

Short note of Aberdeenshire Land Use Strategy Pilot Event

Woodend Barn Arts Centre, Banchory

26th February 2015

Introduction:

Aberdeenshire Council (working with the James Hutton Institute (JHI)) has been carrying out a regional pilot for the Scottish Land Use Strategy on behalf of Scottish Government. The Aberdeenshire Pilot was primarily focused on issues of rural land use change. The key aim of the Pilot was to create a framework which incorporates policy and environmental information to allow users to explore the consequences of particular types of land use change resulting from different policy goals and taking into account climate change.

The Aberdeenshire Council and Royal Society of the Arts Fellows' MCICH Network held an event at the Woodend Barn Arts Centre to which people or organisations who had previously been approached to take part in the Regional Land Use Pilots or who had expressed an interest in becoming involved were invited (see Table 1).

The meeting was chaired by Ann Packard from RSA Scotland (www.theRSA.org) and comprised four presentations followed by invited comments from three land management representatives: Charlie Adam from NFUS, Anne Gray representing Scottish Land and Estates and Jamie Farquhar from Confor. Finally there was a panel discussion featuring all the speakers when questions from the floor were debated.

Presentations

First, Sally Thomas from Scottish Government (Natural Resources Division), explained the background of the Land Use Strategy, the reasons for running the pilot and the rationale for choosing Aberdeenshire for the pilots.

Second, Irina Birnie, the Project Manager from Aberdeenshire Council gave a more specific description of approach taken in Aberdeenshire and in the local focus areas (around Huntly and the Upper Dee catchment), and gave an overview of the project management, consultation process, expected outputs and the key messages to emerge.

Third, Justin Irvine (JHI) described the development of the web based Land Use Change Tool. The tool is designed to demonstrate a process for exploring the consequences of land use change. Its initial focus is on native woodland expansion as an example. It allows the user to modify the output maps by altering the relative importance of different policy related criteria. The tool enables the visualisation in a relatively 'simple' way of large amounts of complex data and calculations.

Fourth, Kirsty Blackstock (JHI) described the programme of stakeholder engagement in the two local focus areas. These involved a series of three connected workshops designed to understand the

drivers of decision making by local people and their evaluation of a number of scenarios of predicted land use change.

The presentations can be accessed on

<http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/energy/AberdeenshireLandUseStrategyPilot.asp>

Comments from the land management sector organisations:

Charlie Adam (NFUS) voiced a concern that there seemed to be limited input from land managers and that food production hadn't been mentioned. The Land Use Strategy and planning should have a long term approach and policies can change because governments generally have short term objectives. He therefore urged caution in the use of the tool for planning before it is fully developed.

Jamie Farquhar (CONFOR) commented that it was good to see an approach that tackled the issue of finding areas for new woodland but emphasised the need to develop the tool for softwood planting. He also pointed out that the forestry sector has long experience of spatial planning at regional scales but recognised that integrating this with other land uses would be a good development and that there was no intention by the forestry sector to encroach on prime agricultural land. He also raised the issue about the effectiveness of the LUS and the need to get the balance right between regulation and incentives. He pointed out that many large land owners are already practising integrated land management and the decisions of these land owners take into account community interests as well as incentives to manage in a particular way. He commented that regional strategies can be constraints but they need to be seen as opportunities and not be seen as putting up barriers to integrated management. He supported the ongoing development of the tool to make it useful in helping individual land owners make decisions.

Anne Gray (SLE) commented that the LUS could be positive or negative for landowners. She recognised that the public interest in the land has increased but warned that increasing public demands channelled through policy directives could increase conflict with private land owner objectives. People own land for particular purposes and if they can't fulfil this then they will be less inclined to invest in owning and managing these areas. The LUS therefore needs to help with balancing public and private objectives and not increase the level of public directives and regulations. However, the LUS can have a role in reconciling different policy objectives and benefits i.e. getting the balance right between top-down and bottom up needs. She pointed out that land use is dominated by farmers who have support regimes to safeguard food production but there is increasing recognition that land can deliver other objectives and enterprises and this needs to be reflected in the way land managers are supported.

Panel discussions and Q&A from the floor

During the panel discussion participants raised a number of concerns about how and when the information and outputs gleaned from the pilots would be used to inform the Land Use Strategy. Most felt that it was too early for it to be used to make any decisive contributions. The discussion alluded to the value of subsidies and incentives and the effect of market forces and supply chains. There was a perception that the government is becoming more coercive and that land managers are being increasingly told what to do. There was a strong feeling that people don't manage their land in

isolation but that they absorb influences and knowledge from multiple sources and that this should be recognised.

With regard to the pilots, people were generally positive about the process. The tool was regarded as useful but came with a 'health warning' in that further development was necessary. The discussion emphasised the importance of involving and consulting land managers in developing the process. It was recognised that bringing stakeholders into closer contact with one another was beneficial for better integration: 'if people could see a benefit they will collaborate'.

There was a discussion around the extent to which policies that drive land use due to climate change mitigation need to be tempered in recognition of the relatively small impact these would have on a global scale.

However there was general agreement that the issues facing land use now and in the future are complex and that ultimately decisions will still lie with the individual land manager.

Table 1-List of Workshop Participants

First Name	Surname	Organisation
Charlie	Adam	NFUS
Jane	Angus	Ballater Community Council
Irina	Birnie	Aberdeenshire Council
Kirsty	Blackstock	James Hutton Institute
Michael	Bruce	Glen Tanar Estate
James	Burnett	Leys Estate
Ewen	Cameron	SNH
Judith	Cox	Aberdeenshire Council
James	Davidson	Aberdeenshire Council
Jim	Dewar	Forestry Commission Scotland
Philip	Di-Duca	UPM-Tillhill
Jamie	Farquhar	Confor
David	Fyffe	Fetternear Estate
Anne	Gray	Scottish Land and Estates
Malcolm	Hay	Farmer
William	Houstoun	
Justin	Irvine	James Hutton Institute
Carol	Kyle	James Hutton Institute
Hywel	Maggs	RSPB
John	Milne	
Jose	Munoz-Rojas	James Hutton Institute
Ann	Packard	Royal Society of the Arts
Mark	Reed	Birmingham City University
Bill	Slee	
Angus	Smith	Farmer
Chris	Spray	University of Dundee
Warwick	Taylor	
Sally	Thomas	Scottish Government
John	Thompson	Forestry Commission Scotland

Ken	Thompson	James Hutton Institute
Rose	Toney	North East Scotland LBAP
Simon	Williams	Dunecht Estate
David	Winton	Farmer

James Hutton Institute

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