Argyll and Bute Woodland and Forestry Strategy

Issues Paper

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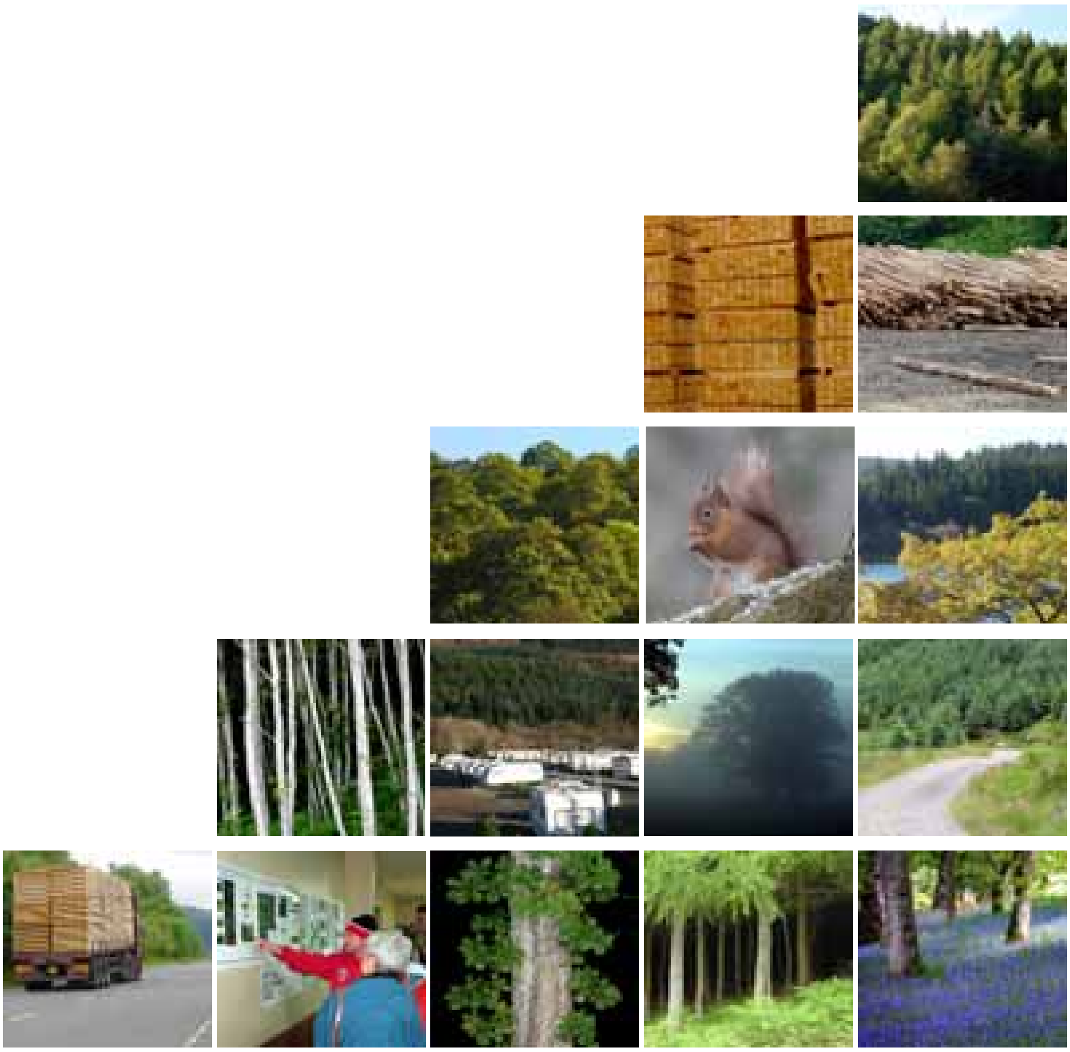

INTRODUCTION

THE ARGYLL AND BUTE WOODLAND AND FORESTRY STRATEGY

What is it, and what is it for?

1. The Strategy will be a high level planning policy document that presents a positive vision of how the forestry industry can contribute to the economy, communities and the environment of Argyll and Bute. It will serve to integrate the practice of forestry with the new development plan for the area, helping to highlight new opportunities, target investment and infrastructure development where necessary and protecting sensitive environments.

2. The principle of partnership is fundamental to developing an effective strategy, since so many interests are potentially affected by forest proposals and operations. Wide-ranging consultation with communities, stakeholders, industry representatives, environmental groups and statutory agencies is therefore central to ensuring the strategy accurately reflects the specific issues affecting the practice of forestry in Argyll and Bute.

3. This Issues Paper has been developed to help promote debate amongst local stakeholders and to provide information that will feed directly into the Strategy. The basis for the paper, and the questions it poses, is a Technical Report analysing the woodland and forests in Argyll and Bute. This technical report is available from www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/woodland .

Why is it being developed?

4. The current Indicative Forestry Strategy covering Argyll and Bute was produced in 1995 as part of the Strathclyde Structure Plan, and does not effectively address many of today's issues – notably climate change or renewable energy. Similarly, the emphasis of forestry practice has changed significantly since 1995, with different support regimes and a greater emphasis on creating high quality multi-functional woodlands.

5. A commitment was made in the 2002 Argyll and Bute Structure Plan to review this strategy, and this is being conducted in line with Scottish Government Circular 9/1999 on Indicative Forestry Strategies. However, the review and strategy development will entail significantly more consultation to reflect the evolution of policy since the publication of this guidance.

What can I contribute?

6. As noted above, partnership between the local authority, communities, stakeholders and the forestry industry are central to developing an accurate and effective strategy. It is therefore imperative that a broad range of views are sought to ensure the strategy effectively addresses the key local and regional issues affecting woodlands and those with an interest in them.

7. The 'Thematic Issues' section highlights a range of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats apparent for woodland and forests in Argyll. These have been used to inform a range of consultation questions that seek views

on how the strategy – and the partners involved in forestry in Argyll – should approach a range of issues and opportunities. However, these questions are by no means exhaustive so any relevant additional comments and suggestions are most welcome.

8. The questions posed can be found under each topic heading and are also listed at the end of this document.

FORESTS IN ARGYLL AND BUTE

9. Argyll and Bute is the most densely forested of Scotland's local authority areas, with 29% (over 2000km^2) of the total land area under woodland of varying types[1]. The vast majority – around 85% - of this resource comprises conifer plantations, with the remainder made up of a range of native woodlands, most notably the 'temperate rainforest' of the Atlantic oakwoods that typify the region.

Importance of forests and the forestry industry

10. The forestry industry, through planting and harvesting operations, management and maintenance activities and timber transport makes a major contribution to Argyll's economy and employs a large number of people, particularly in the most rural areas. In addition to the direct economic contribution, tourism and recreation focussed on woodland and forest areas adds an important dimension in regional income.

11. However, there is significant untapped potential to enhance the processing provision in the area, creating opportunities to add value to timber products and benefit local economies.

12. Woods and forests are also home to a range of valued flora and fauna, are major carbon sinks and convey a range of benefits to communities and visitors alike. As such a major land use, forests are also central to the character of much of Argyll's landscape. Managing this resource to address such a diverse range of objectives and agendas is a complex challenge which the public and private forestry sectors have grasped and has enabled the industry to evolve beyond the production of timber.

The forest resource

13. Argyll and Bute contains around 15% of Scotland's forest resource, over half of which is managed by Forestry Commission Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Ministers. The remaining 48% is owned and managed by a range of private interests, ranging from large estates to small-scale farm woodlands.

14. The topographic, soil and climatic conditions in the area are such that Sitka spruce is by far the dominant tree in woodland (86% of all plantations). The predominance of Sitka spruce is partly a result of climatic and soil conditions, but also a reflection of market demand.

15. The topographic and geographic factors can make many plantations difficult to work in. On average, Argyll has the youngest age class structure for

[1] Data from the National Inventory of Woodland and Trees and FCS Grant Schemes

plantation forests in Scotland, as most of the forest area has been established since the 1970s.

16. The native woodland of the area is almost exclusively broadleaved in character and is dominated by upland birchwoods. However, it is the area's oak woodland that embodies the character and importance of the native forest resource. 49 of Argyll's 122 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are designated, at least in part, for their woodlands. 39 of these for Atlantic oakwoods, reflecting the habitat's importance for a range of species, notably lichens, bryophytes and invertebrates. Argyll and Bute also has 30 Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), internationally protected sites of value for a range of species/habitats. Several of these are designated and protected for their woodland habitats.

SWOT ANALYSIS

17. The following table provides an overview of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) facing woodland and forestry in Argyll today.

Strengths	Weaknesses
High average yield class for Sitka spruce Increasing output as relatively young forests mature Good environmental standards Strong sea transport network High quality woodland and forest biodiversity assets Good local awareness and understanding of the forestry industry (major contributor to the economy) Long tradition of forest and woodland management on estates Strong local activity in renewable energy (hydro and wind) and pre-existing biomass installations – communities more 'woodfuel ready' than in other areas The Argyll and Bute Timber Transport Group and benefits have achieved to date Existing biodiversity supported by woodlands in Argyll and Bute.	Relatively large numbers of difficult-to-work sites (topography, soils, access constraints) Long travel distances by road – high 'detour index' Area is currently losing out on potential to add value through processing timber Limited access to rail network Limited potential for large-scale forest expansion due to environmental designations and physical Limited potential for application of lower impact silvicultural systems due to thin soils, exposure and topographic/soil constraints Some native woodlands are isolated, with poor connectivity
Opportunities	**Threats**
Potential to develop processing facilities that add value to woodland in line with Structure Plan proposals. Opportunities to combine biodiversity with commercial production, particularly in	Potential economic reasons for not harvesting marginal crops or to thin (on suitable sites) regularly due to locational constraints Climate change:

developing the hardwood sector Potential for development of biomass combined heat and/or power Harvesting 1970s and 1980s plantations will create significant opportunities for restructuring and potential diversification Potentially longer growing season as climate change effects become more apparent. Increase the amount of agro forestry in Argyll and Bute Restructuring of woodlands offers new opportunities to the forest industry and other sectors. – offers opportunities to industry and others Build on the success of existing community woodland schemes and pilots to encourage greater local ownership and management of woodlands Expansion of Atlantic oakwoods Greater integration between agriculture and forestry. Sharing of infrastructure e.g. wind, forestry and agriculture. Enhance biodiversity of woodland and non woodland species through planting and management practices	- increasing the frequency of severe weather events, potentially increasing the incidence of windthrow, flooding and land slips - potentially exposing Argyll's forests to a wider range of pests and diseases - potentially requiring changes in the species and provenance of commercial crops Lack of integration of woodlands habitats with other non-woodland nature sites

Question

Do you agree with the above SWOT analysis? If not which elements would you add or change?

Key challenges

18. The success of the forestry industry in Argyll and Bute will hinge on how the following challenges are addressed:

1. **Mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change**: how to maximise the potential for carbon sequestration through woodland expansion; minimise the carbon footprint of the forest industry; contributing to sustainable soil and water management; expanding the renewable energy potential of the forest resource – particular in relation to biomass heat/power; promoting Argyll timber as a quality sustainable building material;

2. **Managing the forest and woodland resource**: ensuring that woods and forests will remain; maximising the potential of sites;

3. **Forestry infrastructure**: ensuring that Argyll's timber production potential is matched by a high quality, low impact transport network and suitable processing facilities to harness the potential to add value;

4. **Integration with the rural development agenda**: ensuring that woodland and forestry fulfil their potential in sustaining rural communities and helping businesses diversify through agriculture and other rural land uses;

5. **Conserving and enhancing biodiversity, landscape quality and the historic environment**: ensuring that woodland and forest management assist in securing a sustainable future for natural and cultural heritage assets and make a positive contribution to landscape quality;

6. **Balancing competing interests**: ensuring that the potential of individual sites is maximised while addressing wider objectives including agricultural and environmental interests;

7. **Community involvement in forestry**: helping to build a 'woodland culture' and assist in meaningful community engagement with forestry issues;

8. **Securing soil and water quality**: minimising the effects of forest operations on the soil and water environment through application of appropriate standards; contributing to flood and water management and slope stabilisation;

9. **Developing the tourism, leisure and recreation potential of the forest resource**: enhancing access and leisure provision on appropriate sites;

10. **Improve integration of the forestry sector with competing/ complementary interests.**

19. These challenges, although undoubtedly testing, present at least as many opportunities as constraints. The profile of timber and forest products has arguably never been higher, as the importance of sustainable sourcing of materials and low carbon energy increase in public profile. Therefore Argyll and Bute's forestry sector, both public and private alike, must be prepared to capitalise on this opportunity.

20. The Argyll and Bute Woodland and Forestry Strategy will be a key means of addressing these issues, but it can only deliver results 'on the ground' with the support of statutory agencies, the public and the industry as a whole. Delivery will require sufficient motivation and incentives for 'buy-in' from private sector forest owners and managers.

POLICY CONTEXT

National

21. Woodlands and forests are an important aspect of the national approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation. The ***Scottish Climate Change Bill***

sets a target of an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, with an interim target of a 50% reduction by 2030. Recent consultations as part of the legislative process have highlighted the key role that Ministers expect the forestry industry to play in expanding woodland cover, boosting levels of carbon sequestration and improving the potential biomass resource.

22. The ***Scottish Forestry Strategy*** (2006) proposed a target of the equivalent of an additional 0.7Mt of CO_2 sequestration in woodland by 2020, and an additional 4.4Mt by 2050 and over 1M dry tonnes of woodfuel per year by 2050. This is translated into a target of increasing forest cover in Scotland by around 25% (an additional 1.3 million ha).

23. The Scottish Government's climate change mitigation and adaptation frameworks[2] support these objectives and further highlight the importance of forestry in addressing a range of climate change effects, and buffering carbon emissions through sequestration. The ***National Planning Framework 2***, although not directly responsible for forestry policy, echoes these issues and proposes mechanisms for woodland expansion through the planning system and supports the development of the requisite infrastructure for the nascent wood energy sector. This includes the development of the 'Timberlink' marine transport network from a number of ports in Argyll and Bute. The new draft ***Scottish Planning Policy*** supports these broad objectives and defines the role of planning authorities in safeguarding the woodland and forest resource, supporting renewable energy and promoting habitat connectivity. ***Scottish Government Planning Circular 9/1999*** on Indicative Forestry Strategies, although currently undergoing revision in light of the new priorities outlined above, sets the precedent for the incorporation of forestry issues in development planning.

24. ***Scotland's Biodiversity – It's In Your Hands 2005*** is a 25 year strategy for the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in Scotland requiring action under five strategic objectives:

- **Species and Habitats:** to stop and reverse biodiversity loss through targeted species and habitat action:
- **People:** to increase awareness, enjoyment and understanding of biodiversity and encourage more people to become involved in conservation;
- **Landscapes and Ecosystems:** to restore and enhance biodiversity in all environments through better planning, design and practice;
- **Integration and coordination:** to ensure that biodiversity is a priority consideration in all decision making;
- **Knowledge:** to ensure that up to date biodiversity knowledge is made available to planners and practitioners.

[2] 'Changing Our Ways: Scotland's Climate Change Programme 2006'; and 'Adapting Our Ways: Managing Scotland's Climate Risk' 2008

25. The strategy goes on to describe the nature of Scotland's biodiversity in terms of its intrinsic value and its value for the economy and the health and wellbeing of Scotland's people. The importance of local Sites of Interest to Nature Conservation and Local Wildlife sites is also highlighted in terms of Local Biodiversity Action Plan targets and the wider contribution they can make to biodiversity on a national scale. In addition, these documents are underpinned by the ***Natura2000*** commitments that safeguard a range of internationally important habitats and species.

26. The ***UK Forestry Standard*** and the ***UK Woodland Assurance Standard*** set out the best practice standards to which woodland and forest management should conform along with the social importance of forestry. These standards ensure suitable environmental protection measures are applied, that new woodlands are well designed and that the forestry workforce receives suitable training to enable safe operation of the sector.

Regional and Local

27. The policies of the Scottish Forestry Strategy are implemented at the regional level through Forest Enterprise ***Forest District Strategic Plans*** (for Argyll and Bute, the relevant plans are those for West Argyll, Cowal and Trossachs and Lochaber Forest Districts[3]). These interpret national policies through the lens of locally-specific priorities and promote the development of woodland and forestry on the National Forest Estate.

28. Several 'regional priorities' identified for Argyll and Bute by the ***Scottish Rural Development Programme*** focus on woodland and forestry. These range from supporting wider carbon management objectives to supporting the development of an efficient and reliable timber and woodfuel supply chain. Rural Development Contract funding is available through the programme for woodland creation and management, supporting farm diversification and wider woodland objectives.

29. The ***Argyll and Bute Structure Plan 2002-2012*** provides strategic direction for sustainable development in the area and highlights the importance of the forestry industry to communities and the economy. The emerging ***Argyll and Bute Local Plan*** (currently at the post-Inquiry modifications stage) identified the production of an Indicative Forestry Strategy as a key action to promoting the development of the industry and maximising its social, economic and environmental potential. A range of other locally-developed policies, such as the ***Argyll and Bute Local Transport Strategy 2007-2010***, the ***Argyll and Bute Council Corporate Plan 2007-2011***, the ***Argyll and Bute Energy Strategy, Argyll and Bute Local Biodiversity Strategy and Agricultural Strategy*** for the Argyll Area all have relevance to the forestry sector, particularly in relation to balancing the needs of the industry with the interests of rural communities.

[3] Lorne Forest District has been merged with Lochaber and West Argyll FDs

THEMATIC ISSUES

Introduction

30. This section breaks down the emerging issues and opportunities for the forestry sector in Argyll and Bute using the themes identified in the 2006 Scottish Forestry Strategy. As noted above, this document provides the strategic and regulatory agenda for the development of the forestry industry in Scotland. The following themes therefore provide the basis for the entire policy framework. They are:

- **Climate Change;**
- **Timber;**
- **Business Development;**
- **Community Development;**
- **Access and Health;**
- **Environmental Quality;** and
- **Biodiversity.**

31. Inevitably, a number of issues cut across policy themes and these will be highlighted where appropriate as they represent significant opportunities to address multiple objectives through coordinated action.

32. Drawing on the factors raised in the individual SWOT analysis conducted for each of the themes, a range of consultation questions are proposed, seeking potential ways forward for forestry in Argyll and Bute.

CLIMATE CHANGE

33. The need to adapt the forestry industry as a whole to the challenges and opportunities of the climate change agenda is a national priority. Because woodland and forestry is essentially a long term investment, it is imperative that managers can be sure their decisions today do not compromise the viability of the sector in decades to come. However, this is reliant on the accuracy and availability of appropriate climate data and robust predictions for the future.

34. In terms of direct impacts, work by Forest Research (2008) suggests that, according to current climate scenarios, the industry is likely to be faced with increased severe weather, resulting in higher rates of windthrow, landslides and flooding and increased prevalence of summer drought conditions. The industry must therefore be prepared to adapt to emergent threats, such as an increased prevalence of pests and disease, altering species and provenance selection where appropriate and planning forests to take account of increased wind speeds, winter waterlogging and summer drought.

35. However, climate change may also result in some positive physical effects, potentially increasing the length of the growing season and facilitating woodland expansion into more marginal areas. This may impact on biodiversity that is dependant on forests; the adaptability of species may be tested if the climate continues to warm.

36. Strategies to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, such as increasing woodland cover to sequester carbon and developing the biomass sector, create significant opportunities for positive management of the forest resource. As around 87% of energy consumption – much of which comes from carbon intensive sources – in homes is for space and water heating[4], the potential of woodfuel installations to fulfil at least some of this demand is significant. Woodland and forests also have a potential role to play in adapting to the effects of climate change. Planting floodplain woodland may assist in natural attenuation schemes, slowing flow rates and limiting the erosive power of floodwaters. In Argyll, where many areas are prone to landslips, strategically placed woodland could contribute by stabilising thin soils and creating buffers against minor debris flows.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Argyll has 15% of the Scottish conifer resource, much of which is approaching maturity – can make a major contribution to woodfuel sector The large existing forest resource in Argyll that provides a nationally significant amount of sawlogs Potential in some sites to use of harvested tree mass for woodfuel (e.g. branches, stumps and small roundwood)	Little current financial support for renewable heat to date Uptake of technologies dependent on developer buy-in for new developments, or public sector investment Conventional forestry practices and road based transport systems are carbon intensive.

[4] Scottish Government Renewable Heat Group 2008 'Scotland's Renewable Heat Strategy: Recommendations to Scottish Ministers'

Pre-existing biomass heat and power installations – potential to act as exemplar projects at a local and national level Nature of Sitka crop – higher carbon sequestration Areas of broadleaved woodland that could be brought into management to boost carbon sequestration/biomass production Adoption of good management practice across the industry Argyll's climate is ideal for growing trees	
Opportunities	Threats
Restructuring and restocking could be focussed on long-term sequestration or biomass production Increased application of district heating could help to address rural fuel poverty Ensuring uptake of biomass heat and power in public procurement process – cost and carbon savings over building lifecycle and displaying leadership in uptake of technology Longer growing season as climate warms Potential for cooperation with other renewables developers on forest land (wind and hydro power) Potential to expand marine transport network for forest products Changing climatic conditions could present opportunities to diversify species mix	Insufficient investment in biomass supply chain will hamper growth If existing weaknesses in the timber/forest products transport network are not addressed, locally produced woodfuel may be less competitive Increased prevalence of pests and disease – particularly serious if relevant to Sitka spruce Increased incidence of windthrow damaging the forest resource and further limiting the potential of exposed sites/thin soils Emerging climate projections suggest that climate impacts may be more significant than previously supposed – creates significant uncertainty for forest planning. Inability of biodiversity to adapt to climate change, impacting on the ecosystem of the area.

Questions

1. Do you agree with the above SWOT analysis? If not which elements would you add or change?

2. Should the Strategy prioritise an expansion of woodland and forests with the aim of maximising carbon sequestration? If so where and is the type of forestry important? If not which areas would be sensitive to expansion and why?

3. How should the Strategy support the development of the woodfuel market to provide a low carbon source of heat and power?

4. What emphasis should be place on using woodland to reduce the risk of flooding and slope instability? Where would this be appropriate?

5. What emphasis should the Strategy place on creating forest habitat networks to help species adapt to climate change? Are there particular species that would benefit from this and where are they?

6. How should the Strategy help existing woodland management and forestry practice adapt to climate change? What actions could be taken and where would these have the most benefit?

TIMBER

37. With a forest resource comprising around 15% of Scotland's total stock of commercial conifers, Argyll and Bute's timber production capacity is of national significance.

38. The majority of these plantations have been established since the 1970s, resulting in a heavily skewed age structure across the region. A combination of climatic factors, topography and soil conditions mean that Sitka spruce is the most viable plantation crop for the majority of Argyll. This, coupled with past regulatory and support regimes, has generated a pattern of large scale, densely-planted monoculture blocks across the region. Forest Enterprise production forecasts suggest that there may be a drop in overall timber quality as block planted at sub-optimal densities reach maturity and are harvested. Although the region contains a significant area of broadleaved woodland (largely upland birch and Atlantic oakwoods) comparatively little of this resource is actively managed for timber production.

39. The long history of commercial afforestation in Argyll and Bute has helped shape the current landscape and ecological makeup of the region. Changes in management practice have helped to create biodiverse areas of woodland that previously comprised more uniform species and age structures.

40. Although Argyll is well suited to growing trees, its relative geographical isolation – particularly true of the islands and southern Kintyre – is a significant issue, making transport of timber and forest products a more important issue than in better connected areas.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Large timber resource, much of which is reaching maturity High average yield classes for Sitka spruce Well established sea transport routes Strong local forestry workforce Recent investment through STTF in transport infrastructure (e.g. in-forest haul routes)	Constraints on viable tree species Underdeveloped processing sector Long distances involved for road haulage Significant areas of relatively inaccessible forest Geographical isolation of certain forest blocks (particularly on islands) Relatively small area of mainland Argyll available for forest expansion (due to environmental designations and topographical/climate constraints) Low added value from timber in Argyll and Bute (e.g. untapped potential in processing)
Opportunities	**Threats**
Multi-scale woodfuel processing and use operations Increase productivity through wood fuel production	Dominance of Sitka increases vulnerability to pest and disease attack as climate change effects take hold Continued central government investment (through STTF) required to bolster transport

Harvesting and restructuring of plantations offer significant opportunities to optimise planting densities, thinning where applicable, to ensure higher timber quality in the next rotation (in addition to other benefits) Use of locally sourced timber in local authority/statutory agency capital projects as exemplars for the material Opportunities to develop processing infrastructure in the region Largely untapped broadleaved resource – areas of native woodland could benefit from more active management Opportunity to develop local hardwood markets/processing/end use business (e.g. furniture, high quality building materials) Diversification of agricultural practices to include forestry Forests continuing to provide opportunities for tourism development	network – economic downturn could adversely affect budgets Rising fuel prices impacting on all transport costs Current high-value sites may be restricted in future potential because of their location in sensitive areas (may be protected by emergent River Basin Management Plans etc) Inappropriate management of native woodland threatening biodiversity.

Questions

7. Do you agree with the above SWOT analysis? If not which elements would you add or change?
8. Should the area of forest in Argyll and Bute be increased? Where should such expansion be concentrated? Are there areas that are considered too sensitive for such expansion?
9. Should the emphasis be on providing more stable and reliable supply of timber from forests in Argyll and Bute? How can this be done?
10. Should there be support for the development of the hard wood sector or an emphasis on increasing the market for woodfuel?
11. How can the Strategy help increase the value added to timber products within Argyll and Bute and develop local markets for timber products?
12. Should there be an emphasis on increasing the proportion of native species and restoring ancient woodland sites, for example, even if this reduces the area of forestry and the volume of timber produced? Where would this be of most value?
13. Is there scope to develop a strategic approach to the planting of native species that are usually associated with commercial plantations?
14. How can the Strategy help deliver the agreed objectives of the Timber Transport Group?

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

41. The forestry sector makes a significant contribution to Argyll's economy, particularly in rural areas. However, this contribution is largely limited to 'traditional' areas such as woodland and forest management, haulage and small scale processing. There is considerable potential for forestry and related businesses to diversify and exploit a number of emergent opportunities, conveying a range of social, economic and environmental benefits.

42. Tourism and recreation-related development on forest land has been extremely successful in diversifying income streams in other areas of Scotland, and may have potential in Argyll. When viewed in parallel with the high quality natural and cultural heritage assets of the region, such developments present an attractive package for 'green tourism' development. However, any developments need to be built around a demand for services.

43. Renewable heat and power is a particularly attractive sector for investment in Argyll. In addition to the economic potential for businesses involved in sourcing and processing suitable biomass, there could be considerable benefits to communities through the installation of individual or district-scale heating schemes. Using locally sourced fuels, such schemes have the potential to reduce fuel bills and the incidence of fuel poverty.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Well established existing Industry Large areas of forest reaching maturity, therefore producing high volumes of sawlogs and fuel Argyll is a well-established tourist destination with a broad base of attractions that has potential for expansion Pre-existing market for woodfuel Large areas of Argyll and Bute under forest management – portfolio analysis may highlight opportunities for disposals for business development Nature based tourism – e.g. Mull Sea Eagle scheme, mountain bike trails, forest parks	Difficulties with existing transport network Range of potential timber products limited by dominance of Sitka spruce Transport distances from Argyll may make forest products less competitive in the national marketplace
Opportunities	**Threats**
Biomass sector could provide an economic use for brash, stumps and small roundwood Opportunities for timber processing facilities of varying scales (in line with the proposals in the Structure Plan) Potential for renewables development on forest land – income can be reinvested in infrastructure etc	Restructuring of forests may reduce future timber production capacity – must remain at a suitable level to ensure any new industry is sustainable Lack of investment in strategic transport infrastructure Perceptions of reduced environmental quality created by clear felling

Potential for expansion of niche markets in hardwood sector, with attendant processing infrastructure Localised woodfuel processing and distribution could increase the value of poor quality or isolated blocks (e.g. on Mull) Use of suitable forest land for the development of affordable housing Deer management in certain areas could be promoted/marketed as stalking concessions Potential to develop a 'Forestry School' to provide an appropriately trained local workforce Potential to build on/grow well established forestry industry. Development of the forest tourism based sector.	

Questions

15. Do you agree with the above SWOT analysis? If not which elements would you add or change?

16. How much potential do you believe the biomass sector has to add value to currently uneconomic forest products or plantations? What and where?

17. How can the economic potential of timber and timber processing industries in Argyll and Bute be maximised?

18. In which areas of Argyll and Bute can woodland and forestry businesses contribute most to local economies?

19. Where are there untapped opportunities for forest-related business development in Argyll and Bute? How best can the strategy help to unlock these opportunities, and what mechanisms could be successfully applied?

20. What is the scope for development of new (or improvement of existing) forest parks in the region to increase the attractiveness of the area to tourist?

21. Which forest areas have the most to potential to be developed for tourism/leisure-related business?

22. Is there potential to diversify incomes from forests and woodlands in Argyll and Bute? If so, how should this be achieved (e.g. biomass, wind energy, tourism and recreation, forest crofts etc)?

23. Should Argyll and Bute make more of its forestry culture and legacy of important woodlands, forests and policy plantings? If so what and where?

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

44. Conveying social and economic benefit to local communities is a central focus of the 2006 Scottish Forestry Strategy. This places considerable responsibility on the forestry sector to ensure that developments maximise the potential social and economic benefits for nearly communities, in addition to ensuring that they are not adversely impacted upon by the industry.

45. Argyll and Bute has a relatively small and widely dispersed population. The main settlements – Campbeltown, Dunoon, Helensburgh, Oban and Rothesay – each have populations identified in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) as being amongst the 15% most deprived in Scotland, while rural communities often suffer from geographical isolation from essential services and amenities. However, strong community identities throughout the area have generated a number of groups and projects with an interest in woodlands and natural and cultural heritage.

46. Woodland and forestry have the potential to contribute a range of benefits for local people, including employment, opportunities for leisure and recreation, land for housing, and a source of cost-effective and environmentally sound energy, in addition to important quality-of-life factors. It has also been demonstrated through a range of projects, for example the Mull and Iona Community Trust (MICT), that woodlands can be effectively managed by local groups. These types of project help foster local ownership and involvement and can have social benefits beyond economic and employment.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Strong community identities and existing groups and structures with an interest in woodland issues Large number of Community Woodlands across the area Relatively large numbers of people employed in ‘land based industries’ therefore a good awareness of issues and opportunities Strong public sector presence can provide leadership in community development Existing examples of land purchase for affordable housing through the National Forest Land Up to date Development Plan Nature based tourism schemes that provide wider benefits for Argyll’s communities.	Dominant planting regimes in 1970s and 80s forests do not always lend themselves to community development schemes Lack of awareness of role of development plan in relation to development issues in woodlands/forests
Opportunities	**Threats**
Build on the success of existing community woodland schemes and pilots to encourage greater local ownership and management of woodlands. Publicity and education – ensuring the public	Difficulties in reconciling the expectations of diverse groups of stakeholders and communities Competing interests (economic, environment, community).

are informed of the issues facing the forestry industry Argyll is an ideal location for the development of small, woodland-related businesses – remote from other sources of employment Community/district-scale biomass heat and power already a success in Argyll – can be used to promote further development Restructuring existing plantations close to communities may create opportunities for engagement Potential to develop woodland crofts or equivalent development on forest land The Argyll and Bute Woodland and Forestry Strategy helping to identify priorities and balance competing interests	Complexity of gaining access to funding sources

Questions

24. Do you agree with the above SWOT analysis? If not which elements would you add or change?

25. Are there opportunities to create 'forest crofts' or other forms of affordable housing associated with forestry in Argyll and Bute that link to the Development Plan opportunities? If so, where might the most suitable locations be?

26. What opportunities are there to help local businesses benefit from links with forestry and woodland?

ACCESS AND HEALTH

47. Outdoor recreation and exercise is increasingly recognised as a key vehicle for health improvement in Scotland. Woodland and forests are ideal venues for such activities. In addition to the advantages for physical wellbeing, access to high quality environments has been shown to have significant mental health benefits.

48. Access rights apply across all forest land, and the emerging Argyll and Bute Core Path Network makes extensive use of forest paths, tracks and existing rights of way. Both public and private sector forest managers have made considerable progress in developing access networks in suitable locations, making it easier for people to access high quality woodland environments. However, much of the forest resource in Argyll is relatively remote from communities and is therefore seldom used. Much of the forest resource in the area is also less suitable for recreational use because its dense planting structure, although this is likely to be addressed during restructuring and restocking.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Woodland and forests recognised as important leisure and recreation resources Range of woodland and forest features (e.g. longer distance paths, natural heritage interests, e.g. NNR/SWT Reserves, cultural heritage) to attract visitors Active access forum, including representatives from the forestry industry	Large parts of the forest resource is remote from centres of population and is relatively inaccessible Planting structure of 1970s and 80s forests do not readily lend themselves to access and recreational development Relative geographical isolation of much of Argyll perhaps reduces the potential for wider promotion
Opportunities	**Threats**
Cooperation with local health board on 'Paths to Health' schemes, prescribing outdoor exercise for suitable patients Linking high quality assets via the Core Path and other access networks Integration with education – promoting woodlands and forests as a resource for learning Maximising the potential of attractions within the forest – possible to attract grant aid from a wider range of sources Potential to create a range of access provision, catering to the full spectrum of possible users Wider promotion of community woodlands, where local people can influence the management of their woodland to maximise relevant benefits Climate trends may contribute to increased	Concentration of use in certain areas – creates the potential for erosion, habitat damage and disturbance Development of an access network that doesn't provide sufficient opportunities for access for the range of different users. Lack of interest/investment from key Provision of facilities develops unrelated to demand context. Impact of warmer, wetter climate (due to climate change) on tourism.

outdoor recreation as summers become warmer and drier Development of community focused facilities such as Green Gyms. Access to water for canoeing, sailing etc. through woodland and forestry Provide improved interpretation and promotion of places of interest; particularly relating to landscape, wildlife, history and geology.	

Questions

27. Do you agree with the above SWOT analysis? If not which elements would you add or change?
28. How important are forests and woodland in contributing to Argyll and Bute's recreational resource? How, where?
29. Is there a need to increase the range of access and recreation opportunities in Argyll and Bute? If so where and what should they be?
30. Where are the most suitable locations for enhancing existing access (explain why) and recreation provision, and what should be done to maximise their potential?
31. Should the focus be on areas popular with tourists or on areas around settlements? Which settlements?
32. What are the key themes that access and recreation promotion and provision should focus on?

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

7.1. The landscapes, natural environment and cultural heritage of Argyll and Bute are widely acknowledged as being amongst the finest in Scotland. As the area has the highest proportional level of forest cover of any Scottish local authority (around 29% of land area), trees and woodland are a fundamental aspect of landscape character. Given that the area also contains a significant proportion of ancient woodland (37,500ha, of which 27,000ha is classed as being of semi-natural origin) these assets also make an important contribution to the setting of archaeological sites and historic monuments and to the composition of historic landscapes as well as having cultural and natural heritage value in themselves. The area also contains just over 10% of Scotland's Scheduled Monuments, dating from the Mesolithic to the early industrial period, and a very high density of undesignated archaeological sites.

49. Environmental quality is fundamental to Argyll's economy, attracting tourists, providing livelihoods for farmers, foresters and land managers and maintaining the quality of water required to support aquaculture and fishing. Since such a significant portion of land area is under forestry, the industry has a major role to play in terms of safeguarding and enhancing these irreplaceable assets. This responsibility will be particularly important with regard to developing forest habitat networks to assist species' adaptation, and migration in response, to the effects of climate change, as well as to the past loss and fragmentation of habitats.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Good environmental practices utilising advice an guidance in legislation and UKFS, UKWAS, forestry EIA and Forest Guidelines (e.g. for soils) General appreciation of the importance of the environment to Argyll's sustainable future Industry is already taking steps to buffer sensitive sites from potentially harmful effects (e.g. re-establishing native riparian habitats to reduce shading of watercourses etc) Relatively large number of nationally and internationally designated natural and cultural heritage sites – established relationships for positive management Strong existing broadleaved resource offers a ready seed source for appropriate expansion and planting	Relatively few sites in Argyll are likely to be suitable for Lower Impact/Continuous Cover silvicultural systems due to exposure and soil conditions – therefore clearfell will continue to dominate plantations Sensitive catchments identified in the River Basin Management Plan may affect the viability of harvesting/replanting certain sites
Opportunities	**Threats**
Restructuring and restocking of existing forest resource is a major opportunity to improve landscape and natural heritage values of many plantations Potential to bring areas of neglected native woodland into management to improve	Climate change may have unforeseen effects on woodland species mix and viable trees, with knock-on effects on landscape quality Increased prevalence of tree pests and disease, and potential invasive species

environmental values (and synergy with other objectives: biomass, hardwood timber, access, biodiversity etc) Training of forestry workers in recognising and protecting sensitive assets (e.g. archaeological sites) Strong environmental credentials may contribute to marketing of timber, forest products and manufactured goods (over and above UKWAS certification) Developing habitat networks through a range of mechanisms: restructuring woodlands, native planting, SRDP funding, farm and croft woodlands etc. Potential for use of limited restructuring – creating broadleaved/riparian habitat corridors through conifer blocks where appropriate Opportunities for woodland and forestry to enhance water quality by mitigating flood effects, reducing run-off in susceptible areas and stabilising landslip-prone slopes Increasing the amount of Atlantic Oak woods in Argyll and Bute	Restocking and restructuring may create conflicts with natural and cultural heritage interests Development of short rotation forestry/coppice could have an impact on landscape quality Harvesting remote/inaccessible stands to enable restructuring may be costly Increased emphasis on planting native broadleaves may affect future viability of the softwood industry Expansion of monoculture potentially threatens biodiversity.

Questions

33. Do you agree with the above SWOT analysis? If not which elements would you add or change?

34. Which forests would benefit from restructuring to bring landscape enhancement and other environmental improvements? Are there specific areas where changes in the composition or extent of forestry and woodland would be beneficial in terms of landscape character and quality?

35. What are the key opportunities to increase awareness and understanding of Argyll and Bute's culture of forestry and woodland?

36. Are there specific areas where the historic environment should be protected from expansions in woodland or forestry, or any existing areas restructuring could enhance the historic environment and people's appreciation of it?

37. Are there areas where forestry contributes to low water quality in burns, rivers and lochs, or are there locations where changes in forestry management, or appropriately designed and located woodland could make a positive contribution to the water environment?

BIODIVERSITY

50. Forestry and woodlands are a rich and diverse habitat for wildlife and they play a vital role in conserving threatened species and protecting the variety of flora and fauna found throughout Scotland. Faunal species of conservation importance which depend on woodland habitats in Argyll and Bute include red squirrel, otter, black grouse, capercaillie and the pearl bordered fritillary butterfly. 49 of the 122 Sites of Special Scientific Interest in the area are designated, at least in part, for their woodland (39 for their Atlantic oakwoods).

51. The importance of forests as habitats across Argyll and Bute is clear from the large proportion of national and international designations that they hold. The conservation and enhancement of internationally designated sites (Natura sites) is a responsibility of those involved in their management. The National and Local Biodiversity Action Plans will be key drivers in helping to achieve this.

52. In the past, forest expansion has had adverse effects on biodiversity through encroachment on important habitats, such as blanket bog, water bodies and river systems. Contemporary forestry practice addresses the responsibility of the industry in relation to safeguarding the natural heritage, working in partnership with land managers and other agencies to tackle issues such as invasive species, deer management and the protection of sensitive species and habitats.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Industry successfully manages a significant area of important habitat (esp. Ancient woodland) Management issues for woodland habitats well understood by foresters Internationally designated woodland assets Cooperation in managing sensitive sites with statutory agencies and NGOs Exemplar projects, such as the Scottish Beaver Trial (supported by FCS) have the potential to raise the profile of managing woodland for natural heritage Presence of iconic species –such as red squirrel, capercaillie, black grouse and large raptors – provide important ‘hooks’ to encourage engagement and public interest	70% of woodland SSSIs are in ‘Unfavourable’ condition (30% assessed as ‘declining) Prevalence of invasive rhododendrons, Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed Deer numbers hampering natural regeneration of woodlands Fencing young plantations / areas of regeneration threaten populations of black grouse and capercaillie Difficult to manage many 1970s and 80s plantations for biodiversity Lack of biodiversity in commercial Sitka forests
Opportunities	**Threats**
Restoration and appropriate management of the existing ancient and semi-natural woodland resource Creation of forest habitat networks – linking existing areas of native woodland through a range of mechanisms	Lack of investment in appropriate grazing management Problems in engaging all relevant stakeholders (foresters, land managers, land owners, tenant farmers, crofters etc) Perceptions of increasingly prescriptive forest

Restructuring / restocking forests following harvesting presents major opportunities for biodiversity enhancement, habitat network development and native woodland expansion e.g. related to Atlantic oak and Caledonian Pinewoods and their associated species Opportunities for smaller scale native woodlands with potential and high biodiversity value Install more bird friendly fencing associated with forests to reduce the potential for collision by species such as Black grouse and Capercaillie. Targeting of funding for biodiversity enhancement through SRDP Using the forest resource to expand educational opportunities Use of Biodiversity Action Plan priorities to attract Lottery or European funding	planning – rather than intended partnership approach Effects of climate change on sensitive woodland habitats and species Monoculture can threaten biodiversity.

Questions

38. Do you agree with the above SWOT analysis? If not which elements would you add or change?

39. Where are the priorities in terms of:
    - Creating habitat networks
    - Restoring ancient woodland, moorland and bog habitats
    - Restructuring forestry plantations to include more native species, more varied age structures and a higher proportion of open space
    - Targeted action on priority species and habitats associated with woodland in Argyll and Bute including native woodlands such as Atlantic oakwoods and Caledonian pine forest?

RESPONDING TO THE ISSUES PAPER

53. Key to developing an effective Woodland and Forestry Strategy for Argyll and Bute will be in the input of stakeholders from all sectors with an interest in woodland and forestry.

54. In order to gather opinion on the priorities for the Strategy we are holding four drop in workshops across Argyll in May. These will be held at:

- STRACHUR MEMORIAL HALL - **STRACHUR** - WEDNESDAY 6TH MAY - 12.00-8.00pm
- TARBERT VILLAGE HALL - **TARBERT**, **LOCH FYNE** - THURSDAY 14TH MAY - 12.00-8.00pm
- CORRAN HALLS - **OBAN** - WEDNESDAY 20TH MAY - 12.00-8.00pm
- GIBSON HALL - **GARELOCHHEAD** - THURSDAY 28TH MAY - 12.00-8.00pm

55. Whilst we hope stakeholders will be able to attend these meetings, we understand that this may not always be possible. Therefore we would welcome your opinions on the thematic questions outlined under each topic area.

56. If you would like to respond to any of the questions raised, please feel to use the space provided and return them to:

Email: forestry@landuse.co.uk

Post: Land Use Consultants, 37 Otago Street, Glasgow, G12 8JJ

Climate Change Questions

1. Do you agree with the above SWOT analysis? If not which elements would you add or change?
2. Should the Strategy prioritise an expansion of woodland and forests with the aim of maximising carbon sequestration? If so where and is the type of forestry important? If not which areas would be sensitive to expansion and why?
3. How should the Strategy support the development of the woodfuel market to provide a low carbon source of heat and power?
4. What emphasis should be place on using woodland to reduce the risk of flooding and slope instability? Where would this be appropriate?
5. What emphasis should the Strategy place on creating forest habitat networks to help species adapt to climate change? Are there particular species that would benefit from this and where are they?
6. How should the Strategy help existing woodland management and forestry practice adapt to climate change? What actions could be taken and where would these have the most benefit?

Responses:

Timber Questions

7. Do you agree with the above SWOT analysis? If not which elements would you add or change?
8. Should the area of forest in Argyll and Bute be increased? Where should such expansion be concentrated? Are there areas that are considered too sensitive for such expansion?
9. Should the emphasis be on providing more stable and reliable supply of timber from forests in Argyll and Bute? How can this be done?
10. Should there be support for the development of the hard wood sector or an emphasis on increasing the market for woodfuel?
11. How can the Strategy help increase the value added to timber products within Argyll and Bute and develop local markets for timber products?
12. Should there be an emphasis on increasing the proportion of native species and restoring ancient woodland sites, for example, even if this reduces the area of forestry and the volume of timber produced? Where would this be of most value?
13. How can the Strategy help deliver the agreed objectives of the Timber Transport Group?
14. Should Argyll and Bute make more of its forestry culture and legacy of important woodlands, forests and policy plantings? If so what and where?

Responses:

Business development Questions

15. Do you agree with the above SWOT analysis? If not which elements would you add or change?
16. How much potential do you believe the biomass sector has to add value to currently uneconomic forest products or plantations? What and where?
17. How can the economic potential of timber and timber processing industries in Argyll and Bute be maximised?
18. In which areas of Argyll and Bute can woodland and forestry businesses contribute most to local economies?
19. Where are there untapped opportunities for forest-related business development in Argyll and Bute? How best can the strategy help to unlock these opportunities, and what mechanisms could be successfully applied?
20. What is the scope for development of new (or improvement of existing) forest parks in the region to increase the attractiveness of the area to tourist?
21. Which forest areas have the most to potential to be developed for tourism/leisure-related business?
22. Is there potential to diversify incomes from forests and woodlands in Argyll and Bute? If so, how should this be achieved (e.g. biomass, wind energy, tourism and recreation, forest crofts etc)?

Responses:

Community development Questions

23. Do you agree with the above SWOT analysis? If not which elements would you add or change?

24. Are there opportunities to create ‘forest crofts’ or other forms of affordable housing associated with forestry in Argyll and Bute that link to the Development Plan opportunities? If so, where might the most suitable locations be?

25. What opportunities are there to help local businesses benefit from links with forestry and woodland?

Responses:

Access and health Questions

26. Do you agree with the above SWOT analysis? If not which elements would you add or change?
27. How important are forests and woodland in contributing to Argyll and Bute's recreational resource? How, where?
28. Is there a need to increase the range of access and recreation opportunities in Argyll and Bute? If so where and what should they be?
29. Where are the most suitable locations for enhancing existing access (explain why) and recreation provision, and what should be done to maximise their potential?
30. Should the focus be on areas popular with tourists or on areas around settlements? Which settlements?
31. What are the key themes that access and recreation promotion and provision should focus on?

Responses:

Environmental quality Questions

32. Do you agree with the above SWOT analysis? If not which elements would you add or change?
33. Which forests would benefit from restructuring to bring landscape enhancement and other environmental improvements? Are there specific areas where changes in the composition or extent of forestry and woodland would be beneficial in terms of landscape character and quality?
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35. Are there specific areas where the historic environment should be protected from expansions in woodland or forestry, or any existing areas restructuring could enhance the historic environment and people's appreciation of it?
36. Are there areas where forestry contributes to low water quality in burns, rivers and lochs, or are there locations where changes in forestry management, or appropriately designed and located woodland could make a positive contribution to the water environment?

Responses:

Biodiversity Questions

37. Do you agree with the above SWOT analysis? If not which elements would you add or change?

38. Where are the priorities in terms of:
    - Creating habitat networks
    - Restoring ancient woodland, moorland and bog habitats
    - Restructuring forestry plantations to include more native species, more varied age structures and a higher proportion of open space
    - Action targeted on priority species and habitats associated with woodland in Argyll and Bute including native woodlands such as Atlantic oakwoods and Caledonian pine forest?

Responses:

GENERAL QUESTIONS

57. Overall, do you think that the amount of forestry and woodland in Argyll and Bute is about right, too little or too much? If too much or too little, please explain why and what should change?

58. Thinking about the balance between coniferous forestry on the one hand and broadleaf and semi-natural woodland on the other hand, do you think the balance is about right, too heavily in favour of coniferous woodland, or too heavily in favour of broadleaves? Please explain why and how you think a change in the balance could be achieved?

59. Which issues are most important in guiding the future development of forestry and woodland in Argyll and Bute? Please enter a tick for each category.

	Highest priority				Lowest priority
Timber					
Business development					
Climate Change					
Community development					
Access and health					
Biodiversity					
Environmental quality					