

Regional Strategic Woodland Creation Project Public Engagement: Upper Ale Water and Hermitage Water/Ale Water- Ettrick Water.

As you will be aware, the Scottish Government has ambitious targets to increase woodland cover in Scotland from 18% to 21% by 2032. To achieve this will require the current 10,000ha p.a. planting target to increase to 15,000ha p.a. by 2024-25.

The targets are embedded in the Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan, with woodland creation making a vital contribution to national greenhouse gas emission reduction targets. This is reflected in the recently revised Scottish Forestry Strategy.

A second key driver for the targets is to ensure stability of timber supply to support an important sector of the rural economy worth nearly £1 billion to Scotland's GVA. The Climate Change Plan has an ambition to increase the use of Scottish wood products in construction from 2.2M m³ to 3.0M m³ by 2031/32.

Scottish Government has reviewed the current arrangements for the consideration and approval of Forestry Planting proposals to see how the application process for woodland creation might be improved and streamlined. The review report makes 21 recommendations including *Recommendation 19: A pilot scheme with a willing local authority to identify areas for large scale planting schemes should be considered.* This work takes forward that recommendation.

There is already guidance for woodland creation in Scottish Borders. The Scottish Borders Woodland identifies preferred, potential and sensitive areas for new woodland based on landscape, land capability for forestry and other key criteria.

In 2016, the Council was one of two regions selected by Scottish Government to pilot a new approach to land-use planning. The results of this pilot considered land use and the provision of ecosystem services, including timber production and native woodland expansion.

The current proposal provides an opportunity to identify how any additional woodland could deliver multiple benefits to the region. Ways in which this can be done include:

- ensuring that the benefits of woodland creation are shared e.g. through community ownership and engagement and sustainable local employment and training opportunities;
- considering a range of different types of woodland and forestry;
- considering wider impacts of this land use change on farming, population, housing and connectivity, flood protection and cultural heritage;
- addressing key infrastructure such as the Timber Transport Network;
- considering and addressing the cumulative impact of new planting;
- increasing the diversity of ownership of woodland created.

In a preliminary piece of work, the Council and the Scottish Government (Scottish Forestry) have identified two pilot areas within Scottish Borders region

based on Woodland Strategy criteria, land capability for agriculture, habitat data, landscape and environmental constraints. The two pilot areas are

- Upper Ale water- Mid Ettrick,
- Hermitage water-Upper Teviot

These are remote rural areas with small, dispersed populations and very few settlements which means that most residents will have views about how the land is managed. Current land use is predominantly hill farming and forestry with some upland and lowland sporting activity (grouse and pheasant management).

We now want to engage with local people, businesses and organisations, those who own and manage the land, to consider opportunities for woodland creation in these areas. This will include consideration of the landscape and environmental fit of new woodland and forestry to safeguard the environment, sustain existing land use businesses, employment and training opportunities and opportunities for multiple benefits including access & recreation and flood protection. The first stage of this will seek to capture from stakeholders the main issues they foresee.

The Southern Uplands Partnership and Borders Forest Trust have been contracted by the Council to carry out this consultation work. They will be contacting you to get your views on this subject. Please get in touch if you would like to know more (contact details below). We will be holding a number of drop-in events as well as workshop sessions in the area later in August and September. These will be widely promoted.