

**EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

**DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE - 13 FEBRUARY 2001**

**NATURAL HERITAGE ZONES PROGRAMME – ZONE 19:  
WESTERN SOUTHERN UPLANDS AND INNER SOLWAY**

**Report by Director of Development Services**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee of the content of Scottish Natural Heritage's Draft Local Prospectus for the Natural Heritage of the Western Southern Uplands and Inner Solway which has been identified as Zone 19 of the Natural Heritage Zones Programme and to recommend what formal response on the above prospectus should be made to Scottish Natural Heritage by the Head of Planning and Building Control before the deadline of 28 February 2001.

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 At its meeting on 26 September 2000 the Development Services Committee considered a report by the Director of Development Services which set out the aims and objectives of the new system of Natural Heritage Zones proposed by SNH.
- 2.2 It should be emphasised that the status of Natural Heritage Zones is visionary rather than prescriptive. They are intended to provide a framework against which Local Biodiversity Action Plans in particular, and other initiatives, can be effected within the context of Development Plans and Government guidance on nature conservation and other related matters.
- 2.3 The main aim of Natural Heritage Zones is to develop long term goals for the natural heritage for use by SNH and others, which take into consideration local, social and economic aspirations. The new system proposes that future decisions about the natural heritage are taken collectively by a range of organisations which will set the vision for the future and agree how this is to be achieved.

**3. CONTENTS OF DRAFT LOCAL PROSPECTUS FOR NATURAL HERITAGE ZONE 19**

- 3.1 The consultation document puts forward for comment a vision for the natural heritage of the Western Southern Uplands and Inner Solway in the year 2025. It describes the natural heritage as it presently exists, how it has come to take this form, how and why it is changing, and sets out objectives for achieving the proposed vision through sustainable development.

- 3.2 NHZ 19 comprises the local authority areas of Dumfries and Galloway and parts of South Ayrshire, East Ayrshire and South Lanarkshire (see map in Appendix). The relevant part of East Ayrshire takes in the Doon Valley and the northern parts of the Southern Uplands including the Muirkirk Uplands and the Lowther Hills.
- 3.3 The prospectus summarises the character of NHZ19 and in terms of East Ayrshire emphasises the wildlife importance of the lowland areas with their mixed farming, small woodlands and river valleys; the moors with grouse, birds of prey and unusual plants, and the large afforested area supporting red squirrel populations. The prospectus also points out the excellent opportunities for recreation and access within the uplands and forests of the NHZ.
- 3.4 The prospectus identifies the following major changes affecting NHZ19 over the past 50 years:
- Intensification of agriculture
  - Increase of coniferous plantations and associated reductions in areas of heather moorland, blanket mire and grassland
  - Major changes in land use have significantly altered traditional landscapes without the guidance of a strategic or sustainable framework based on natural heritage interests
  - Upland farming has shifted from grazing by cattle to sheep
  - Moorlands have lost areas of heather and there has been a reduction in grouse numbers
  - The trend for greater recreational use of the countryside and increased provision for access and interpretation.
- 3.5 The prospectus has identified that the key drivers for the natural heritage over the coming years will be climate change, international commitments to nature conservation and sustainable development and Government policies.

The key challenges facing the natural heritage of the zone are the need to redress a reasonable balance of land use; this would involve the restructuring of forestry to restore landscapes, expansion and restoration of areas of native woodland, restoration of sustainable management to grouse moors, restoration of priority habitats lost during agricultural and forestry changes between the 1940s and 1980s, delivering river catchment management, and implementation of the new access legislation.

- 3.6 The natural heritage priority objectives set out in the above prospectus are to:
- Maintain or improve the quality and diversity of landscape character, and diversity of habitats and species, and
  - Encourage increased awareness and understanding and greater but sustainable use of the natural heritage.

SNH considers that these objectives can in part be achieved through a series of measures which are detailed in the Appendix to this report. These measures are set against the relevant policies, strategies and initiatives presently in force or being pursued.

#### **4. CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

- 4.1 While the NHZ19 draft prospectus is a very useful document in setting out in a comprehensive way methods by which nature conservation issues can be tackled within its subject area, the approved Ayrshire Structure Plan, the East Ayrshire Local Plan and the Open Cast Coal Subject Plan will remain the primary documents in providing the statutory policy framework.
- 4.2 It is clear that the Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan has a central role to play in achieving the above objectives set out in the NHZ19 draft prospectus particularly in meeting the requirements for wide consultation and participation. Both the draft prospectus and the draft Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan also recognise that the enhancement of existing and recovery of lost habitats within the NHZ19 area in Ayrshire is a long term process to which planning policy can make an important contribution.
- 4.3 In order to progress the draft Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action effectively it will be necessary for the proposed guidance relating to NHZ19 to be considered together with the contents of any future prospectus for NHZ17 – West Central Belt.

#### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 None.

#### **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 None.

#### **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 7.1 **It is recommended that the Committee authorise the Director to;**

**(a) respond to SNH in terms set out in Section 4 above and;**

**(b) to continue to liaise with SNH on future initiatives which may emerge through the Natural Heritage Zone programme**

**Stephen Chorley  
Director of Development Services**

29 January 2001

JT/MMM

## **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 1. The Natural Heritage of the Western Southern Uplands and Inner Solway – Natural Heritage Zones Local Prospectus for Zone 19 (SNH, December 2000).**
- 2. Report by Director of Development Services to Development Services Committee 26 September 2000: Natural Heritage Zones.**

For further information on the contents of this report please contact Julian Thorp.  
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**Implementation Officer: Julian Thorp**

## APPENDIX:

The following table sets out the measures identified in SNH's draft prospectus for NHZ19 set against the relevant existing policies, strategies and initiatives currently being developed at National, Structure Plan and Local Plan level within East Ayrshire.

| <u>NHZ19 Measures</u>   | <u>Relevant Strategies, Policies, Initiatives</u>   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Establishing a strategic framework for forestry development to maintain a reasonable balance of land uses</li></ul>   | Indicative Forestry Strategy<br>National Forestry Plan<br>Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan<br>Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan:-<br>Policy E3<br>East Ayrshire Finalised Local Plan:-<br>Policy ENV15                         |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Encouraging private forestry to adopt standards comparable to state forests as regards landscape, biodiversity, recreation and access</li></ul>               | As above and<br>East Ayrshire Finalised Local Plan:-<br>Policy ENV16  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Promotion of restoration and expansion of native woodland for both commercial and biodiversity purposes</li></ul>   | Indicative Forestry Strategy<br>Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan<br>East Ayrshire Finalised Local Plan:-<br>Policies ENV10(v)<br>ENV12 & ENV15<br>East Ayrshire Woodlands  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Encourage best practice conservation management of farmland through agricultural support schemes, minimum standard codes and grouse more management</li></ul> | Environmentally Sensitive Areas<br>Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan<br>East Ayrshire Finalised Local Plan:-<br>Policy ENV4   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Enhanced integrated land-use decision making through increased stakeholder and community involvement, and through various forums</li></ul>                    | The Ayrshire Biodiversity Action Plan audit document emphasises that the spectrum of sectors, organisations and individuals, with an interest in biodiversity, and being part of the LBAP process, should be as wide as possible. |

- Encouraging restoration of priority habitats and species which were lost during the unsustainable land-use changes between the 1940s and 1980s. Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan  
Indicative Forestry Strategy  
Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan:-  
Policies E1, E2 and E6  
East Ayrshire Finalised Local Plan:-  
Policies ENV10-16 (inc)
- Development of a comprehensive system of wildlife sites Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan  
East Ayrshire Finalised Local Plan:-  
Proposal PROP9
- Development of access, environmental education and interpretation strategies and community learning plans Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan.  
Initiatives promoted by the Council's Ranger Service
- Establishment of Environmental Resource Centre This idea could be developed from the existing environmental educational resource provided by the Council's Ranger Service
- Establishment of Core Path Networks, footpaths around settlements and increased facilities for wider countryside access Paths for All Initiative  
Sustrans  
Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan:-  
Policies AD58, E5, T1, T2  
East Ayrshire Finalised Local Plan:-  
Policies TLR4, T2

## AGENDA