Confor response to Scottish Borders Local Development Plan Consultation

Confor is the not-for-profit organisation for sustainable forestry and wood-using businesses in the UK. We have more than 1,500 member companies representing the whole forestry and wood supply chain. Confor focuses on the strategic issues that are vital to the success and sustainable future of the sector. These include helping to build the market for wood and forest products, creating a supportive policy environment and helping members to become more competitive and successful.

We have only answered relevant questions.

Growing Your Economy

Q5. Have you any suggestions as to how allocated business and industrial land can be delivered more effectively?

The Local Development Planning process should take into account the intention to create a Rural Economic Framework to mainstream rural development within the National Performance Framework, based on the recommendations of the National Council of Rural Advisors.[1]

To achieve realistic growth in the rural economy may require a more sympathetic planning regime which can accommodate the digital and infrastructure needs and allow development including housing to happen, which is presently restricted by planning policy.

Sustainability and Climate Change

Q13. Do you support the preferred option? Are there any other matters relating to sustainability and climate change which should be addressed? Do you have an alternative option?

The preferred option refers to the Scottish Borders Woodland Strategy as the policy framework for forests and woodlands in the area. It adds that 'the Council is encouraged to consider a strategic approach to ensure that these anticipated, large scale, land use changes [woodland creation to meet Scottish Government targets] balance the needs of businesses, local communities and the wider environment'.

[1] https://www.gov.scot/publications/new-blueprint-scotlands-rural-economy-recommendations-scottish-ministers/

The Scottish Borders Woodlands Strategy (SBWS2005) was written in 2005. While it contains much that is still relevant, it is due for revisiting, given the importance of the forestry industry in the region and the significant changes which have taken place in that time.

The SBWS2005 provides excellent baseline figures on forestry in the region, for example:

- **A £24m economy:** In 1999 forestry and timber were estimated to be contributing £24m to the regional economy, of which 50% was log exports (timber harvested from Scottish Borders forests but processed outwith its boundaries), 25% primary and secondary wood processing in the area, and 25% from other activities: forest management, woodland tourism, haulage.
- **Woodland cover:** in 2005, 87,435 hectares (18.5%) of the region was afforested.
- **Species distribution:** In 1999, around 80% of the forest area was productive conifer.
- **Forest ownership:** 31% of forests in the region were publicly owned (Forestry Commission), 43% by private individuals, 24% by investment funds, and 2% by community and charitable groups.

The SBWS2005 also provides forecasts for expected woodland change. Some examples include:

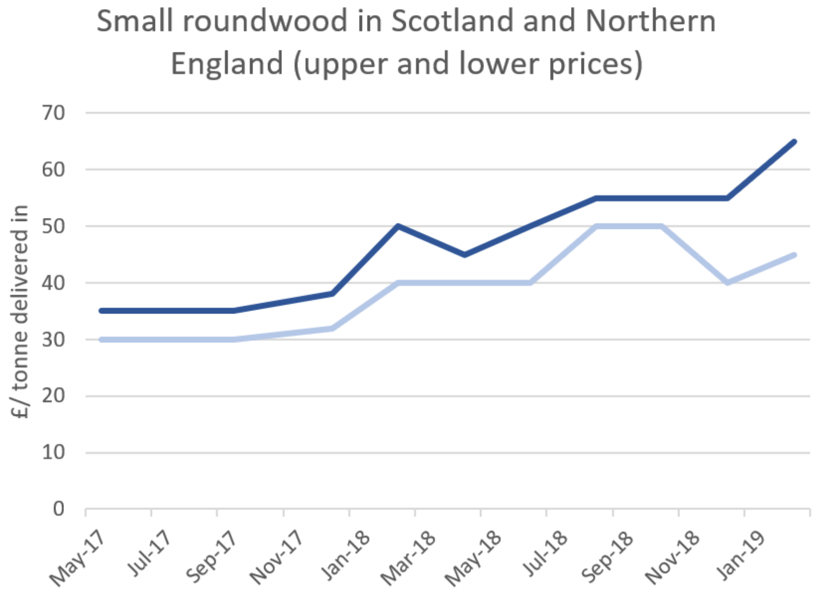
- Forest maturity: in 2005, 65% of the conifer crops were expected to be harvested in the next decade.
- Timber harvests in 2005 were forecast to increase until 2014 and then decline.
- Restructuring of conifer stands under the UK Forestry Standard was expected to introduce significant additional diversity to forests.

Finally, the SBWS2005 provides policies to shape woodlands and forests in the area, for example:

- Increased value-added of timber locally, including the use of local timber in construction.
- A wood energy strategy
- Timber transport investment
- Diverse woodland expansion for biodiversity and carbon capture, towards a target of 25% by 2050, including farm woodland, riparian woodland, ancient woodland restoration
- Increase use of certification (FSC/PEFC)
- Increased use of woodlands by people: tourism, access, community ownership

Since 2005, a number of developments have taken place which were not anticipated, including:

- **The very substantial rise in timber prices.** Sawlogs have risen by 30-50% and small roundwood by 50-85% in the past 18 months. The signs are that the bulk of this increase represents a readjustment, rather than a peak, in the market.



Source: Timber Auctions

- **The impact of wood energy on local timber availability.** The success of RHI schemes has led to concerns that timber is being diverted into biomass fuel from other markets such as particleboard or fencing manufacture. This represents a loss of added value and manufacturing jobs, and the loss of carbon back into the atmosphere which could have been stored for decades in timber products.
- **The growing recognition of timber products as a carbon sink.** The importance of carbon stored for the medium-term in timber products, especially houses, to reduce net carbon emissions in the medium term, has become more widely understood. The UK Committee on Climate Change reported in 2018 that 'an expansion of the use of wood in construction and mean that bioenergy could meet between 5% and 15% of the UK's energy demand in 2050 (compared to around 7% today)'.[2] It has been calculated that

[2] Committee on Climate Change, *Biomass in a low carbon economy* (2018).

substituting wood for current construction materials could save 14-31% of global CO2 emissions.[3]

- **The poorly-quantified loss of productive forest area** through land use changes such as wind farms and habitat restoration.

Confor recommends that the Local Development Plan include a commitment to refresh the Woodland Strategy. This should include:

- A comparison between 2005 and 2019 figures[4]
- An assessment of the success of the Key Actions in the 2005 strategy
- A reassessment of the economic, environmental and social priorities in forestry and woodlands
- A new set of Key Actions

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[3] Oliver, Nassar, Lippke & McCarter. "Carbon, Fossil Fuel, and Biodiversity Mitigation with Wood and Forests." *Journal of Sustainable Forestry* , Dec. 2013, pp. 248-275.
[4] The new Borderlands Report (2019) from the National Forest Inventory provides much of the required data.