cutting theme, the absence of any reference to the growth of biomass for energy needs urgent attention given its significance in the UKCC recommendations.

Does the content of the Land Use Strategy and the manner in which it has been presented, demonstrate that the Scottish Government is taking steps to help deliver sustainable land use?

The draft strategy does demonstrate that the Scottish Government is taking steps to help deliver sustainable land use. However, it is somewhat piecemeal and could be much more forward-looking. Examples of suggested improvements could include:

- The addition of a section providing information on what previous strategies have delivered and how any lessons learned will be addressed in the new strategy.
- A much more explicit link to the proposed approach to the implementation plan.
- A more explicit link to the UN Sustainable Development Goals to place Scottish land use more clearly within an international context.
- Recommendations for future policy priorities (recognising the political reality of the 2021 election)

Given the statutory timescale for the publication of this strategy, we would support the use of a slightly higher-level document that provides the context for more meaningful stakeholder discussion and engagement with regards to the implementation plan. The ICF is keen to play an active role in this and is able to draw on extensive forestry and arboricultural experience that will be so vital in achieving the vision.