

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE: 16 DECEMBER 2003

SCOTLAND'S FUTURE LANDSCAPES? : ENCOURAGING A WIDER DEBATE A DISCUSSION PAPER FROM SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE

Report by Director of Development Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1** To seek the views of the Committee on a discussion paper prepared by Scottish Natural Heritage entitled 'Scotland's Future Landscapes? Encouraging a Wider Debate'. The paper sets out SNH's thinking on the prospects facing Scotland's landscapes and seeks to stimulate and inform a debate about how this important national asset can best be cared for.

2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1** Scotland's landscapes are recognised by Scottish Natural Heritage as a major national asset and a crucial ingredient in defining Scottish national identity. They constitute much of the country's appeal as a place to visit and as a source of quality goods, and the scenery of the country is seen as a significant generator of economic activity and opportunity. However, SNH recognises that not all of Scotland's landscapes are attractive and that some bear the scars of past exploitation and neglect. In SNH's view, all Scotland's landscapes deserve care and attention, with the enhancement of those that are of poor quality being just as much a priority as the protection of those that are internationally outstanding. The discussion paper invites comments and views on how Scotland's landscapes can best be looked after for people today and for future generations. Views are invited on a series of questions detailed in the paper, with responses requested by 13 February 2004.

3 THE DISCUSSION PAPER

- 3.1** The discussion paper is a concise document which sets out how SNH's objectives for Scotland's landscapes might best be achieved. The contents of the paper are organised in a number of sections dealing with specific landscape issues as follows:

Section 1: describes what SNH means by the term 'landscape', identifies what is special about Scotland's landscapes and explores the various ways in which people value them;

Section 2: describes the dynamics of change in the landscape and summarises the key trends over the past half century;

Section 3: sets out the policy principles that guide SNH's landscape work and, by reference to a number of landscape settings, identifies some of the key issues ahead to be addressed;

Section 4: recognises the many interests in Scotland's landscapes and the complimentary roles these need to play.

3.2 A series of eight questions is raised in the paper relating to the above sections. A summary of the main observations on the paper is detailed in Annex 1 to this report.

4 GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

4.1 East Ayrshire Council as planning authority can generally only protect and influence improvements to the physical appearance of the landscape in so far as new development is concerned and this is usually only at a very small local scale. Appropriate policies regarding landscape matters, together with the identification of specific Landscape Character Areas where protection of the landscape from intrusive developments is give priority, have been included within the adopted East Ayrshire Local Plan in this regard. Many activities that shape the landscape in any major way, such as larger scale forestry and agricultural developments, fall outwith the planning system. Such developments are therefore outwith the direct sphere of influence of the Council except in an advisory capacity as a consultee on such issues as forestry planting and felling proposals, and through the operations of East Ayrshire Woodlands.

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no financial implications for the Council as a result of the consultation exercise.

6 LEGAL / AUTHORITY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no legal / authority implications for the Council as a result of the consultation exercise.

7 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no personnel implications for the Council as a result of the consultation exercise.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 It is recommended that the Council agrees:

(a) to approve the contents of this report; and

- (b) to authorise the Director of Development Services to submit a full response on the Discussion Paper to Scottish Natural Heritage based on the key points set out in the Annex to this report.

Stephen Chorley
Director of Development Services

20 November 2003

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

- (i) Scottish Natural Heritage Discussion Paper: Scotland's Future Landscape?: Encouraging a Wider Debate

For further information on the report contact Julian Thorp, Planning Officer, on 01563 576789

Implementation Officer: Alan Neish

SUMMARY OF THE COUNCIL'S MAIN OBSERVATIONS ON THE DISCUSSION PAPER

- (i) The views expressed in the Discussion Paper regarding the special qualities of the Scottish landscape in terms of its diversity, landform and national, regional and local character are considered worthy of the Council's full support.
- (ii) The range of values and benefits that the landscape brings to the lives of residents and visitors in terms of its aesthetic, recreational, cultural, and ecological qualities, as detailed in the Discussion Paper, is considered to be exhaustive. There are no additions that the Council would wish to make to the list provided in the document.
- (iii) The Council is of the view that increased education for all landowners and other stakeholders with an interest in countryside matters should be adopted by SNH as a prime objective to achieving greater care of the landscape.
- (iv) The Council is of the view that additional forces for landscape change in East Ayrshire have been the development of opencast coal mining and the development of large scale renewable energy developments in the form of wind farms, throughout the area.
- (v) In addition to the six principles advocated in the paper to manage landscape change, it is considered that landscape change should also be managed and developed so as to maximise the contribution it can make to the local economy and the enjoyment of both residents and visitors to the area.
- (vi) The Council is supportive of the views of SNH that a more proactive approach to integrated landscape planning and management is required. This is already demonstrated by the Council through the production of the Ayrshire Landscape Assessment, the Ayrshire Woodlands Strategy and the Ayrshire Biodiversity Action Plan, as well as the provision of appropriate policies in the East Ayrshire Local Plan and the recent commissioning of a landscape study of the Kilmarnock and Stewarton areas by the Department
- (vii) The Council would agree that SNH should continue to take the lead role in addressing landscape issues detailed in the Discussion Paper but with the full involvement of all land owners, local communities, Local Councils and all other bodies and individuals with a stakeholder interest in the subject.