

Strategic context for improving community engagement in decisions about forestry and increasing forestry's contribution to the delivery of community benefits.

1. Introduction

[Scotland's Forestry Strategy Implementation Plan 2022-25](#), was developed with input from the National Forestry Stakeholder Group and key delivery partners. It includes a number of actions that the Scottish Government and its partners will deliver to help empower communities and increase the benefits they get from forestry. Two actions highlighted as being a particular focus for this Implementation Plan period are:

- » Work with the forestry sector and communities to promote the principles set out in the Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement and improve the opportunities for communities to be involved with the development of forestry proposals and plans.
- » Develop and implement a framework for increasing forestry's contribution to the delivery of local community benefits and community wealth building.

This paper sets out, from the Scottish Government's perspective, the strategic context for these shared ambitions.

2. Community empowerment and land reform

The [Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act](#) was passed in 2015. It provides a legal framework to empower community bodies through both the ownership of land and buildings, as well as through strengthening their voices in the decisions that matter to and affect them.

The following year, the [Land Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2016](#) was introduced: it includes a requirement for Government to produce a statement of land rights and responsibilities, the first of which was published in 2017. This articulated our vision for the ownership, use and management of land; and the balance between the rights of land owners, managers, local communities and society at large.

In 2022, we published a refreshed [Scottish Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement 2022](#). It is underpinned by seven principles, which include the principles that:

- » More local communities should have the opportunity to own, lease or use land which can contribute to their community's wellbeing and future development; and
- » There should be meaningful collaboration and community engagement in decisions about land.

3. Community benefits and community wealth building

We are committed to ensuring a just transition as the changes required to achieve a net zero, climate resilient, wellbeing economy are implemented. This includes both the outcome – a fairer, greener future for all – and the process to get there. To support the delivery of this ambition, we will lead the production of just transition plans in key sectors,

including land use and agriculture. These plans will be developed in a way that is co-designed and co-delivered by communities, businesses, workers and unions.

Our [National Strategy for Economic Transformation](#) (NSET), was published in 2022, setting out the ambition for a fairer, wealthier and greener country. It recognises that private investment in natural capital is critical to enabling the pace and the scale of action required to achieve net-zero by 2045 and reverse biodiversity loss, but that the market for investment must be designed in such a way that it creates benefits that are shared between public, private and community interests, supporting a just transition and securing a vibrant future for communities.

In support of this goal, the [Interim Principles for Responsible Investment in Natural Capital](#) were published. These principles are aligned with those set out in the [Scottish Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement 2022](#), particularly the principle that land ownership, management and use should deliver a wide range of social, environmental, economic and cultural benefits.

We have also adopted the internationally recognised [Community Wealth Building](#) (CWB) approach to economic development as a key practical means by which progress can be made towards realising our wellbeing economy vision, as outlined in the [NSET](#). CWB aims to ensure the economic system builds wealth and prosperity for everyone, with communities receiving more of the benefits from the wealth they help to generate. CWB incorporates the principle of a socially just use of land and it is a key tool that we will use to support a just transition to net zero.

4. Conclusion

Woodland creation is an important part of our approach to tackling the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, so as forest cover in Scotland expands, it must be delivered in a fair and sustainable way, with positive impacts for everybody, those living now, and future generations to come. We are therefore committed to ensuring communities are meaningfully engaged in decisions about land that affect them, including with regards to forestry.

Scotland's forests and woodlands currently deliver significant economic, environmental and social benefits. We are committed to working with partners to identify opportunities to increase the scale of these benefits, whilst also enabling more people, particularly local communities, to directly benefit from the sustainable expansion and management of the country's forests and woodlands.