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FRIENDS OF THE SCOTSMAN

Planting the seed – tree target could give Scots farmers new opportunities

S we settle into 2020 and think about taking down the festive decorations, we should pause to reflect that trees are not just for Christmas.

Hopefully, everyone has plans to recycle their real Christmas tree, so it can be turned into compost or chippings. Anything else would just be wrong, as trees are the ultimate in sustainability - when you harvest them (normally for much longer-term uses than Christmas trees), you can plant more in their place and the wood itself is normal-

Most Christmas trees come from specialist farms, though they can also be from so-called 'nurse crops' for new woodland of broadleaf

This is a reflection of the way that forestry in Scotland has changed since the Forestry Commission was established in 1919. Then the focus was maximising production of timber for pit props, now more and morepeopleareplantingwoods and benefiting from them in different

Irecently came across an enterprising forest owner in Aberdeenshire who produces foliage for wreaths, while an increasing number in the farming community have begun to embrace forestry this year, recognising the opportunity to diversify into an activity that doesn't rely on



Stuart Goodall is enthusiastic about plans to create broadleaf woodlands and diversify the rural economy

long-term annual payments from the government.

With the future shape of rural funding uncertain after Brexit, there is an increasing realisation among farmers that trees can provide shelter for sheep in winter, improving animal welfare and reducing feed costs-as well as offering fuel for the

Looking ahead, and with New Year resolutions in mind, I hope that Scottish Government and the forestry sector will do more to grasp the opportunities presented by the hundreds of thousands of broadleaf trees - birch, sycamore, aspen, oak and more - planted in new, mixedspecies woodlands.

Traditionally they haven't been looked after as they grow – if they were, Scotland could produce more high-quality wood for bespoke houses, for flooring, windows and other domestic uses

These trees would be very valuable alongside the softwoods which supply timber to sawmills or wood panel businesses – and provide many domestic wooden products which we all take for granted. While these modern, mixed forests are growing, thousands of us will enjoy walking, cycling or bird-watching in the woods

for a walk in the woods over the Christmas holidays so far? If not, there is still time to walk, run or cycle off some of those extra festive

There is cross-party support at

When I began my career in the

How many of you have been out

In 2019, the Scottish Govern-

ment surpassed its annual new planting target of 10,000 hectares (about 20 million trees) and just before Christmas, the SNP committed to planting 18,000ha (about 36 million trees) annually in Scotland

Holyrood for more tree planting, given the recognition of the key role these forests can play in the fight against the damaging impacts of climate change, as growing trees soak up carbon and wood products



forestry sector in the 1980s, planting and managing trees was for the few, and most of us had little awareness of its wide-ranging benefits to the woodland owner and to our society, our rural economy and our

environment. In just under a year's time, Glasgow will host the major climate change summit COP26 a great opportunity to realise the wide-ranging benefits of planting more trees and managing the ones

tively than we did in the past.

Treesareavitalcomponentofwhat Scotland can do to face up to climate change, our most fundamental global challenge – something to

reflect on before we take down the Christmas tree.
Stuart Goodall is chief executive of

Confor, which represents 1500 forestry and wood-using businesses: www.





How we use land has to change for the benefit of all – and the

> **Dr Andrew Midgley** welcomes a Scottish Government initiative Last year the Committee on

e need to take a closer look at the way we use land. Why? Because land use has very real consequences for us all and, at present, our land is managed in a way that does not necessarily deliver all the benefits

This is an increasingly pressing issue. The Scottish Government has acknowledged the climate and biodiversity emergencies and respected bodies like the Committee on Climate Change have suggested that we will only meet our new emissions reduction targets if there is significant land use change. Land is, therefore, a critical asset and we need o make sure we are using it effectively in the context of both the climate

and biodiversity crises.

Climate Change published a report on climate and land use in the UK and concluded that the current approach is not sustainable.

Land can deliver a wide range of things – it can be used to produce food or to grow timber, sequester and store carbon, be managed to help reduce flooding, provide a home for nature and sites for producing renewable energy.

It also provides beautiful landscapes for everyone to enjoy. The list goes on. But today, land is often used with only a few of these benefits in mind. The focus on food, timber and game management sometimes means that many of the wider benefits are overlooked or are second order concerns.

As a result, Scotland's land is not always being managed in a way that

optimises the benefits it could deliver to society as a whole. At the same time, the committee

has also identified that Scotland has the ability to meet emissions reduction targets earlier than the UK as a whole because of the potential we have to use our land resourc-

The committee suggests that some agricultural land could be put to another use and it advocates a substantial increase in the area of

We stand at a point in time when we recognise that current land use policies are far from sustainable and we need land to deliver more.

This is why we need to look again at land use. Some fresh thinking is required. We need to think strategically about what we want land to deliver and we need to design better policies to shape the way we use our nited land resources.

Fortunately, the Scottish Government has recognised these issues.

It has announced a more regional approach to land use decisionmaking recently in its Programme for Government, committing to the creation of new regional partnerships which will produce Regional Land Use Frameworks by 2023. This approach should lead to bet-

ter and more informed choices about land use and it is welcome news. It represents a step towards more critical thinking about how we can optimise land use and towards a policy and financial support regime for rural land managers that is much more focused on delivering public goods. Developing a regional approach to land use won't be without its challenges. Land use can be contentious - with many different parties looking out for their own interests-but regional partnerships can hopefully be the focus for some positive conversations about current land use and future aspirations.

We should proceed carefully because whilst change is necessary it is important to remember that people's livelihoods and communities may be affected. Nonetheless, the fact it could be difficult should not put us off-the prize is too great.

What should these regional partnerships do? Details are still to be worked out, but Scottish Environment LINK believes the partnerships should undertake a comprehensive analysis of land use and management in their region and

identify the key opportunities to enhance the delivery of services from the land.

The partnerships would then produce Regional Land Use Frameworks that would include a set of recommendations to the Scottish Government about regional priorities for land use and indicative funding needs. The Scottish Government would then make decisions about the allocation of funding and

This is in contrast to the current situation where large amounts of public money are spent, often in ways that perpetuate the unsustainable use of land. The goal is a more rational approach that uses public money in a way that optimises land use and maximises the public benefits from that spend. We can do

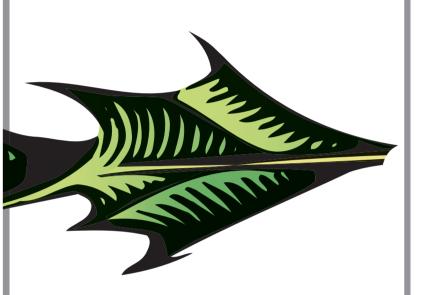
tainable land use. We must work together to grasp this opportunity and identify land use plans and policies that benefit society

better. We can achieve more sus-

Dr Andrew Midgley, senior policy officer at RSPB Scotland and member of LINK's Land Use



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