

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

SPECIAL DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE – 8 APRIL 2003

WOODLANDS STRATEGY

Report by Director of Development Services

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek the Committee's approval for the establishment of an Ayrshire Forestry Forum together with appropriate support.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At its meeting of 17 December 2002 the Committee considered a report on the recent announcement by the Forestry Commission of a new 'Locational Premium' which would offer supplementary grant for woodland planting and development in Ayrshire linked directly to the Ayrshire and Arran Woodlands Strategy which has been developed by the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee. It was also indicated that the Forestry Commission had suggested that the Councils and other bodies most closely associated with implementing the woodlands strategy should consider appointing a Project Co-ordinator to work with an Ayrshire Woodlands Forum. It was noted that a further report would be submitted to the Committee on this proposal.
- 2.2 At its meeting of 7 March 2003 the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee considered a report setting out in general terms the proposal for a Forestry Forum and a Project Co-ordinator. It was agreed to ask the three Councils and other bodies for a commitment of support for this proposal. Once support has been established full detailed proposals for the proposed Forum and support arrangements will be drawn up under the auspices of the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee.

3 PROPOSED FORUM AND PROJECT CO-ORDINATOR

- 3.1 It is proposed to establish a Forestry Forum comprising elected representatives of the three Councils, representatives of appropriate government agencies including SNH, the Forestry Commission and the Agriculture Division of the Scottish Executive, together with representatives of landowners and private forestry operators. If the Forum is to be fully representative of the wide range of interests it will necessarily be a large grouping. For this reason it is intended that it should meet on a yearly basis in the form of a small conference session.

- 3.2** Between meetings of the full Forum implementation of the woodlands strategy would be steered by a small Executive Group formed from the core local authority and government agencies. It is envisaged that these would be the three Councils, the Forestry Commission, SNH, Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire and the Agriculture Division of the Scottish Executive.
- 3.3** The task of developing new initiatives, co-ordinating delivery at the strategic level and policy support to the Forum and Executive Steering Group would be covered by the appointment of a Project Co-ordinator. It is proposed that the Project Co-ordinator should be appointed by one of the Councils and seconded to the Joint Structure Plan Team for the duration of the project. The Joint Structure Plan Team would also provide administrative support. The annual cost of the salary for the Co-ordinator and associated administration is estimated at £40,000. It has been suggested that each Council should consider contributing £5,000 per annum. The Forestry Commission has indicated that it would support the project with £10,000 per annum and SNH, Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire and the Agriculture Division of the Scottish Executive have also indicated that they would support the project.

4 ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSAL

- 4.1** The Ayrshire and Arran Woodlands Strategy has rapidly gained respect at national level as a leading example of strategic planning for forestry and woodlands. This was reflected in the Forestry Commission's announcement of the locational premium for forestry grants. Forestry and woodlands cover a substantial area in Ayrshire, particularly in East and South Ayrshire. The strategy places forestry and woodlands in a wider social and economic context. The proposed actions will involve not only conservation and development of forestry and woodlands but also the development of community access, wider nature conservation objectives, and potential to support diversification and development of rural economies. This is in line with national strategies for woodlands. It is also in line with the Ayrshire Economic Forum's recently approved development strategy (previously reported to the Committee) which features rural diversification as an economic driver for the Ayrshire economy. In this context the proposed Forum and Project Co-ordinator should be welcomed.
- 4.2** East Ayrshire Council has been active in developing forestry initiatives through:
- The successful programmes implemented through the East Ayrshire Woodlands Initiative
 - Its leading role in the Forestry Transport Group for the south west of Scotland which has recently achieved agreement with operators on preferred routes and protocols for managing forestry transport.

4.3 These contributions to the development of the woodlands strategy are fully recognised by the potential core partners in the proposed Forum. It is recognised that the activities of both East Ayrshire Woodlands and the Transport Group should be reinforced by the proposed new Forum. There is a possibility that the Forum could provide a framework within which East Ayrshire Woodlands could extend project management activities to the rest of Ayrshire. The Forum will also benefit from the professional advice which both East Ayrshire Woodlands and the Transportation Group can offer.

4.4 As currently constituted, however, East Ayrshire Woodlands could not perform the full range of functions envisaged for the Forum or the Project Co-ordinator and the Transportation Group has a specific functional focus. It is, however, suggested that East Ayrshire Council should undertake to incorporate the proposed Project Co-ordinator post within the establishment of the Development Services Department and that in offering support to the proposed Forum and Project Co-ordinator Post the Council should ask for consideration to be given to establishing a clear role for both East Ayrshire Woodlands and the Transportation Group within the structure of the Forum and its project support arrangements.

5 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 If it is agreed that the Council should offer to establish the proposed post of Woodlands Strategy Co-ordinator within the development Services Department a further report relating to this post will be submitted to the Policy & Resources Corporate Sub-Committee in due course.

6 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 It is not currently proposed to establish the Forestry Forum as a legal entity. Responsibility for management of the Forum meetings and project support will rest with the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee.

7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The proposed contribution of £5,000 per annum towards the cost of the Co-ordinating Officer and administrative support can be met from within the budget currently allocated for overall support of the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan Team.

8 RECOMMENDATION

8.1 It is recommended that the Committee agree to:

- (a) support the formation of an Ayrshire Woodlands Forum;
- (b) contribute up to £5,000 per annum towards the cost of appointing a Project Co-ordinator and support for the Forum's activities;

- (c) offer to establish the post within the Development Services Department; and
- (d) request the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and Transportation Committee to consider ways in which the activities of the East Ayrshire Woodlands and the Ayrshire Timber Transport Group can be reinforced through the activities of the proposed Forum.

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Director of Development Services
1 April 2003
SC/JR

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil

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