

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE: 7 MAY 2002

DRAFT AYRSHIRE WOODLAND STRATEGY

Report by Director of Development Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee on the contents of the Draft Ayrshire Woodland Strategy which has been circulated to East Ayrshire Council by the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee as part of a formal consultation with statutory bodies regarding the document, and to obtain the views of the Committee on the Draft Strategy.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** As part of the approval process for the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan a commitment was given by the Ayrshire Councils to prepare jointly a forestry strategy for Ayrshire and for that strategy to be the subject of consultation. Since formal approval of the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan in January 2000 the Ayrshire Councils have been working in conjunction with the AJSPTC through a Steering Group to produce the above forestry strategy.
- 2.2** In March 2000 an Indicative Forestry Strategy for Ayrshire: Issues and Opportunities 2000 Report was published, this report acting as a starting point for consultation toward developing a new Indicative Forestry Strategy for Ayrshire. A wide range of groups including the forestry industry, Local Councils, Community Councils and environmental interest groups were invited to comment.
- 2.3** In recognition of the issues raised through the above consultation process and of the changing national approach to forestry/woodland matters contained in the subsequent publications, "Forests for Scotland, the Scottish Forestry Strategy" by the Forestry Commission and "Roots for Growth" by the Scottish Executive it was concluded that a more wide ranging strategy document was necessary than previously envisaged in Government Guidance on Indicative Forestry Strategies.
- 2.4** The above Steering Group therefore decided to formulate an Ayrshire Woodland Strategy that would allow not only for the landscape sensitivity to forestry to be mapped, but also issues of active forestry management, the economic and social consequences of timber production and transport of the timber resource to be addressed.

3. CONTENTS OF DRAFT AYRSHIRE WOODLAND STRATEGY

3.1 The Draft Ayrshire Woodland Strategy takes on board national policies in respect of the following:-

1. Planning Context

- the Strategy seeks to link forestry to other aspects of strategic policy in the approved Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan.
- the Strategy provides a context whereby Councils are able to give informed views on forestry and woodland proposals in the context of socio-economic and other planning considerations.

2. Biodiversity

- the Strategy recognises the strong Government commitment to biodiversity by placing emphasis on the role future woodland planting and management can play in its reinforcement and development.

3. Forestry, Agricultural and General Rural Policy

- the Strategy reflects the Scottish Executive's commitments made in 'Forests for Scotland – The Scottish Forestry Strategy' through setting out how multi-purpose woodland can benefit Ayrshire in terms of developing the local timber industry, local tourism and recreation the enhancement of local diversity and distinctiveness and the integration of rural land practices for the benefit of local rural communities.
- the Strategy more specifically provides a local context whereby the maintenance and development of the economic, ecological and social functions of forests in rural areas, including the afforestation of agricultural and non-agricultural land can be considered as part of the Rural Development Plan for Scotland required under European Legislation.
- the Strategy sets out a local context for the operations of the Rural Development Plan for Scotland which is required under European Legislation to provide a national overview against which to set a rural development approach with particular emphasis on the agricultural and forestry sectors. As the Plan targets European funds it will have a major influence on the implementation of the Strategy.

- 3.2** The Strategy describes the existing woodland resource in East Ayrshire in terms of both current and likely future commercial woodland activity, including its importance as a generator of employment; the woodland environment and planting trends resulting from changes in the funding arrangements for forestry grants, the revision of national forestry policy and the diversification and viability of the agricultural sector.
- 3.3** The Strategy includes a map showing suitability of areas for woodland planting by four specific categories in line with revised Government advice. These categories are listed below. This approach is based on the recognition that some areas may be generally unsuitable for woodland planting through agricultural or environmental concerns and/or may only be appropriate to a certain scale or type of planting.

Preferred Areas:

Areas with few constraints for planting other than a requirement to meet the UK Forestry Standard. Further planting of woods and forests will be encouraged.

Potential Areas:

Areas where scale is an issue, and/or where there is at least one significant issue relating to biodiversity, landscape, agriculture and the natural and built environment, but where there is still considerable potential for specific types of wood and forest planting.

Sensitive Areas:

Areas where there is a significant sensitivity either to scale or to other land use priorities, and where the further planting of woods and forests is to be discouraged.

Areas Unsuitable for Planting

Areas considered unsuitable for wood and forest planting for a variety of reasons – built-up areas, covered by water, too high for economic tree growth etc.

This approach is based on the recognition that some areas may be generally unsuitable for woodland planting or may only be appropriate to a certain scale or type of planting.

- 3.4** The Strategy also sets out in detail action that requires to be taken to promote the integration of woodland planting and management into a broader land-use agenda.

4. PLANNING POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1** While the regulation of forestry is not conducted under the Planning Acts the Planning and Building Control Division has the opportunity to make comments to the Forestry Commission on proposed Forest Design Plans, Woodland Grant Schemes and Felling Licence Applications. Larger forestry operations now require Environmental Impact Assessments on which the Local Authorities are statutory consultees. It is considered that the draft Ayrshire Woodland Strategy will enable the Council to make more informed responses by providing a more comprehensive context for consideration of such proposals.
- 4.2** It is considered that the draft Ayrshire Woodland Strategy (AWS) is in accordance with the Council's Strategic Development Strategy, and will assist the Council in developing the role of woodlands and forestry in promoting new employment opportunities.
- 4.3** The draft AWS also forms useful guidance on how detailed implementation of the Council's Local Plan policies on natural heritage and landscape and rural environment policies can be assisted through its identification of potential key actions that could be taken to promote the local woodland resource in sympathy with the local environment.
- 4.4** Underlying the above guidance, in its identification of areas in Ayrshire that it regards suit different approaches to future woodland and forestry planting the AWS sympathetically reflects the structure of the existing Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Strategy and the Ayrshire Landscape Classification. It is therefore considered that the AWS adopts a wholly sustainable stance with regard to nature conservation in Ayrshire.
- 4.5** By setting out a 'modus operandi' for the promotion of 'Timber' Transport Routes for Ayrshire the AWS assists the process of addressing concerns, relating to current and potential future timber traffic, raised by remoter rural communities served by a network of rural public roads vulnerable to damage from frequent use by heavy timber traffic. The AWS therefore reflects the aims of the Council's Local Transport Strategy 2001-2004 (Section 14.2) in respect of dealing with timber transport issues. The issue of timber transport is also addressed later on in this agenda and reflects the growing concerns regarding this matter.
- 4.6** However, within East Ayrshire the general control regime exerted by the relevant operators over the transport implications of forestry operations compares unfavourably to the controls which the Council is able to exert over the operations of the opencast coal industry.
- 4.7** Through the planning regime the Council has been able to expect a high standard of fleet management and control, the avoidance as far as possible of the use of road transport and where appropriate contributions to upgrade roads to the standard necessary to carry large vehicles safely without

excessive damage to the roads. There is no such mechanism for control over timber transport which now forms a significantly greater source of complaints from the communities affected than coal transport.

- 4.8** The matter of Timber transport has been raised with the Society of Chief Officers of Transportation Scotland (SCOTS) many of whose members have similar problems and a working group has been convened to consider the matter.
- 4.9** With the production of timber due to treble in East Ayrshire within the next 20 years the effect on road infrastructure will become a major problem and the Timber Industry must be persuaded to act responsibly and consider contributions towards keeping roads used for haulage in a safe condition. The AWS should be amended to reflect this approach.
- 4.10** Local MSP's should be made aware of this future problem and lobbied to introduce statutory enforcement on the Timber Industry to contribute towards the maintenance of such routes.
- 4.11** The AWS also recognises that forestry proposals create legitimate concerns within local communities. The AWS seeks to identify the most suitable locations for various types and scales of woodland planting. The integration of public consultation at the earliest opportunity during its formulation will help reduce conflict and delay in reaching decisions about woodland and forestry matters. The AWS suggests that the Forestry Commission, together with the timber industry and local Councils should explore methods to increase the effectiveness of consultation and dialogue with local communities. This approach is particularly welcome at present in East Ayrshire owing to public concern about rural unemployment, timber traffic movements, potential effects of felling on water supply and amenity, and the need to take account of the potential opportunities for developing public recreation in association with forestry/woodland planting which are being addressed by the Council's emerging Access Strategy.
- 4.12** As the above consultation period ended on Friday, 19 April 2002 the Head of Planning and Building Control has already made a provisional response on the Draft Strategy to the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee (AJSPTC) and this response forms Section 4 of this report.

5. FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1** None.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1** It is recommended that the Committee:

- (i)** endorse the views of the Head of Planning and Building Control on the draft Ayrshire Woodland Strategy set out in Section 4 of this report;

- (ii) note the comments expressed by the Head of Roads on future maintenance problems with Timber Haul Routes; and
- (iii) note the proposals for ensuring that the Timber Industry accepts some financial responsibility for the maintenance of such routes

Stephen Chorley
Director of Development Services

17 April 2002
(JT/MMM)

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 1. East Ayrshire Finalised Local Plan (as Modified).**
- 2. East Ayrshire Local Transport Strategy 2001-2004.**
- 3. Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan.**

For further information on the contents of this report contact Julian Thorp. Telephone 01563 576789.

Implementation Officer: Alan Neish.

AGENDA