

Newcastleton: Afforestation/ Community Consultation Working Session

Date: 12th September 2023

Time: 14:00-16:00

Venue: Dalkeith House, 13 Douglas Square, Newcastleton TD9 0QD

Draft Meeting Note

1.	<p>Welcome & Purpose of the Working Session Starting a conversation - understand the challenges and seek collective solutions.</p>
2.	<p>Introductions – Quick Roundtable Attendees: <u>Scottish Forestry:</u> - Doug Howieson, Conservator, South Scotland - Chris Stark (online), Woodland Creation Case Manager - Chris Ryde, Woodland Officer <u>Scottish Borders Council:</u> - Iain Aitkman, Chief Planning Officer - Watson McAteer (online), Convenor and Councillor for Hawick & Hermitage <u>Newcastleton Community Council:</u> - Iain Crosbie, Chair - Barbara Elborn - Rob Irwin <u>Newcastleton and District Development Trust:</u> - Greg Cuthbert, Chair <u>Communities for Diverse Forestry:</u> - Morag Paterson <u>South of Scotland Enterprise:</u> - Jane Morrison-Ross, Chief Executive - Kate Musgrave, Head of Enterprising Communities - Rob Davidson, Community Wealth Building Strategy Manager - Andy Tharme, Natural Resources Strategy Manager - Kirsten Logue, Community Development Specialist</p>
3.	<p>The Challenge</p>
3.1	<p>Process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community facing high volume of woodland creation in the area - up to 3,000ha. Transformational for the area. - Community concern about ability to make informed decisions - very reliant on the information developers are willing to share, which is inconsistent and often solely reliant on maps. - Specific example of Flatt Farm forestation - engagement was unsatisfactory and NCC made a complaint to the developer.
3.2	<p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Volunteer resource is as at capacity. NCC emphasised that the burden is on the community to engage with complex area. NCC grant is £640/yr. Losing members due to volunteer fatigue. Noted this was a shared experience of

	<p>Community Councils and not exclusive to Newcastleton. MP echoed that her inbox is full of communities raising queries similar to this.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accessibility of information provided is a concern – some community members do not have access to computers and the complex impacts of forestry not understood by lay public. - Young people are not proactively engaged, when that grouping is most likely to be impacted by the fully grown trees.
3.3	<p>Cumulative & Visual Impact Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Data is unavailable around cumulative impact – community is requesting visual showing 5 & 10 year impacts of planting. - Comparison made around windfarm development which provide visual and cumulative impact assessments. - NCC keen to stress the community is not against forestry and is economically reliant on the industry and the active leisure opportunities it provides (demonstrated by economic hardship following Storm Arwen). Focus is on unintended consequences and for community to be empowered to influence their environment and local economy – just transition.
4.	<p>The Opportunities</p>
4.1	<p>Process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SF apologised for the experience NCC had regarding Flatt Farm. NCC acknowledged that it had received further correspondence around proposed amendments to the plans. - SF shared helpful links and documents round the room around process: https://forestry.gov.scot/support-regulations/woodland-creation and community engagement: https://forestry.gov.scot/forests-people/communities/local-stakeholder-and-community-engagement-and-consultation - SF's legal framework is under different legislation than other types of planning and as such the process is different. SF do not have a statutory requirement to consult with communities. SF is the competent authority delegated by Scottish Ministers to decide on planting. - SF seeks involvement from communities but stated it is engagement rather than consultation (in context of Local Authority planning terminology). Community engagement is intended to gain local insight into plans. - UK Forestry Standard is the 'bible' and outlines community engagement. - The developer is responsible for community engagement and Forestry Grant Scheme awards are scored on several factors, and community engagement is rated highly, at 5. - Scoping is carried out to assess the need for an Environmental Impact Assessments and the process for this is outlined in the links above. - SF has a complaints policy, and a complaint would go to Head of Operational Delivery, and if contract awarded, can then go to ombudsman and/or judicial review. - Noted that the upcoming Woodland Creation summit is focussed on meeting the Net Zero targets for planting. Terms of Reference of that meeting not yet agreed but unlikely to address the issues raised in this meeting.
4.2	<p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confor is developing consultation and guidance for agents and applicants. Confor has provided training and webinar sessions previously. - Scoping study (link below) highlights the limited capacity within communities and makes recommendations on addressing this issue.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It was noted in the room that resource and capacity is under pressure within public sector to provide support. - Linked and relevant legislation – Land Reform Bill, Community Wealth Building Bill and Agriculture and Rural Development Bill – all may have impact on the issues raised.
4.3	<p>Cumulative & Visual Impact Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SOSE keen to have a partnership approach to challenges as noted in the Convention of South of Scotland (12th September). - Noted that cumulative impacts are complex and difficult to assess. - Regional Strategic Woodland Creation pilot developed with SF by SBC. Staffing challenges have delayed this work but it is likely to come back to Elected Members for agreement in the coming months. If implemented, this would become Supplementary Planning Guidance and inform SBC's response. D&G unable to partake in pilot due to capacity issues. - RLUP – a key element coming out of this work is a broader voice, input into decisions. RLUP is currently a broader strategic view, but there is opportunity with the Regional Land Use Framework to develop in due course programmes of work to incorporate some of the issues raised here into the actions, for the Regional Economic Partnership's consideration The stakeholder response largely supported a regional strategic approach to woodland creation. There is also potential for a pilot exploring sub-catchment scale land use planning under the RLUP to help inform choices and guide decision making.
5.	<p>Agreed Actions & Next Steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MP's suggestion around running recorded webinar/training sessions for communities on policy drivers, process and engagement was welcomed. Noted challenges around organisational limited capacity. Suggestion that Confor may be the right delivery organisation for this. SOSE to set up a meeting with Confor and raise this as a possibility. - SF and SOSE to continue working group on recommendations coming from the scoping study. SOSE will feed back the outcomes of this meeting to the next working group. - SBC will continue working on Regional Strategic Woodland Creation pilot. - SOSE to engage with Communities for Diverse Forestry. - SOSE to work with RLUP partners to explore strategic approaches to woodland creation including assessment of cumulative impact within the RLUF actions. - SOSE to explore opportunities to develop sub-catchment land use pilots connected to scoping study working group and RLUP.

Background Reading:

- Report: [Opportunities to increase the delivery of local community benefits and community wealth building from woodland creation in the South of Scotland – a scoping study](#)
- Summary of key findings from the South of Scotland Regional Land Use Partnership Pilot (RLUP) – attached
- Pre-application sites:
 - o Flatt Farm – Foresight 120 ha
 - o Powisholm – Scottish Woodland 80ha
 - o Ninestane Rig 210 ha, Leahaugh 250 ha – Buccleuch – new sites

- Mangerton & Steele Road – Buccleuch existing revised Mgt plans for review
- Hartgarth (Holm Hill & Tarras Valley) Oxygen Conservation
- Larriston Deadwater – mgt plan review