**Summary of the discussions of the National Forestry Stakeholder Group**

**held on 28 July 2021**

Kevin Quinlan, Director EnFor welcomed the attendees to the first meeting of the National Forestry Stakeholder Group. The group’s Terms of Reference, agenda and a background paper was circulated prior to the meeting; these are available on the Scottish Forestry website.

Kevin noted that it is a new group, with a new purpose, but very much based on the successful collaborative approach taken develop the first Forestry Strategy Implementation Plan. The group’s purpose is to have a strategic forward look, with input from a diverse range of interests our work to shape our future work and ensure collective action.

The objective of this meeting was to start the conversation to prepare the development of the second Forestry Strategy Implementation Plan.

Màiri McAllan MSP, the Minister for Environment, Biodiversity and Land Reform joined the meeting and made introductory remarks.

The attendees all broke into three sub-groups, which addressed the Forestry Strategy’s 3 Strategic Objectives. Participants were asked to identify and discuss the strategic policy issues influencing the implementation of the forestry strategy objectives, forestry targets and SG outcomes. The objective was to hear views on the:

* Strategic issues that influence the realisation of the Scottish Government’s long-term vision for forestry, SG outcomes and delivery of climate change, biodiversity and forestry targets.
* Issues on the implementation, monitoring and statutory reporting of Scotland’s Forestry Strategy.

The groups reported back on their discussions to the plenary and this summarised below. Comments are not attributed.

Overall themes discussed and fed back by chairs:

* Sustainable and inclusive economic growth is critical – it must meet the Just Transition objectives.
* Innovation and investment is skills is critical – to help shape the forests of the future, and those we wish to work in the sector.
* The interconnectivity between forestry and other land uses is at the heart of many challenges; how the forestry sector brings communities, the wider public and organisations along with it and to have a shared understanding of the ambition and address concerns.
* Improvement to mapping and data to informed sensible decisions about land use change / opportunities
* The Scottish Government need to provide consistent policy signals / incentives to maintain investor confidence
* The focus should be on right tree for the right purpose – opportunity to maximise Scotland’s natural capital and secure external investment in woodland expansion / peatland restoration to deliver Net Zero.
* SFS objectives are cross-cutting do not sit in isolation -   many apply across all of them. Future design of the Implementation Plan needs to reflect how this can be articulated.

**More detailed comments on each of the three strategic objectives were captured and have been fed back to the team leading the Implementation Review; these are summarised below.**

**Objective 1: Increase contribution of forests and woodlands to sustainable and inclusive economic growth.**

* SG needs to support economic growth across sectors and avoid the opportunity costs to other sectors (e.g. farming) from focusing exclusively on forestry
* The private sector needs certainty to maintain investor confidence – including commitment to productive tree species planting to underpin continuity of wood fibre supply
* Forestry and farming are not a binary choice or exclusive – agro (agri) forestry provide an opportunity – need to provide more information / comms on benefits to rural businesses of trees / woods on farms
* Opportunity to attract new external investors – need a clear message focus eg forestry for Net Zero
* Opportunity to diversify the economic models both in terms of products and services (PES) and the scale and type of businesses that are included within the sector eg small-scale and local – scope for approaches that generates / circulates money locally
* Need to promote / explore opportunities to use more wood / develop new markets – opportunity to increase the productivity of native woodland by increasing management inputs
* Need to manage trade-offs between land uses and to balance multiple objectives
* Economic value is important but tends to dominate the agenda. Important strategy is balanced and SF resourced to cover other areas.
* Focus/resource needed to improve infrastructure to support growth in visitors/tourism. Forestry and tourism need to work together on this.
* A stronger community remit recognising the employment opportunities forestry brings to rural areas.
* Certainty/transparency on what is coming to support companies making long term investments/plans - help with supply and what can realistically achieve.
* Ensuring we are getting the best value from our land, for example:
  + How can we open up/stimulate market for certain species which are used for firewood here but worth a lot of money on continent.
  + Use of local timber for construction
  + Looking to keep value in Scotland/local communities. We export products for other countries to add value and them import back in.
  + Noted that schemes and grants can help with this.
* Investing in education for forestry in Scotland is vital for future skills
* Ensuring we recognise downstream business as important economic contributors and adding value to home grown products.
* Continuity is important case of incentives and policy and any future grant scheme.
* Diversity of land ownership is important to inclusive economic growth and development. Need to make greater strides into community ownerships and smaller scale owners to help keep investment in local economy.

**Objective 2: Improve resilience of forests and woodlands and increase contribution to healthy and high quality environment.**

* The focus should be right tree in the right place and prompting the right mix of woodland types to deliver the goods and service Scotland requires – more effort should be spent in the ‘middle ground’ the land that could / does deliver a range of benefits where competition is strongest, as the places not to plant trees and those where it is obvious are known – “squeezed middle (grade 3.2-5 land). Evidence based decision-making critical. Awareness of farm business objectives
* Investment in native woodland expansion, condition (deer management and INNS) and ecological connectivity would deliver greatest environmental benefits – but also need to improve native element of productive woodlands e.g. via UKFS
* Deer management is probably the single biggest issue regarding improving woodland condition; but recognise the need to build resilience to pests and diseases, and management of all woodlands is important for woodlands to achieve their potential
* Useful to set out prospectus for different trees delivering different benefits – how do we monetise nature to protect it – e.g. Net Zero – need to have open conversations around opportunities to secure income from range of ecosystem services.
* Need to introduce a stronger element of resilience into long term forest plans and see resilience as a core part of SFM.
* Important to understand the dichotomy between native being good and conifer bad for the environment. What changes do we need to reduce polarisation of opinion? One solution posed was the way we display our information i.e.
  + 46% of the FGS are for broadleaves or native species. People have a misconception it is predominantly conifer.
  + Recognition that conifer is a natural habitat for important species such as red squirrel.
* Communities quite often don’t get to choose woodland they get. They tend to love their woodland and issues arise around woodland management and communicating any changes happening to it.
* Deer - need to get this under control or land owners will only plant species less palatable to deer. This is wider than just a forestry issue.
* Communication – we do not have a forestry culture like Scandinavia/Canada/USA. Need to communicate the value of forests to public and those communities affected by forestry issues.
* Need to support communities who own woodland, not just to buy them.
* Connectivity - Smaller fragmented woods are more expensive to manage. We don’t tend to know about these pieces of land. How can we incentivise people to come forward? Do we need a more regional approach which gives more public benefits? How do we enable communities to engage with this woodland? Where are managed well have a high value to local communities. Are the blockers agency policies?
* Local Authorities have taken greater interest in urban forest management. They have a big part to play - including the smaller urban woodlands. Opportunity to educate and work with local authorities.
* More can be done to make it easier to transfer control to communities and help make it less daunting.
* Forestry can’t be seen as something which takes place far away in rural communities. People need to understand there will be a change in the landscape.

**Objective 3: Increase use of forest and woodland resources to enable more people to improve health, well-being and life chances.**

* Look for more opportunities to benefit from forestry – need support to engage in forestry
* Opportunity to add local value from woodland and increase communities’ stake in land
* Communities are frustrated about how they can influence woodland creation proposals / plans – part of formal process but not applied consistency across country. Priority is to improve public participation / community engagement in woodland creation proposals – manage expectations and increase understanding of process – Confor looking to review / refresh members approach – Land Rights and Responsibility Statement is being revised last this year – change to refresh / promote good engagement.
* Explore opportunity to link into other ‘planning / engagement’ processes e.g. land use planning especially spatial development plans (e.g. FWS)
* Useful to develop a heat map (setting out food production, woodland creation and peatland restoration opportunities e.g. maximising natural capital) this could form the basis of local conversations / local democracy – could pilot it under the Regional Land Use Partnership approach – need to develop quality / accessibility of digital mapping
* More young people experience the benefits of woodland. How do we create a social movement amongst young people around forestry and environmentalism.
* Maintaining engagement – a lot of people have discovered what is on their doorstep in the last 18 months, how do we keep this engagement up? Next strategy need to recognise this increased use and access to forests and land.
* Education – issues around fire and water safety. Need to help educate people living, working in and visiting areas on how to enjoy safely.
* Community groups can be daunted by how to access grants. Services offered now are oversubscribed. Need to look at supporting/resourcig them.
* Local Authority role raised again – they don’t always understand the importance of forestry to economy or community. Working with LA is opportunity.

**Closing of the meeting**

In closing the Minister thanked everyone for their input and noted a couple of particular points:

* The group and format seemed to work well and was grateful for the opportunity to speak to a diverse range of stakeholders in one meeting.
* The forestry sector has a proven ability to delivery; we need to be stronger on innovation and skills.
* The success of trees and woodlands helping tackle climate change doesn’t detract that the activities that manage and create our woodlands also need to look at their decarbonisation journey.
* There is a need for economic growth to benefit everyone, especially communities as part of Just Transition.
* We can’t create any more of our land it’s one of our greatest assets. The question of how we use and change it one of the most important over this parliamentary term.

The Minister and Kevin thanked everyone for participating and making it such a successful first meeting.

The next meeting would be in November and the Minister recommended that it should address the issues around the decarbonisation of the forest sector and its activities.

**Scottish Forestry**

**July 2021**