

Understanding stakeholder values for woodland expansion

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Despite woodland expansion being advocated via a number of policy documents, barriers to woodland creation in Scotland remain. These include contested views about land use amongst multiple stakeholders, concerns around trade-offs with other land uses, and a lack of synergy between policies and plans.

This briefing note presents the results of research which used a mixed-methods approach to elicit 'visions' for woodland expansion. These visions form 'positive descriptions of a desired future', specifically relating to how different stakeholders ideally see woodland expansion unfolding over the 21st century.

The findings highlight areas of common ground and divergence among different stakeholders' aims for woodland expansion. The visions provide a synthesis of potential directions to inform woodland expansion policy to support strategic land use planning.

Key points

- The visions highlight the wide variety of objectives and values associated with woodland expansion in Scotland
- At a national level, there is a great deal of consensus between stakeholders that woodland expansion can offer valuable public benefits in terms of carbon sequestration, water and flood regulation, and biodiversity conservation
- Some stakeholders envisage dramatic changes such as giving over larger areas of land to natural processes and natural regeneration of native woodland by radically altering deer management and changing sporting practices, or fostering smaller-scale local community control of land and woodland expansion
- It is recognised that the amount of woodland stipulated by the current aspiration is very small when spread across the whole of Scotland. It was noted that it is not known whether it is possible to achieve all that is wanted from woodland expansion with this small increase
- Landscape scale collaboration and decision making, as advocated and tested through the Land Use Strategy, is widely perceived across visions to be the way forward in terms of governing decisions for woodland expansion and other land use changes
- New incentives, perhaps some form of Payment for Ecosystem Services, were viewed within all visions as a potential mechanism for encouraging the woodland creation, particularly for woodland types which are less likely to provide income from existing markets such as timber or fuelwood in the long term e.g. for native woodlands providing biodiversity and water regulation benefits
- Discussions highlighted that Brexit provides a window of opportunity in the next couple of years to change incentives and regulations relating to woodland, and other land uses, which have previously been strongly determined by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)
- The local context was acknowledged to be hugely important by more than one vision. It was recognised that some quarters might find the level of consensus for more woodland stated in the visions threatening
- Leading on from this, it is recognised across the visions that the implementation of the visions at the local scale needs to be facilitated through discussions with stakeholders who understand the local context
- In order to encourage more woodland creation, the power of tailoring messages to communicate the benefits of woodland in different contexts to different stakeholders was also recognised across visions

Why visions?

Scenario planning offers a framework for developing more resilient policies in the face of uncertainty (1). Visions are a type of normative scenario, which revolve around a positive description of a desired future (2). They can be useful tools for long-term decision making by: posing challenges to accepted ways of thinking; stimulating dialogue between stakeholders; and helping to build consensus on shared priorities (3).

Approach

The research employed a mixed method approach:

- Document analysis of 53 vision documents, plans and policies relating to forestry and woodland expansion from a wide range of stakeholders involved in forestry, conservation and land use in Scotland
- Workshop with 18 stakeholders and semi-structured interviews with 4 stakeholders to receive feedback and input

Findings

The document analysis elicited five visions for how woodland expansion might unfold over the 21st Century (Figure 1). Feedback and input from stakeholders provided support for the visions as they were presented, and generated clarifications, further detail, and ideas for how they might be implemented in terms of future governance.

Common ground

- Woodland expansion is anticipated to provide important public benefits, such as

carbon sequestration, water regulation and biodiversity conservation, and new payment mechanisms should be put in place to provide funding for these benefits (e.g. PES)

- Landscape scale collaboration and decision making will assist with negotiating and achieving the variety of aims for woodland expansion
- Tailored communication about the benefits available from woodland expansion to land owners and land managers is essential
- Professional facilitation/mediation is required to resolve land use conflicts

Divergent aims

- Alternative ways of making a living from new woodlands are envisaged by the visions. In *Green Gold*, employment is generated by a diverse and strong forestry sector with a focus on timber. In *Wild Woodlands* and *Native Networks*, there is a greater focus on tourism and recreation, plus some low-impact silviculture e.g. woodfuel
- *Wild Woodlands* envisages a new way of thinking about biodiversity, emphasising a dynamic approach, allowing species and habitats to fluctuate across landscapes. This vision would require dramatic changes to deer management and current sporting practices
- For two visions, *Woodland Culture* and *Wild Woodlands*, Land Reform and Community Empowerment were viewed as prerequisites

References

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Green Gold

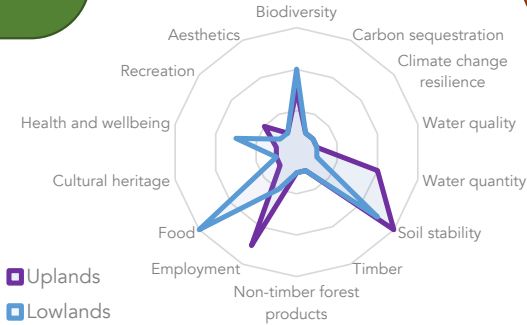
Larger scale, productive, sustainable plantations adhere to high standards, and are an integral part of Scottish land use and the national economy. There is a focus on productive species which provide high value timber (e.g. non-native conifers), but plantations are designed with native species, riparian buffers and open spaces. The carbon stored in forests and forest products is highly valued.

Multiple Benefits

Sustainably managed trees and woodlands 'stitch-in' and complement a diverse mix of land uses at the landscape scale. Emphasis is on 'the right tree in the right place'. Agricultural land is a key asset to be protected, but forestry is seen by farmers and land owners as a potentially integral part of their portfolio.

Wild Woodlands

Larger areas of land are given over to natural processes, with naturally regenerating native woodland being a key indicator of dynamic, biodiversity rich wild land. Wild land is incompatible with most modern farming, but silvopastoral and transhumance systems thrive on the edges of wild areas. Natural transitions between land uses are encouraged and biodiversity is restored, including native species reintroductions.



Woodland Culture

A well-forested and productive landscape encompasses small-scale diversity of tree species, woodland type and tenure. Communities are empowered, and local people make their living from woodlands in a wide variety of ways and hutting is commonplace. All woodland types are potentially productive, and small scale processing technology is widely accessible, supporting local timber, woodfuel and non-timber forest product markets.

Native Networks

Native and semi-natural woodlands are protected, restored and reconnected at all scales, enabling integration with other land uses, and avoiding fragmentation of important open ground habitats. Natural regeneration and transition zones are encouraged between land uses. Woodland networks play a valuable role in developing climate change resilience and providing green ways for recreation.

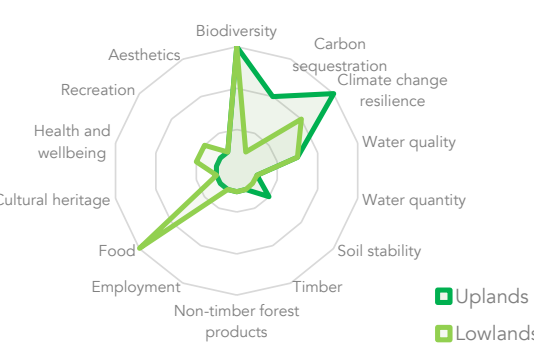
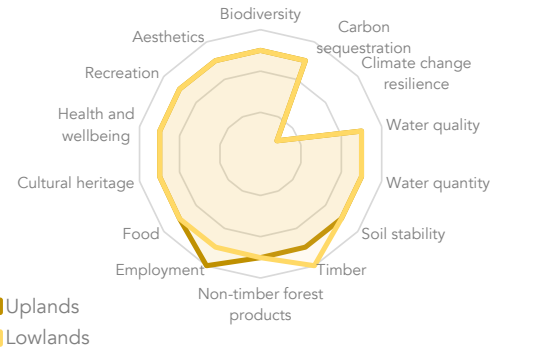


Figure 1. Brief descriptions of each vision, together with graphs illustrating the ecosystem services that stakeholders envisaged each vision providing, should they come to fruition. In both the workshop and interviews, participants were asked to rank the top 5 benefits they envisaged the vision providing in both upland and lowland landscapes