

Agenda Item	14
Report No	EDI/26/18

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Environment, Development and Infrastructure

Date: 17 May 2018

Report Title: Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy 2018 (consultation draft)

Report By: Director of Development and Infrastructure

- 1. Purpose/Executive Summary**
 - 1.1 This report sets out the 'Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy 2018' (see **Appendix 1**). Members are asked to approve this document for full public consultation.
- 2. Recommendations**
 - 2.1 Members are asked to approve 'Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy' for public release and 8 week consultation.

3. Background

- 3.1 Highland Council is preparing a Highland Forest Woodland Strategy (HFWS) as supplementary guidance to the Highland-wide Local Development Plan. The new HFWS is a refresh of the existing HFWS produced in 2006, to update references to policy, strategic aims and objectives and also the map of preferred areas.
- 3.2 Scottish Government encourages Local Authorities to produce a forest and woodland strategy, the structure of which is guided by Forestry Commission Scotland's *The Right Tree in the Right Place*.

4. Purpose of the document (see Appendix 1)

- 4.1 The proposed HFWS sets out high-level objectives for forestry and woodland management and creation, reflecting national policy and regional circumstances for the Local Development Plan area. It is an expression of forestry and woodland stakeholders' priorities for the area, including climate change, timber and business development, community development and the environment. It includes issues relating to planning and development, as well as Council-owned and managed woodlands.
- 4.2 The draft strategy was prepared following engagement sessions and workshops with key stakeholders, including Forestry Commission Scotland, the Highlands & Islands Forestry Forum, Scottish Natural Heritage, Timber Transport Group and others to ensure key issues, concerns and objectives were properly addressed within the strategy.
- 4.3 The proposed HFWS includes an indicative spatial map, identifying opportunities for appropriate woodland expansion based on known sensitivities. The map will also be used by Forestry Commission Scotland to guide decisions regarding the allocation of funding.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Subject to Member approval the document will be subject to public consultation for a minimum of 8 weeks.
- 5.2 The HFWS is subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and the relevant authorities will be consulted during the same period. Any revisions to the HFWS arising will be noted when the strategy is presented to members for adoption.
- 5.3 Gaelic headings and a Member foreword will be added prior to adoption.

6. Implications

- 6.1 Resource
The cost of publication, advertising and consultation will be met within existing budgets. All time and work associated with this process is within existing capacity.
- 6.2 Legal, Risk, Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural), and Climate Change / Carbon Clever
The guidance does not present any legal implications or raise any equality, risk or Gaelic issues, but highlights climate change/carbon clever and/or rural issues for the Council.

Designation: Director of Development and Infrastructure

Date: 1 May 2018

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Development and
Infrastructure
Service

Seirbheis an
Leasachaidh agus
a' Bhun-structair



Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy

Coille Gàidhealach agus Ro-innleachd Choilltean



May 2018

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The HFWS has been prepared by The Highland Council with the assistance of GR Forestry Consultancy and C J Piper & Co, Chartered Foresters, GIS support from AM Geomorphology and Forestry Commission Scotland, and in consultation with a range of statutory agencies and forestry sector stakeholders including the Highland and the Islands Forestry Forum.



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FOREWORD

Forestry in Highland - as in Scotland generally - is a success story. Scotland's forestry sector as a whole is estimated to contribute £1 billion a year to the Scottish economy and support 25,000 FTE jobs in forestry-related businesses.

Highland's forests, woodlands and trees should be regarded as one of its most highly prized natural resources and those which deliver a wide range of economic, social and environmental benefits, from access and recreational facilities, opportunities to promote and encourage health and wellbeing to the protection and enhancement of its biodiversity - including the restoration of some of the most iconic ancient native woodland landscapes. In addition, by capturing carbon and helping to protect Highland's infrastructure by stabilising soils and regulating water flows, forests, woodlands and trees also play a vital role in helping to meet Scotland's climate change targets.

As well as being home to many cutting edge wood processing, harvesting, haulage and sustainable construction businesses that have seen considerable growth and gained significantly in reputation over the past few decades, Highland is also proud to host the Scottish School of Forestry as a hub for forestry education, training and skills development. The forestry sector in Highland has also played a crucial role in driving forward improvements in integrated land use, land reform and community empowerment.

At the time of developing this Strategy, which sets out the future direction of travel for the Highland forest and woodland resource, forest industries generally - both here and throughout Scotland - are nonetheless facing a challenging period of transition. The sustainability of the sector's success story is coming under threat by the decline in planting of productive woodlands which will affect continuity of future timber supplies and investor confidence. Furthermore, the implications of BREXIT for the forestry and timber sectors will, whilst difficult to predict, undoubtedly involve adjusting to both the challenges and opportunities of operating outside the Common Agricultural Policy.

Notwithstanding these challenges, as the largest local authority area in the UK and custodians of an outstanding natural environment and vibrant forest industry, Highland Council has an important strategic role to play, along with its public and private sector partners, in supporting and maintaining a positive environment for the forest and woodland resource to expand, integrate and thrive alongside other key industries.

Through this refreshed Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy, the Council welcomes the opportunity to play its part in supporting the achievement of the Scottish Government's strategic themes, as set out the Scottish Forestry Strategy, alongside national targets for woodland expansion, as reflected by its own vision, priorities and objectives for Highland's forests and woodlands. The Council will promote the expansion of productive and native woodland and high quality sustainable forest management in Highland. This will in turn enhance the natural environment, secure and create more jobs, stimulate investment and longer term industry confidence whilst striving to improve the infrastructure necessary to support them.

Highland Council's intention is that by helping to steer new planting to the most appropriate locations and guide the restructuring of forests and woodlands, the refreshed Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy will continue to support the enhanced integration of forestry with other land uses and ensure that the uptake of funding for woodland expansion is appropriately targeted.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2018 Highland Forest & Woodland Strategy (HFWS) is one of a series of Supplementary Guidance documents prepared by The Highland Council to support its Highland-wide Local Development Plan (2012).

Whilst essentially a refresh of the 'Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy' produced in 2006, this updated HFWS has been prepared against the backdrop of significant changes in the national and regional policy context and regulatory frameworks for forestry and wider land use, together with new priorities, challenges and opportunities facing the industry that have come to the forefront over the past decade. It presents the key issues, challenges and opportunities, together with a refreshed vision, strategic aims and objectives for the future expansion and stewardship of the Highland forest and woodland resource and associated industries over the next 20 years. Once approved, the HFWS will be reviewed on a 5 yearly basis.

At the broadest strategic level, the **purpose** of the HFWS is to provide a regional expression of how the national vision and priorities for the protection and expansion of Scotland's forest and woodland resource - as set out in the Scottish Government's Land Use Strategy for Scotland (2012), Scottish Forestry Strategy (2006) and other related Strategies - will be achieved within the context of the Highlands. More specifically, the purpose of the HFWS is to provide Highland Council with the framework for consulting on applications for grant support for woodland creation and management in support of the existing regulatory and environmental protection processes, most notably the UK Forestry Standard.

As a regional reflection of the Scottish Forestry Strategy, and drawing on consultation with a wide range of stakeholders including the Highland and the Islands Forestry Forum, the HFWS sets out the important roles that forestry will continue to play in delivering a wide range of sustainable economic and rural development, environmental, social and community benefits across Highland.

In accordance with Scottish Government Guidance a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulation Appraisal are underway and will inform the HFWS.

Achievement of the Strategy's vision is based around eight **key themes** that not only cross cut with those of the Scottish Forestry Strategy but also respond more specifically to the issues and opportunities for the future of forests and woodlands in Highland.

HFWS Themes

- ◆ Expanding the area of forests and woodland;
- ◆ Achieving the economic potential of forests and woodlands;
- ◆ Developing resilience to climate change;
- ◆ Encouraging community engagement and empowerment;
- ◆ Protecting and enhancing Highland's natural capital;
- ◆ Integrating with development and tourism;
- ◆ Strengthening connections with health, access and recreation and learning;
- ◆ Promoting business and skills development.

Each of these themes is then attributed a number of associated policy **objectives** as the basis for practical implementation and delivery of key **outcomes** for Highland (see Section 5).

A key component of the HFWS and its **implementation** is the inclusion of updated Spatial Mapping guidance in the form of a map showing **indicative** classification of land that might be suitable for woodland expansion.

Such classification is necessarily at strategic scale and illustrates the general level of constraint / opportunity for woodland expansion - not land which the HFWS proposes should be planted; **it is therefore only intended to guide stakeholders and to help target public funding towards the most suitable sites.**

The HFWS Policy Map has been assembled from GIS layers using an objective list of datasets for relevant sensitivities and opportunities including agricultural land classifications, statutory designations for landscape, priority species and habitats and the cultural and historical environment, with a view to achieving a level of consistency with neighbouring local authority forestry strategy spatial guidance, including Aberdeenshire, Moray and the Cairngorms National Park Authority.

The HFWS is a dynamic document and an important aspect of the Strategy process is to **review** and update the policy context and accuracy of the underlying data to the spatial mapping guidance on a five yearly cycle and to **monitor** progress towards indicators and targets within the Strategy.

1

INTRODUCING THE STRATEGY

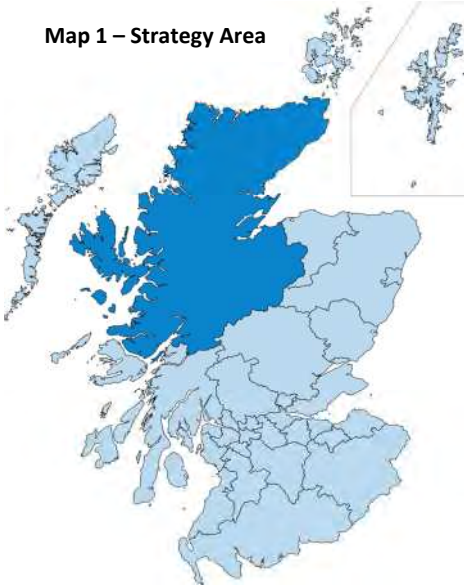
Introduction

The Highland Council area covers some 26,000 km² - a third of Scotland's landmass - and is the largest local authority area in the UK. The forests and woodlands of the Highlands are iconic elements of the environmental, landscape and cultural fabric of the region as well as being significant contributors to the wider Highland economy. It is therefore of vital importance that the innate value, diversity, and need for sustainable management and expansion of this multi-functional resource are recognised, protected and championed.

The 2018 Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy (HFWS) sets out the important roles that forestry will continue to play in delivering a wide range of sustainable economic and rural development, environmental, social and community benefits. It presents the key issues, challenges and opportunities, together with a refreshed vision, strategic aims and objectives for the future expansion and stewardship of the Highland forest and woodland resource and associated industries over the next 20 years.

Development of the Strategy has been supported by consultation with a wide range of forest industry and woodland-related statutory agencies and other stakeholders, both individually and collectively, through the Highland and the Islands Forestry Forum.

Map 1 – Strategy Area



Strategy Status & Purpose

In line with Scottish Planning Policy, the refreshed HFWS will become Supplementary Guidance forming part of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP).

At the broadest level, the purpose of the HFWS is to provide a regional expression of how the national vision and priorities for the protection and expansion of Scotland's forest and woodland resource - as set out in the Scottish Government's Land Use Strategy for Scotland, Scottish Forestry Strategy and other related Strategies - will be achieved within the context of the Highlands, as defined by the administrative boundary of the Highland Council – see Map 1.

The HFWS's status as Supplementary Guidance will also link closely with the Council's [Trees, Woodland & Development Supplementary Guidance \(2013\)](#) adopted in order to assist the Council in determining planning applications, particularly those involving development proposals that could result in the loss of trees or woodland.

More specifically the purpose of the HFWS is to:

- ◆ Identify the key issues and opportunities affecting forestry and woodlands in the Highlands;
- ◆ Provide a promotional tool for raising awareness of the multi-faceted value of the Highland forest and woodland resource;
- ◆ Guide Forestry Commission Scotland in the appraisal of funding applications for woodland expansion through the Scottish Government's Forestry Grant Scheme using the Strategy's strategic spatial mapping tool;
- ◆ Assist Highland Council when consulted in connection with applications for grant support for woodland creation and management in support of the existing regulatory processes;
- ◆ Influence and contribute to collaborative working with partner agencies, the forestry industry, landowners, land managers and communities in tackling key issues and realising the opportunities.



How has the 2018 HFWS changed since 2006?

Although a “Refresh” of the 2006 Strategy, which identified many issues and actions that are still relevant, the 2018 HFWS has been prepared against the backdrop of significant changes in the national and regional policy context and regulatory frameworks for forestry and wider land use. New priorities, challenges and opportunities facing the industry have also come to the forefront over the past decade.

Key differences between the 2018 HFWS and its predecessor Strategy include:

- ◆ Preparation of the 2018 HFWS has been guided by the Scottish Government’s [Right Tree in the Right Place \(2010\)](#) which superseded Circular 9/1999 on Indicative Forestry Strategies and provides an updated framework for development of local authority regional strategies;
- ◆ The 2018 HFWS will be informed by a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitat Regulations Appraisal (HRA).
- ◆ The 2018 HFWS has drawn on the Scottish Forestry Strategy (2006) for developing strategic themes for forestry in Highland that provide a regional interpretation of the national vision;
- ◆ Importantly, the 2018 HFWS provides updated *indicative* strategic guidance for woodland expansion in Highland through the availability of an interactive, online spatial mapping tool. This was derived from an updated set of mapping criteria broadly consistent with those used in the neighbouring forestry strategies for Aberdeenshire and Moray. Using these mapping criteria, the 2018 HFWS has mapped opportunities for woodland expansion at a strategic level using the following categories:
 - Preferred
 - Potential
 - Potential with sensitivities
 - Sensitive
 - Land above 550m (Montane)

2

REGULATORY & POLICY FRAMEWORK

Since the 2006 Strategy there have been significant changes to the legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks that have a bearing on or interact with forests and woodlands at national and regional levels.

National Legislation, Regulation & Control

In 2016, the Scottish Government published its proposals for new arrangements for the governance and regulation of forestry in Scotland. These include putting in place new primary legislation and an organisational structure to fully devolve forestry in Scotland and accountability to Scottish Ministers - changes that, subject to consultation, will be finalised during the lifetime of this refreshed HFWS. Until this happens and subject to outcomes of Brexit negotiations, forestry in Scotland will continue to be regulated primarily by Forestry Commission Scotland under:

- ◆ **Forestry Act 1967** (as amended);
- ◆ **Plant Health Act 1967**;
- ◆ **Environmental Impact Assessment Forestry (Scotland) Regulations 2017**.

Regulation of some tree felling also comes under the scope of the **Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997** (as amended by the Planning (Scotland) Act 2006).

In addition, the **UK Forestry Standard (2017)** sets out the national tenet for sustainable forest management together with accompanying guidelines (see also inset above).



UK Forestry Standard

The UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) is the reference standard for sustainable forest management in the UK. Supported by a series of guidelines covering biodiversity, climate change, historic environment, landscape, people, soils and water, the Standard outlines the context for forestry in the UK, sets out the approach of the UK governments to sustainable forest management, defines standards and requirements and provides a basis for regulation and monitoring.

National Policy Context

The overarching context for the HFWS flows fore-mostly, but not solely, from:

- ◆ The Scottish Government's updated ***Land Use Strategy (getting the best from our land) (2016)*** with its stated potential "for a new strategic vision for the uplands";
- ◆ ***Scottish Forestry Strategy (2006)*** which marks an important shift in the emphasis of forestry policy, focusing on seven important themes that reflect the role of trees and woodlands in meeting a broad range of objectives for sustainable development. The SFS is due to be reviewed in 2018; subsequent amendments will be incorporated into the HFWS as required.
- ◆ **The Scottish Government's Rationale for Woodland Expansion (2009)** which provides detail on how woodland expansion can best increase the delivery of public benefit from Scotland's Land;
- ◆ **Scottish Government Policy on Control of Woodland Removal (2009)** which sets out the policy and criteria for determining the acceptability of woodland removal which should be taken into account when preparing development plans and determining planning applications;
- ◆ **The Climate Change Plan 2018-2032** affirms a target of planting 100,000 hectares between 2012 and 2022. The long term ambition is that by 2032 Scotland's woodland cover will increase to 21% of the land area.
- ◆ **Scottish Planning Policy National Planning Framework 3 (2014)** which reiterates the need to plan for the expansion of woodland cover and creation of green networks;

- ◆ [Scottish Government Community Empowerment Act \(2015\)](#) which helps to empower communities through the ownership and control of land;
- ◆ [Draft Climate Change Plan \(2017\)](#) which sets out the Scottish Government's targets for new planting and increased promotion of home grown timber in UK construction.

Local Policy Context

At local level the overarching context for the HFWS is provided by Highland-wide Local Development Plan (2012) and associated supplementary guidance.

3

THE HIGHLAND FOREST & WOODLAND RESOURCE

Scotland's Forest Resource

Scotland's trees, woodlands and forests make a vital contribution to the nation's economic, environmental and social wellbeing as well as currently offsetting over 10 million of Scotland's annual 70 million tonnes of CO² emissions.

The forestry sector is worth almost £1 billion a year to the Scottish economy, supporting 25,000 full time equivalent jobs in forestry-related businesses. Scotland is also home to world-leading forestry and wood businesses that have seen considerable growth with investment of £250m in the last decade.

Over 55% of Britain's trees are in Scotland where the total area of woodland and forest is currently 1.42 million hectares - 18% of Scotland's total land area. Whilst 70% of Scotland's forests were planted during the second half of the 20th Century, since the 1990s, however, there has been a significant shift in the type and location of new planting.

Native woodlands are also a vital part of Scotland's natural and cultural heritage. Although what is left today is only a small proportion of the native woodland that once covered much of Scotland, much has been done since the 1980s to protect and restore the areas that remain, a considerable proportion of which is in Highland.

Although woodland cover has increased significantly in the past 50-60 years, it nonetheless still compares unfavourably with the European average of 37%. Over the last decade planting targets have failed to be met but this trend is likely to be reversed over the coming years.

Failure to increase planting is a threat to security of wood supply for the wood processing industries, and business confidence, inward investment and activity elsewhere in the forestry sector.

Forests & Woodlands in Highland

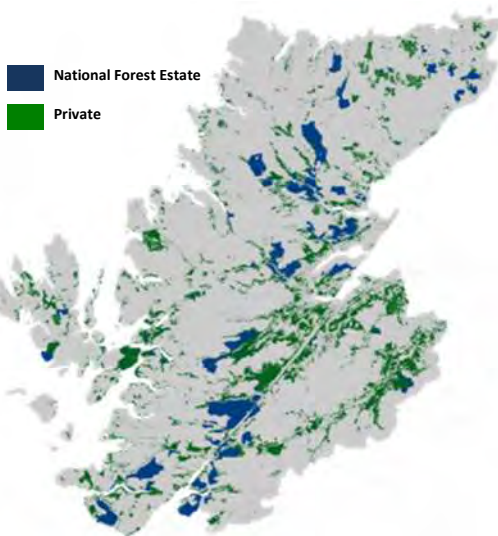
Forestry is one of the most extensive uses of land in Highland with a total woodland cover of about 310,000 hectares or 13% of land area. It is also an important source of employment with woodland management and timber processing providing the equivalent of at least 2,000 FTE jobs.

Most of the woodland expansion in the Highlands up to the late 1980s was aimed at softwood timber production through establishment of large-scale conifer plantations.

Development of the commercial forestry resource has typically been concentrated in areas with favourable soils and climate - notably within the Inner Moray Firth, Strathspey and Great Glen corridor towards Fort William and also to the North and North West, including substantial areas within Caithness and Sutherland - see Map 2.

In recent decades however, the type of and objectives for new planting have shifted towards the restoration and expansion of the Highland's historically depleted native woodlands, together with more multi-functional woodland.

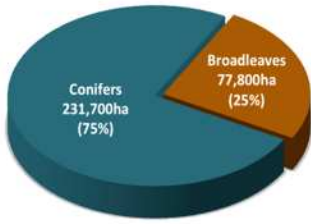
Map 2 – Forest Cover in Highland





Woodland Types and Characteristics

Fig 1 Highland Forest & Woodland Cover - Proportions of Conifers and Broadleaves



Productive Woodland

Of the total woodland area in Highland, 75% is coniferous woodland¹, broadly mirroring that for Scotland as a whole - see Fig 1.

The distribution of conifer species is dominated by Sitka spruce (27%), Scots pine (21%) and Lodgepole pine (19%) with birch being the dominant broadleaved species at 17% of the total woodland cover - see Fig 2.

Native Woodland

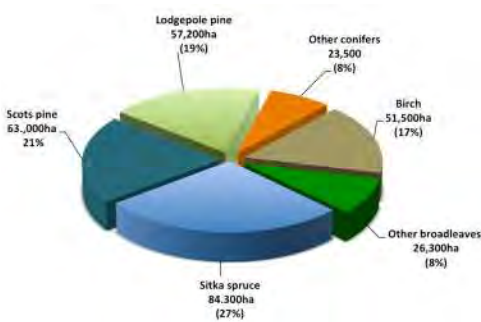
The area of native woodland in Highland (as recorded in the Native Woodland Survey for Scotland: Highland 2014) is 130,000 Ha², which is 37% of the total woodland area and 5% of the total land area of Highland.

The main priority habitat types are native pinewoods (43%, including the iconic areas of remnant Caledonian Forest), upland birchwoods (34%) and wet woodland (9%).

Many of the native woods in Highland are highly semi-natural in their present structure and composition with Scots pine and downy birch the most common native tree species in the upper canopy.

Rarer woodland habitats include upland oakwoods (4%), upland mixed ash woods (2%) with the remaining woodland made up of scrub species, including Montane willow scrub.

Fig 2 Highland Forest & Woodland Cover – Species Distribution

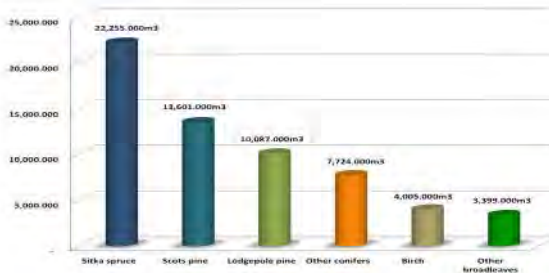


Woodland Habitat Networks

An evolving and increasingly significant woodland type within Highland, particularly on marginal peat sites where the design of conifer plantation restructuring is an on-going process, is the establishment of “transitional” woodland edges to help protect and enhance forest margins where these interface with peatlands, on which otherwise traditional conifer restocking is no longer appropriate.

Riparian woodland is defined as any woodland on the edge of a watercourse or waterbody. The main benefits of riparian woodland are improvements to water quality, shading to reduce summer temperatures for salmon and freshwater pearl mussel, bank stabilisation and an increase in habitat diversity. Rivers and burns are natural corridors along which riparian woodland can create woodland habitat linkages within and between river catchments. Gullies formed by upland burns can be refuges for woodland remnants, also containing associated understory species.

Fig 3 Highland Forest & Woodland Cover – Distribution of Standing Timber (m³ overbark)



Timber Supply & Availability

The Forestry Commission’s 2014 National Forestry Inventory data³ indicates that there are currently some 62million cubic metres (m³) of standing timber within Highland forests and woodlands, of which 36% comprises Sitka spruce, 22% Scots pine and 17% Lodgepole pine representing the three dominant productive conifer species. Only 13% of total standing volume comprises other conifer species with the 12% balance of 7.4million m³ being broadleaves - see Fig 3.

The inventory also indicates that an estimated annual output of some 2 million m³ and 45,000 m³ of softwood and hardwood timber respectively will become available from Highland forests over the period 2017-21 rising to 3.2million m³ and 80,000 m³ respectively by 2037.

After this period however, there is a marked drop off in timber availability, the risks of which are highlighted below.

^{1 & 3} NFI provisional estimates for Highland & Islands Conservancy; October 2014, Forestry Commission

² Native Woodland Survey for Scotland: Highland; January 2014, Forestry Commission Scotland



Timber Processing

Highland hosts a well-developed wood processing sector which in turn provides a vitally important economic contribution to the wider forestry sector through the provision of market outlets for the region's small roundwood and sawlog dimension timber. The sector has seen considerable inward investment over the past two decades which was further consolidated in early 2016 with Norbord's announcement of its £100m investment into an additional line within its oriented strand board plant at Dalcross, almost doubling its annual intake of small roundwood.

Elsewhere, Highland has seen the expansion and modernisation of the region's key sawmilling businesses including BSW in Fort William and Boat of Garten, JDG Munro at Dingwall, John Gordon and Tulloch Timber at Nairn.

In addition to small roundwood processing at Norbord there is also the Balcas combined heat and power plant at Invergordon that generates 8MW of electricity and manufactures 100,000 tonnes per annum of woodfuel pellets and local woodfuel markets have also developed, often as a result of bringing small, unmanaged and remote woodlands back into more active management.

4

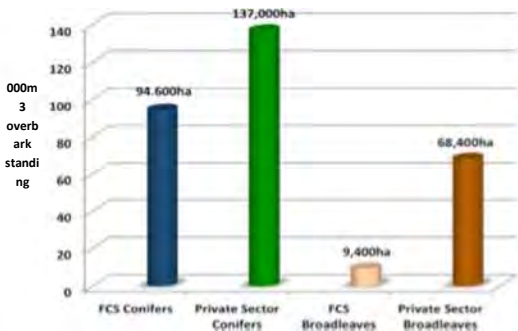
CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

This section outlines some of the key forest and woodland-related issues, constraints and opportunities that have come to the fore both nationally and within Highland over the past decade. The issues and opportunities were identified in consultation with stakeholders as influencing factors in the context of the development of the Strategy’s vision, themes and objectives.

Ownership

As elsewhere in Scotland, ownership of woodlands is fragmented, although there has been a trend over the past decade for an increasingly large proportion of private land within Highland to come under the management of a small number of landowners. Currently 66% of the Highland forest and woodland resource is under private ownership (including an increasing proportion of community owned or managed woodlands) with the balance of 34% comprising National Forest Estate, owned by Scottish Ministers and managed by Forestry Commission Scotland and its successor body Forestry and Land Scotland. This means that the private sector will have an increasingly important role to play in the stewardship of Highland’s forest and woodland resource (see Fig 4).

Fig 4 Highland Forest & Woodland Cover – Distribution of Ownership by Woodland Type



Woodland Removal

A key strategic issue facing Highland, as elsewhere in Scotland, is the net loss of woodland cover in the region, together with the historic shortfall in new planting compared with national targets, particularly in respect of productive woodland.

The loss of woodland cover results from woodland being removed and not replaced for a number of reasons, including forestry removed to accommodate wind farms and the restructuring of forests planted in the 20th century in order to improve their visual appearance through the incorporation of more open space, wider distribution of age classes and the creation of opportunities for increased biodiversity and recreation. In 2009 Scottish Government a policy on the control of woodland removal to provide direction for decisions on woodland removal in Scotland. The policy was in support of Scottish Forest Strategy and the Climate Change Scotland Act 2009 to meet the target of creating 100,000 has of new woodland over the period 2012-22.

Furthermore there is now a presumption against new planting or restocking on many peatland soils – particularly where peat depth is > 50cms - where there may be net negative environmental impacts of planting or restocking in terms of greenhouse gas emissions.

More emphasis is therefore required in prioritising efforts to reverse the decline in productive forestry by supporting opportunities for expansion of high quality productive planting and restocking on the most appropriate sites and where there are appropriate transport links

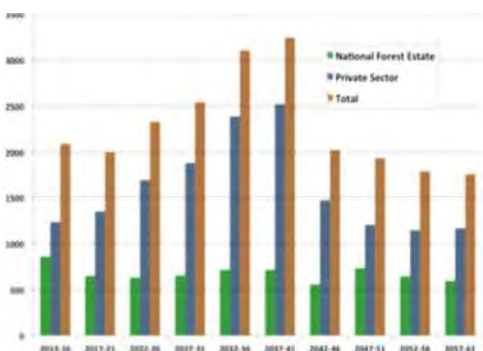
Whilst it is recognised that the diverse range of ownerships across Highland will have a correspondingly diverse range of objectives and priorities for planting, the HFWS provides the opportunity to support and help target public funding for appropriate woodland creation and long term forest plan proposals.

Future Timber Supplies and the “Timber Gap”

The 2014 National Forest Inventory’s 50-year UK timber availability forecast shows a steadily increasing supply of softwood timber until the late 2030s followed by a sharp decline thereafter.

The forecast for Highland follows a similar trend - see Fig 5 below. This drop-off has serious implications for future security of softwood timber supplies post-2030

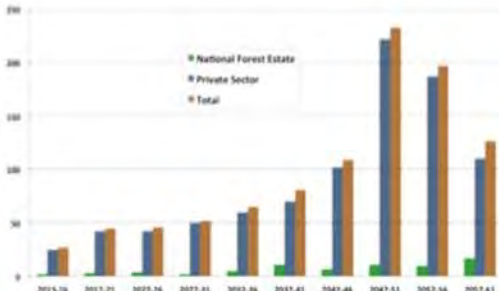
Fig 5 50-year forecast of average annual softwood timber availability in Highland



Source: National Forest Inventory : Forestry Commission Scotland (2014)



Fig 6 50-year forecast of average annual hardwood timber availability in Highland



Source: National Forest Inventory: Forestry Commission Scotland (2014)

and with it, the potential for job losses and loss of confidence, reduced new investment by the wood processing sectors in Highland and missed opportunities in contributing to climate change targets.

Conversely, the forecast for hardwoods over the same period shows a marked increase in availability (see Fig 6) - this arising as a consequence of a corresponding peak in broadleaved and native woodland planting during the period 2000-10.

This anticipated significant increase in availability of hardwood timber from Highland forests provides strategic business opportunities for the development of the hardwood sector, including timber utilisation and downstream markets, particularly within the private sector.

Timber Transport

A key feature of the transport network within Highland is that only 950km (12%) of the total public road network length of 7,700km are trunk roads. The balance of 88% (6,776km)⁴ are predominantly minor rural roads which provide the primary access to the forest resource and are within the Council's direct responsibility for maintenance.

There are increasingly significant constraints on the use of the public road network by the forestry industry in parts of the Highlands, particularly in remote areas. These areas, which timber lorries can struggle to access, are served by minor rural roads which are often single-track, have structural limitations and are in poor condition.

Reductions in local authority budgets for maintaining the rural road network are a limiting factor in the economic viability and sustainable management of the forest resource and its associated supply chain. In parts of Caithness and Sutherland the inadequacy of the rural road network to accommodate predicted volumes of future timber production is leading to the likelihood of long term restrictions being placed on timber traffic. Furthermore, planning for expansion and restocking will have to take road infrastructure limitations into consideration.

Through Scotland's network of Regional Timber Transport Groups, including the Highland Timber Traffic Group (HTTG), the forest industry has worked collaboratively with the Government, local authorities and communities to identify agreed routes for timber haulage vehicles to use, seek alternatives to road transport and invest in the roads infrastructure, the latter with support from the [Strategic Timber Transport Fund](#).

The Highland Agreed Routes Map - developed by the HTTG to categorise the roads leading to forests in terms of their capacity to sustain the likely level of timber haulage - will remain at the heart of the partnership approach to help mitigate many timber transport challenges in the region. Furthermore the [Highland Timber Transport Group Flow Country Strategy 2014-16 \(2016\)](#) highlighted the unrealised potential for rail to play a significant part in mitigating the recognised constraints on the public road network.

The [HITRANS Branchliner Report \(2016\)](#) went further by pointing unequivocally to the need for a modal shift to establish the feasibility of transferring the transport of substantial quantities of timber from road to rail, thereby establishing a more integrated solution to future timber transport across keys timber producing areas of Highland. Further concerted action will be required to address the most difficult to access areas and the HTTG will continue its vital role in coordinating activity and supporting and promoting potential alternative modes of transport.

⁴ [Scottish Transport Statistics No. 35 2016](#), February 2017, Transport Scotland



Climate Change

Helping to *mitigate* and *adapt* to climate change will be a key role for Highland's forests and woodlands over the foreseeable future.

Mitigation involves the reduction of carbon emissions either by substituting the use of fossil fuels or by increasing the capacity of the environment to absorb and store carbon and thereby contribute to national and regional climate change targets.

Opportunities for mitigation include:

- ◆ **New planting of trees to absorb carbon;**
- ◆ **Carbon offsetting** – new woodlands created in Highland could become verified under the **Woodland Carbon Code** and thereby gain access to potential carbon markets;
- ◆ **Increased use of timber as a building material** - helping to reduce carbon emissions associated with the manufacture and transportation of more energy intensive materials such as steel and concrete and locking up carbon in the longer term. There is a growing body of best practice from across Scotland - with exemplars within Highland - demonstrating how timber can be used in a range of building types (e.g. the "**Sullivan Report**"¹, "**Code for Sustainable Homes**"², "**Sustainable Construction Timber**"³ and "**Designing Housing with Scottish Timber**"). This also offers considerable potential to raise awareness, encourage and embed more extensive use of timber as a low carbon building material within the Highland planning system;
- ◆ **Use of wood and biomass as an energy source** - supporting forests and woodlands that can contribute to and bolster the woodfuel supply chain will contribute to a lower carbon economy for Highland.

Adaptation involves planning and managing woodland ecosystems to minimise the harmful impacts of climate change such as increases in the risk of flooding, the effects of drought, the impact of heat-waves on urban environments and the need to help plants – including trees and woodland - and wildlife adapt as their habitats change.

Opportunities for adaptation include:

- ◆ **Sustainable drainage** - trees and woodland are recognised as being a key component of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS);
- ◆ **Tree planting** to reduce flood risk has an important role to play in a package of measures designed to stabilise slopes and slow the flow of water from upland areas to reduce the impact on downstream communities and infrastructure. Existing forests and woodland can also play a key part in sustainable approaches to flood management;
- ◆ **Species selection** – consideration as to how changing climate will affect the future management and species composition of the Highland forest resource, given that it is already having impacts elsewhere in UK forestry, including growth rates and the increased incidence of pests and diseases. As management horizons for trees and woodlands are inherently long, planning for enhanced adaptability and resilience to climate change, for example through a broader choice of suitable species, needs to be given increased emphasis within woodland creation and restructuring plans.

¹ www.sbsa.gov.uk/sullivanreport.htm

² www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding

³ www.forestry.gov.uk/sustainableconstruction



Tree Health

Tree health is currently a major issue in UK forestry generally but with a number of particularly destructive pests and diseases at the forefront in Scotland and Highland that are constraining woodland management options – notably pine lappet moth (*Dendrolimus pini*), *Dothistroma* needle blight (DNB), ash dieback (*Chalara fraxinea*), Dutch elm disease and *Phytophthora ramorum*. *Dothistroma* in particular has caused widespread damage in parts of Highland resulting in the premature clearance of large swathes of productive forestry and associated economic losses. Pests and diseases such as *Chalara* also have potential impacts on native woodlands.

The integrity of the native flora and fauna of Highland woodlands is also threatened by invasive non-native species, particularly *Rhododendron ponticum*. National programmes to ensure its removal from Scotland's National Forest Estate are well underway locally.

More opportunities must be taken to diversify structural and species composition as defences against increasing threats from pathogens through woodland creation and restructuring proposals.

Deer Management

Deer management is a key issue in the Highlands where there are inherent natural tensions between the interests of landowners for whom deer stalking is a key land use and source of income and those who consider that grazing and browsing pressure, primarily by deer (but also by sheep), continues to be too high to fulfil forest management and conservation objectives.

In some areas however, deer densities are now in better balance with management objectives and there has been overall improvement in the proportion of designated features of nature conservation importance - including native woodlands - achieving favourable condition, whilst elsewhere, deer impacts are still preventing recovery or enhancement of important habitats⁴.

Opportunities to maintain and improve collaborative deer management (through Deer Management Groups and deer management plans) across Highland should continue to be taken to help deliver environmentally sustainable deer management, together with the findings and implications of the Deer Management in Scotland Report (2016), the 20 year vision set out in "Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach (2008) and the 2012 Deer Code.

Community Engagement and Empowerment

Forests and woodlands help foster community cohesion by creating a sense of place, connecting individuals and communities with their local identity, land and cultural heritage.

Forestry has also been shown to be an effective catalyst in community capacity building by providing opportunities for community ownership of woodlands that empowers communities to contribute directly to achieving locally relevant sustainable rural development, environmental, biodiversity, recreational and health benefits.

⁴ www.snh.gov.uk/pdfs/publications/corporateDeerManReview2016.pdf



There are some 50 established community groups and projects across Highland many of which own and /or manage local woods ranging from ancient semi-native woodlands to large conifer plantations and urban woods. These include well-established exemplars such as Abriachan, Aigas, Culag, Dunnet, and Tormore and more recent initiatives at Dunain, Glengarry and Inverness, to name but a few.

The Scottish Government's ***Community Empowerment Act (2015)*** is designed to help empower community bodies through the ownership of land and buildings and also to improve outcomes for communities by improving the process of community planning. The Highland community sector has played an influential role over the past two decades in the expansion and development of community woodland ownership – for example, through use of the former National Forest Land Scheme and the successor [Community Asset Transfer Scheme](#) (CATS).

The CATS provides the HFWS with the opportunity and rationale for more effectively supporting and promoting the future of community land ownership and underpin its vision for increasing areas of forests and woodland in Highland that further strengthen cultural and emotional connections with its communities.

Furthermore, under the [Land Reform \(Scotland\) Act \(2016\)](#) there is a requirement for engaging with communities with an interest in forestry and woodland-related development proposals.

Landscape

Highland's woodlands and forests provide integral and often iconic elements of the landscapes that attract people to live and visit the region. A significant proportion of landscapes are designated as National Scenic Areas (NSA) and Special Landscape Areas (SLA) and identify woodlands as being part of their special qualities. These landscapes designations are used to inform the Spatial Mapping Guidance (Map 3).

Highland also contains significant Wild Land areas; areas which include the most extensive tracts of semi-and-near natural habitat and high wildness in Scotland.

Whilst Wild Land areas do not carry statutory designations, they are regarded as a nationally important asset in Scottish Government planning policy. In order therefore to secure their distinctiveness and special character, appropriate protection and enhancement measures need to be considered.

It is recognised that protecting Wild Land areas requires supportive management and that in many areas, opportunities for appropriate enhancement often exist. In the context of a forestry and woodland strategy – two aims of which are to guide woodland expansion and encourage collaborative working so that opportunities for land use change can be realised - it is thought appropriate to highlight the need to take cognisance of Wild Land areas at an early stage when developing and consulting on woodland creation proposals so that an appropriate and proportionate assessment of any impacts can be made.

Spatial data on Wild Land areas can be found via [Scotland's Environment Web](#) and policy guidance at [Scottish Natural Heritage](#).

Biodiversity

Our forests and woodlands also provide habitats for a variety of plants and wildlife and Highland supports over three quarters of the UK's priority habitats and species found in Scotland. Wooded areas host a rich and diverse range of flora and fauna. Ancient and other native woodlands are of particular importance, not just because of their innate biodiversity value, but for the soil structure, function and diversity of flora developed over long periods of time - making them an irreplaceable resource.

The remnants of Scotland's Caledonian pinewoods are arguably Highland's most iconic cultural, scenic and wildlife assets. Having naturally seeded and grown since the last ice age but subject to widespread clearance and grazing over the centuries, only some 12,000 Ha currently remain, distributed over some thirty five key sites stretching from Shieldaig in the far west, to Loch Einig in Sutherland to the north, north of Loch Lomond to the south and Deeside to the east. At least twenty of these areas are designated as SSSIs, emphasising their conservation importance.

Highland's west coast and glens also host important remnants of Scotland's Atlantic oakwoods, such as those at Loch Sunart, which in turn provide some of Europe's best examples of lichen epiphyte habitats. Classed as cool temperate rainforest, these woodlands are now highly fragmented having been widely felled in the 18th and 19th centuries are therefore high priority conservation areas.

In hosting these and other priority habitats, Highland plays a key role in contributing to Scotland's ***2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity (2013)*** strategy and the ***Highland Biodiversity Action Plan (2015)***.

The HFWS provides an on-going opportunity to support well-designed and sensitive woodland management and expansion proposals that will complement and restore Highland's native woodlands. This will in turn protect ancient and semi-natural woodland and maintain and enhance biodiversity.

Access, Recreation & Tourism

For Highland's forests and woodlands to continue to provide their many health, recreation and tourism benefits, they need to be accessible for visitors of all abilities. There also needs to be on-going recognition of the contribution that landowners make in providing such benefits alongside their other management objectives.

The economic contribution of forests and woodlands to the Scottish tourism industry has been estimated at over £4.5 billion per year; in Highland, their value is becoming more clearly recognised as a key element of tourism destinations with cycling tourism, mountain biking and wildlife tourism making significant contributions.

Woodland paths are an important constituent of the Core Path Plans and as new woodland paths are developed there is an opportunity to extend the Core Path Network.

There are a number of important tourism transport corridors and destination routes in Highland, including the road routes of the A9 through Strathspey, the Great Glen, Invergarry to Skye and Inverness to Ullapool, and the designated Long Distance Routes of the West Highland, Great Glen and Speyside Ways and the more recently promoted North Coast 500 route. These provide important opportunities for further strengthening connections between tourism and Highland forests and woodlands, and with the concept of establishing more "forest parks" coming to the fore, forests such as Ardverikie, Morvern and Achnashellach that provide the visual backdrop to many of the region's tourism experiences, could also be added to this number.

There are also opportunities to improve the setting of important cultural heritage sites and landscapes through the removal of regeneration or past planting and by restoring woodland where the historical evidence indicates that this was present during the life of the sites, as found with a number in Sunart.

The many designed landscapes, such those included in the Historic Scotland / SNH Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes, including Eilean Shona (Loch Moidart) and Beaufort near Beaulay have a significant woodland element and their

sustainable management and promotion would also contribute to cultural and tourism benefits.

Such wealth of natural heritage thus provides Highland not only with physical “natural capital” but also significant associated economic business development opportunities.

Health & Wellbeing

There is mounting evidence which demonstrates that access to good quality green space - including trees, woodlands and nearby countryside - can make a significant contribution to improvement of physical and mental health and recovery times.

At a national scale, the health sector is recognising such benefits as one of the determinants of health and there are a number of initiatives that are actively working with the sector to help promote and deliver them, such as the **Green Exercise Partnership** (GEP) - a national partnership between Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland and NHS Health Scotland established in 2007 - and FCS’s “**Branching Out**” programme which is an innovative development for adults who use mental health services in Scotland; Branching Out is currently active in nine NHS board areas including Highland.

Since 2010 the GEP has provided funding to support demonstration projects across Scotland including [The New Craigs Greenspace project](#) near Inverness.

In its [Annual Report of the Director of Public Health, Highland \(2014\)](#), NHS Highland recognised the opportunities to improve human mental and physical health through exercise and general enjoyment of the outdoors and called for greater investment in our natural capital to protect existing ecosystems and improve the health of our natural environment.

There are three NHS Highland hospitals within the HFWS area - the District General Hospital at Raigmore in Inverness and two Rural General Hospitals in Wick and Fort William and thus opportunities to establish/foster stronger links and engagement between the Highland health sector, public agencies like FCS and SNH and other partner organisations such as Maggies (based at Raigmore) and local community woodland groups such as those at Abriachan, Dunnet and Evanton, to identify more ways of helping to deliver the NHS Highland vision and contribute to the health and wellbeing of the region’s rural and urban communities.

Trees, Woodlands & Development

The HFWS offers opportunities to more proactively promote and integrate the many and varied benefits provided by trees, woodlands and forests (“ecosystems services”) in relation to development at master planning and operational levels. This could include more innovative approaches to living and working sustainably within woodlands, for example woodland crofts and hutting.

Highland Council Supplementary Guidance (Trees, Woodlands and Development) will be used to guide development where it may impact on trees and woodlands. Scottish Government policy on the Control of Woodland Removal will be a consideration where proposals involve a permanent change in land use resulting in a net loss of woodland.

Forestry Sector Labour and Skills Availability

Over 25,000 people work in Scotland’s forestry and related industries of which 19,500 are employed in forest management and timber processing and over 6,000 in forestry-related tourism roles.

Whilst the forest industry can be an attractive and rewarding place to work, offering a wide range of job opportunities with the capacity to double in size over the next ten years, the current forestry workforce is ageing and is not expanding at a

sufficient enough rate to meet the growing demands of the sector. Furthermore, as 94% of forestry businesses have less than 10 staff, the costs of providing accessible entry points to the sector such as those offered through the Scottish Government's "Apprenticeship Family" and of delivering on-going training for those within it are seen as a significant barrier for these small businesses.

Recognising the importance of a skilled workforce to the sustainability of Scotland's forest and timber sector, The Scottish Forest and Timber Technologies Industry Leadership Group, has established a Skills Working Group in order to develop a Skills Investment Plan, in conjunction with Skills Development Scotland, which will outline a plan of action to ensure the industry has the skilled and diverse workforce it requires to enable its continued growth.

Highland is well placed to contribute to these actions with its breadth of forestry, timber processing and construction businesses and its significant knowledge base in community and crofter forestry initiatives. Furthermore, the Scottish School of Forestry, Inverness College, UHI is a centre of excellence for promoting the sector as an attractive career choice and providing forestry training both to the next generation of foresters and the existing workforce as a result of its strong links to schools and outdoor woodland learning initiatives in Highland and the wide range of further and higher education programmes and short courses it delivers.

BREXIT & Changes in Forestry Legislation & Regulation

The impact on the Highland forestry sector of leaving the European Union is as uncertain as it is for Scotland and UK as a whole. Confor and other forest industry representatives have identified a range of potential impacts on the forestry sector under three main themes:

- ◆ **Legislative & Regulatory Affairs** (including issues such as EIA Regulations, Birds & Habitats Directives, Plant Health, Employment and Health & Safety Law);
- ◆ **Public Funding** (including the support for woodland creation and management, supply chain and timber processing, community development and research);
- ◆ **Trading & Markets** (including issues such goods, labour, timber & construction, renewable energy and land).

In terms of specific forestry legislation and regulation, with the introduction of the ***Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Bill*** in 2018, there will be changes to forestry legislation in Scotland. Encompassing forestry and land management, the Bill recognises the wider benefits that forestry can deliver and has been designed to provide a modern approach to forestry development, support and regulation where forestry will be more fully accountable to Scottish Ministers and the Scottish Parliament.

It is anticipated that changes resulting from the Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Bill would be implemented in 2019.

Although traditionally geared towards long term planning, the forestry sector is well accustomed to the constantly evolving dynamics of its policy and support structures and is sufficiently resilient and sustainable to adapt. Opportunities also exist to regularly review local forestry strategies to maintain support for forestry by responding to major structural change.



5

VISION, STRATEGIC THEMES, OBJECTIVES & OUTCOMES

The HFWS sets out The Highland Council's vision, strategic themes, objectives that will form the basis of its support for the development of the Highland forest and woodland resource and its stewardship over the next 20 years and associated outcomes.

Vision

Our vision is that **“the forests, woodlands and trees of the Highlands will be prized elements of our economic, environmental, community and cultural fabric, fulfilling valued and sustainable roles in realising their productive potential and enriching the quality of life for all who live, work and visit here.”**

Strategic Themes

The HFWS has the following eight key strategic themes that cross cut with those of the Scottish Forestry Strategy and reflect and respond to the issues and opportunities set out in Part 4 of the Strategy.

The themes are not listed in any particular order as they are seen as being of equal importance in achieving the vision. In the following sections each theme is accompanied by policy objectives that provide the focus for action over the next five years.

“ ... the forests, woodlands and trees of the Highlands will be prized elements of our economic, environmental, community and cultural fabric, fulfilling valued and sustainable roles in realising their productive potential and enriching the quality of life for all who live, work and visit here.

”

- 1 Woodland Expansion;
- 2 Economic Potential;
- 3 Climate Change;
- 4 Community Empowerment;
- 5 Environmental Capital;
- 6 Development and Tourism;
- 7 Health and Wellbeing;
- 8 Business and skills development.



Policy Objectives

Theme 1 – Woodland Expansion

Expansion of forests and woodland in Highland will be looked upon as a means of contributing to achieving national targets for increasing the areas of productive and native woodland but always subject to an appropriate scale, type, objective and overriding constraints.

Furthermore, in order that forests and woodland can deliver their full potential of multiple economic, environmental, social and community benefits, it is the HFWS's aspiration that such woodland expansion should be integrated, diverse, inclusive, resilient, productive and better supported by regional infrastructure.

There is a presumption that the design and subsequent management of all woodland creation and restructuring proposals will be carried out in accordance with the requirements of the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS).

Objectives

- ◆ **Support increased levels of productive and multifunctional woodland expansion across Highland;**
- ◆ **Encourage planting that contributes to integration with and expansion of native woodland and other woodland habitat networks;**
- ◆ **Encourage woodland expansion that delivers 'ecosystem services' relating to mitigation and adaptation to climate change, including flood plan management objectives;**
- ◆ **Encourage a collaborative and balanced approach to deer management that support the Highland economy whilst safeguarding its forests, woodlands and wider environmental interests;**
- ◆ **Support woodland expansion and crofter forestry schemes that help better integrate forestry with agriculture;**
- ◆ **Contribute to the implementation of the recommendations of the Mackinnon Report for woodland expansion.**

Theme 2 - Economic Potential

Sustainable management of Highland's forests and woodland will be dependent on the sector as a whole being economically viable.

A key factor in helping landowners to achieve the economic viability of their woodland investment is the availability of necessary supporting infrastructure, principally pertaining to timber transport but also efficiency of access to appropriate public funding mechanisms.

Wood processors also require a consistent and reliable supply of timber if they are to continue to invest in the industry. There is therefore a business imperative to help 'smooth' the supply of timber from Highland forests to avoid predicted peak and troughs of timber availability. This will require a combination of good long-term planning and production forecasting, the prudent use of the national forest estate's timber resource and incentives for the phased restructuring of plantations.



Objectives

- ◆ Continue to work with the Highland Timber Transport Group (HTTG) to facilitate forest industry collaboration to improve timber transport infrastructure including rail and sea;
- ◆ Work in partnership with HTTG to identify priority road improvement projects and remove the majority of constraints through a medium term programme of investment in improvement;
- ◆ In conjunction with the Highland Timber Transport Group, actively seek ways to integrate rural roads infrastructure and land-use planning;
- ◆ Encourage the wider use of woodfuel in domestic and smaller-scale commercial settings to support the development of the Highland-wide biomass supply chain;
- ◆ Support the development of local hard wood products;
- ◆ Promote growth of markets for timber grown in Highland for sustainable construction.

Theme 3 - Climate Change

This theme centres on the roles of Highland forests and woodland in helping to reduce the impact of climate change and better equipping Highland to adapt to those changes.

Woodland creation and management should continue to support the principles of the EU Water Framework Directive, River Basin Management Planning and flood risk management aims, together with protection of soils and slope stability and species diversification.

Objectives

- ◆ Support forestry proposals that enhance environmental and soil protection through sustainable flood and catchment management;
- ◆ Support increasing use of woodfuel for renewable energy;
- ◆ Continue to encourage diversity of species within woodland creation and long term forest plans to adapt to climate change and improve resilience against pests and disease;
- ◆ Promote increased use of home-grown sustainably produced timber and timber products for construction and house building through Highland Council's sustainable procurement policy;
- ◆ Raise awareness of Voluntary Carbon Standards such as the Woodland Carbon Code as mechanisms for help to realise the benefits of carbon sequestration;
- ◆ Continue to implement SG Policy on the Control of Woodland Removal when considering development proposals that involve the loss of trees and woodland;
- ◆ Encourage wider use of Low Impact Silvicultural Systems (LISS) where appropriate to increase long term carbon retention;
- ◆ Support opportunities for peatland habitat restoration in combination with "peatland edge" and "transition" type woodland and habitat connectivity as part of restructuring / long term forest plan proposals.



Theme 4 – Community Empowerment

The HFWS's vision incorporates not only physically increasing areas of forests and woodland in Highland but also further strengthening cultural and emotional connections between communities and the forests and woodlands themselves.

Enabling mechanisms such as the **2015 Community Empowerment Act**, and the **Community Assets Transfer Scheme (CATS)** will continue to help community groups to meet their aspirations for local woodland ownership and achieving ways to providing increased public benefits and opportunities

Objectives

- ◆ **Continue to support asset transfer, community woodland ownership and management within Highland;**
- ◆ **Encourage local engagement in scoping meetings relating to Forest Plans and woodland creation proposals to deliver local benefits;**
- ◆ **Encourage community owned wood-related energy projects in woodlands;**
- ◆ **Encourage and promote community led affordable housing within appropriate woodland settings as described in The Highland's Council Trees, Woodland & Development Supplementary Guidance;**
- ◆ **Support accessible access and recreational facilities, local employment, rural skills and community energy projects.**

Theme 5 - Environmental Capital

The quality and diversity of Highland's landscapes, biodiversity and cultural heritage – its Environmental Capital - is a key asset, underpinning the area's attractiveness as a place to live, work, visit and invest. The region's forests and woodlands already make a substantial contribution to the landscapes and biodiversity of Highland, providing a range of natural and semi-natural habitats and forming an integral part of the area's historic environment and cultural heritage.

This Theme's objectives focus on ways of further enhancing this contribution.

Objectives

- ◆ **Promote woodland management and expansion that restores, enhances and safeguards biodiversity and habitat connectivity;**
- ◆ **Support sustainable forest management proposals that meet the UK Forestry Standard;**
- ◆ **In conjunction with other partners, promote the benefits of incremental restoration of Plantation on Ancient Woodland (PAWS) sites;**
- ◆ **Ensure that woodland expansion proposals and long-term management plans protect and promote Highland's historic environment and cultural heritage, including gardens and designed landscapes and heritage trees.**

Theme 6 - Development and Tourism

Trees and woodlands make an important contribution to place making and their interaction with good quality development can create attractive and functional places for people to live and work – as exemplified in many European countries.

Well planned and designed planting and forest restructuring also ensures that new development makes a positive contribution to the wider environment, safeguarding and reinforcing habitat networks, enhancing tourism corridors and



integrating development within the wider landscape.

Settlements of more than 2,000 inhabitants may be eligible for the Forestry Grant Scheme's Woodland In and Around Towns (WIAT) programme. Enhanced and sustainable management of woodlands in and around towns and villages and the integration of woodlands with new developments can improve their character and setting as well as providing opportunities for better access and community participation.

Objectives

- ◆ Ensure that provision for new planting and /or management of existing tree cover are incorporated as integral elements of development briefs and master plans for new development and regeneration proposals across Highland;
- ◆ Promote opportunities for funding streams such as WIAT to contribute to enhancement of urban fringe areas through improvements to local woodlands, particularly those in or near deprived areas;
- ◆ Work with woodland owners, managers and other stakeholders to identify and develop the potential of strategically located new and existing Highland woodlands (for example, forest parks) as future visitor and tourism attractions and destinations;
- ◆ Encourage woodland tourism initiatives to sign up to Visit Scotland Welcome Schemes;
- ◆ Support opportunities for linking accessible and active outdoor access/recreation and tourism in and between Highland forests and woodlands, including mountain biking, walking and activities such as orienteering and eco- tourism.
- ◆ Support the restructuring of woodland and forestry along tourism corridors
- ◆ Support sensitive housing/hutting/developments in woodlands in accordance with Supplementary Guidance on Trees, Woodland and Development

Theme 7 – Health and Wellbeing

Projects designed to bring physical and mental health benefits to Highland communities through linkages with forests and woodlands will continue to be a priority over the lifetime of the HFWS. Similarly existing initiatives and new partnerships with NHS Highland, local community groups and other health sector partners can be consolidated and expanded.

The access opportunities that woodlands provide have a significant role in health improvement and are robust environments for outdoor activities, with the capacity to absorb large numbers of people while still maintaining the all-important “sense of place”. Community woodlands have a particularly important role to play in this respect.

The potential range and scale of woodland-linked access and recreation opportunities is high, as demonstrated by the growth in cycling tourism and mountain biking within forests such as Laggan and Golspie.

Access rights exercised under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code provide landowners and the public with legal and advisory frameworks for taking responsible access.

The potential for local woodlands to be used as ‘natural classrooms’ thus

“
Understanding a place – its physical, social economic, cultural and environmental characteristics – is a fundamental prerequisite of good planning.”

James Mackinnon (retired Scottish Government Chief Planner)

embracing education as a route to reconnecting people, particularly schoolchildren, with their forests and thereby helping to create a forest culture will be encouraged through delivery by well-established mechanisms such as Forest School and the Highland OWL (Outdoor Woodland Learning) groups.

Objectives

- ◆ **Continue to work with the Highland health sector and other stakeholders to raise awareness of the role of trees and woodlands in provision of health benefits;**
- ◆ **Support and extend the benefits of joint health initiatives such as “Branching Out” and the Green Exercise Partnership” across Highland;**
- ◆ **Promote the role of woodlands in providing a resource for physical activity close to where people live and work;**
- ◆ **Support and promote development and management of the Highland Core Paths network;**
- ◆ **Ensure that provision for responsible public access to forests and woodlands is embedded in woodland creation proposals and maintained within existing woodlands using the frameworks of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and Land Reform Act;**
- ◆ **Encourage and promote the use of Highland forests and woodlands for outdoor learning through Forest School and Highland OWL.**

Theme 8 - Business and Skills Development

Delivering the full benefits of multifunctional and sustainable forest management requires a diverse, well-trained, highly skilled and motivated workforce. This is a key role of universities and higher education establishments; within Highland, the Scottish School of Forestry, Inverness College, UHI, is the principal institution for forestry education and training.

Encouraging people to consider working in the forest industry requires effective marketing and communication strategies which will showcase the sector as a vibrant and progressive industry with opportunities for rewarding careers.

Offering new entrants a clear route into the industry requires the development of flexible, accessible and stimulating apprenticeship schemes, together with the encouragement of employers to engage in such programmes.

Providing opportunities for the emerging and existing workforce to learn and continually develop skills which will enable them to meet the diverse demands of the sector and to maximise links with other industries requires a curriculum which is up-to-date and appropriate to the needs of the industry, a recognition of the role of continual professional development, the provision of relevant training programmes and a willingness to exchange knowledge and identify cross-cutting opportunities with other sectors.

Objectives

- ◆ Working collaboratively with industry and education partners across Highland and the Scottish Forest and Timber Technologies Skills Group, promote the sector as a potential career choice to new entrants;
- ◆ Improve links between schools, FE/HE institutions and industry through the support, development and delivery of rural skills and apprenticeship programmes and active engagement with Developing the Young Workforce;
- ◆ Support curriculum and training provision in the Highlands to ensure they are up-to-date, appropriate and meet the needs of the industry;
- ◆ In partnership with industry initiatives such as the Highland Forest Industry Cluster, explore and promote the development of accessible and stimulating apprenticeship schemes across the Highlands and encourage employer engagement with such programmes;
- ◆ Support knowledge exchange and explore cross-cutting opportunities with other land based sectors operating within the Highlands.

Strategy Outcomes

It is envisaged that over its initial 20-year lifespan, the HFWS will have delivered the following key outcomes:

Theme 1: Woodland expansion in Highland will have contributed strongly towards achieving national targets.

Theme 2: Realisation of the economic potential of the Highland forest resource is supported by appropriate infrastructure.

Theme 3: Highland forest and woodland are more resilient to the effects of climate change.

Theme 4: More Highland communities are empowered through ownership, management and connection with their local forests and woodlands.

Theme 5: Forests and woodland are highly valued for their role in enhancing and protecting Highland's iconic environmental capital.

Theme 6: More built development and tourism is integrated with Highland forests and woodland.

Theme 7: The health and wellbeing development derived from forests and woodland are firmly embedded within Highland's health sector.

Theme 8: Highland is widely recognised as a centre of excellence for forestry education, skills and business innovation.

DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

Spatial Guidance for Woodland Expansion

A key strategic aim of the HFWS is the expansion of forests and woodlands in Highland supported by the overarching principle that such expansion should be looked upon favourably, albeit subject to appropriate scale, woodland type, objective, policy and legislative considerations and other overriding constraints.

The classification of land sensitivity to woodland expansion provided in the 2006 Strategy's "Policy Map" has been updated using the guidance provided by the SG's 'The Right Tree in the Right Place'. It retains the three main categories of "Preferred", "Potential" and "Sensitive" but, in order to reflect Highland's diversity, also includes two additional categories; "Potential with Sensitivities" and "Land above 550m".

The provision of this updated spatial guidance is intended to enable, rather than constrain woodland expansion. The classification is a strategic process, giving a general impression of an area's suitability or otherwise for woodland expansion that will help maximise benefits and integrate with adjacent land uses.

The refreshed Policy Map (see Map 3) illustrates the general level of opportunity for woodland expansion - not land which the HFWS proposes should be planted. Given that woodland is one of many possible uses for much of the region's land, inclusion within one or other of the land categories should not be interpreted as precluding other viable and environmentally acceptable land uses.

As such the spatial guidance in Map 3 is therefore intended only to guide stakeholders towards potentially suitable sites and does not automatically mean that a planting proposal would proceed. On detailed examination there will inevitably be small areas that could readily fall into a different category.

The importance of site-specific assessment of individual proposals for woodland expansion, or woodland removal, thus remains paramount and for this reason it is critical to emphasise that the classifications are indicative rather than prescriptive.

The five categories are defined as below:

Preferred – Land which is suitable for a range of woodland types and objectives. It should be possible to address site specific issues with well-designed proposals which meet the UK Forestry Standard and associated guidelines.

Potential – Land which offers considerable potential for a range of woodland types which integrate with other land uses. The design of schemes will require careful consideration to address limited sensitivities and in particular, follow FCS Guidance on [Woodland Creation on Agricultural Land](#).

Potential with sensitivities – Land which offers potential for woodland types which predominantly deliver biodiversity, landscape and/or amenity objectives. The design of schemes will require more careful consideration to address a wider range of sensitivities.

Sensitive – Land which offers limited potential for woodland types which predominantly deliver biodiversity, landscape and/or amenity objectives. A combination of known sensitivities are only likely to support woodland of a scale and character which can be accommodated without significant adverse effects on sensitivities, and/or where it would enhance features of local interest.

Land above 550m - Land offering limited potential for predominately montane woodland type. A combination of known sensitivities and altitude are only likely to support woodland of a scale and character which can be accommodated without

significant adverse effects on sensitivities, and/or where it would enhance features of local interest.

In addition to the above, Map 3 identifies existing woodland, lochs and water courses and larger urban areas considered unsuitable for woodland.

In general, the more sensitive the classification, the more numerous and significant are likely to be the issues that will need to be addressed in considering woodland expansion proposals and the greater the likelihood that an Environmental Impact Assessment will be required. A Habitats Regulations Assessment will be required for all proposals which could have a significant effect on Natura 2000 sites.



CRITERION	INFORMATION LAYER	MAP CATEGORY / COLOUR
Existing Woodland	National Forest Inventory Scotland (2013)	Shows existing native woodland – i.e. out with area available for new woodland creation.
	Native Woodland Survey of Scotland	
Agricultural land	Macaulay (JHI) Land Capability for Agriculture Class 3.2 land *	Potential – see Woodland Creation on Agricultural Land
	Macaulay (JHI) Land Capability for Agriculture prime quality land (Classes 1, 2 and 3.1)	Potential with sensitivities
Cultural heritage	Designed Landscapes and Gardens	Potential with sensitivities
	Scheduled Ancient Monuments (with 20m buffer)**	Potential with sensitivities
	Battlefields	Potential with sensitivities
Natural heritage sites / environmental designations / landscapes Allocation of environmental ¹ and landscape ² designations into Potential with sensitivities or Sensitive has been made by SNH and the Highland Council respectively.	Local Nature Reserves	Potential with sensitivities
	National Nature Reserves	Potential with sensitivities
	National Scenic Areas	Potential with sensitivities
	RAMSAR sites	Potential with sensitivities
	Special Areas of Conservation	Potential with sensitivities
	Special Landscape Areas	Potential with sensitivities
	Sites of Special Scientific Interest	Potential with sensitivities
	Special Protection Areas	Potential with sensitivities
	RAMSAR sites	Sensitive
	Special Areas of Conservation	Sensitive
	Special Landscape Areas	Sensitive
	Sites of Special Scientific Interest	Sensitive
	Special Protection Areas	Sensitive
Carbon rich soils	SNH Carbon & Peatland Map (2016) derived from JHI soil carbon data	Potential with sensitivities – see Forestry and Peatland Habitats
Elevation	Elevation data	Land over 550m
Urban (built up) areas	Land Capability for Forestry Category 20	Unsuitable

Table 1. Summary of Spatial Mapping Criteria & Information Layers

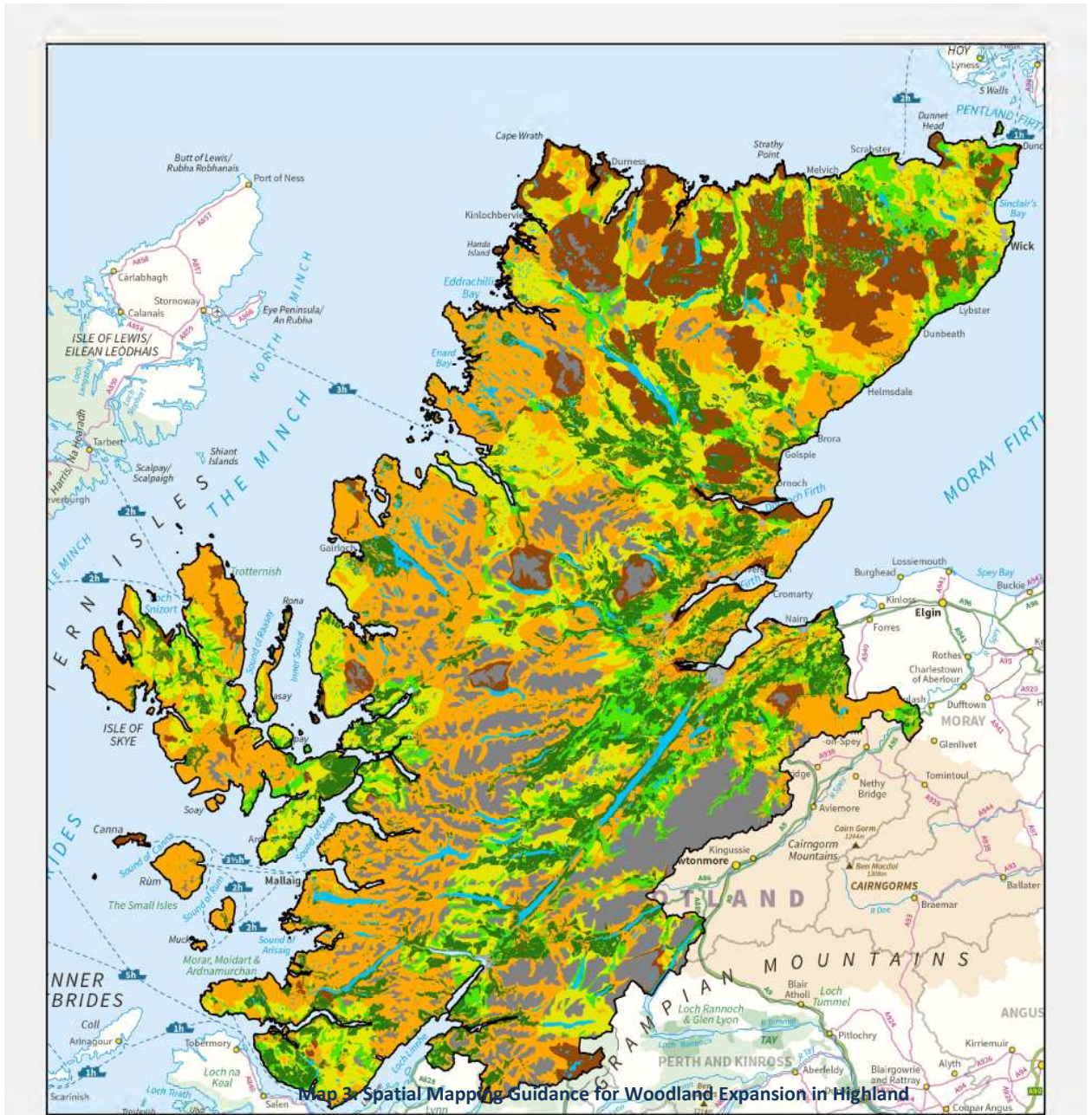
Notes on Table 1

*All other Macaulay Land Capability classes above 3.2 (i.e. 4.1 to 7) are categorised as “Preferred” where no other constraints apply;

**The “Potential with sensitivities” categorisation given the Scheduled Monuments is a means of identifying the 20m buffer round these sites as sensitive to new planting. The actual monuments themselves, which are generally too small to show on the map, will be “Unsuitable” for planting.

¹ Conservation designations have been categorised into “Potential with sensitivities” or “Sensitive” by SNH

² Landscape designations have been categorised into “Potential with sensitivities” or “Sensitive” by the Highland Council



Map 3: Spatial Mapping Guidance for Woodland Expansion in Highland

Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy

Legend

- Existing Woodland
- Preferred
- Potential
- Potential with Sensitivities
- Sensitive
- Unsuitable
- Land over 550m
- Loch / Water

0 10 20 40 Kilometres

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Enabling Woodland Expansion

This refreshed HFWS has highlighted the key issues and opportunities in relation to forestry and woodlands in Highland together with the Councils' vision for how forestry will help contribute towards enhancing the environmental, economic and community fabric of Highland in a sustainable basis. However, this vision is only meaningful and achievable through commitment, "buy in" and a coordinated approach by the Highland Council, its many partner agencies and all those involved in the forest industry and associated communities to furthering a targeted implementation programme.

As a follow on from formal adoption of the refreshed HFWS, it is therefore recommended that an implementation process take place using the issues and opportunities, strategic themes and objectives already identified in this document as the baseline.

The output of the implementation process could be an Action Plan showing ownership for leading or partnering the delivery of each action by relevant agencies or organisations.

The Highland Council would lead on approaching relevant public and private sector stakeholders through bodies including the Highland and Islands Forestry Forum and Forestry Commission Scotland.

Monitoring & Review

The HFWS is a dynamic document, capable of being reviewed and updated as appropriate in response to changing circumstances and priorities.

An important aspect of the Strategy process is therefore to agree with key public and private partners and other stakeholders the responsibilities for maintaining and updating the policy context and accuracy of the underlying data to the spatial mapping guidance and for monitoring progress towards indicators and targets within the Strategy.

These modifications can then be fed into periodic reviews in order to keep the Strategy relevant, responsive and consistent with prevailing Scottish Government and Highland Council policies and strategies over its lifetime.

The overall HFWS will therefore be reviewed on a five yearly basis in line with Supplementary Guidance cycles.
