

ANGUS COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE – 11 JUNE 2024

ANGUS FORESTRY & WOODLAND STRATEGY 2024-2034 - FINAL REPORT

REPORT BY ALISON SMITH, DIRECTOR OF VIBRANT COMMUNITIES AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

**1. ABSTRACT**

This report seeks the approval of the Angus Forestry & Woodland Strategy 2024-2034 following a period of public consultation, which will form the Council's policy in relation to forestry and woodland in Angus.

**2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICIES**

Commitment to delivery of this project contributes to the following priorities in the Council Plan 2023-2028.

**Caring for our Place**

- Take action to mitigate against climate change by delivering our Transition to Net Zero Action Plan: 2022 to 2030 and leading on the delivery of a Sustainable Energy Climate Action Plan (SECAP) for Angus to reduce area wide emissions.
- Produce a Local Development Plan for Angus.
- Enhance and restore Angus Biodiversity, corporately and with a range of stakeholders.

**3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Committee:

- (i) Agree the proposed responses to the consultation undertaken on the draft Angus Forestry & Woodland Strategy 2024-2034 as set out in Appendix 1;
- (ii) Agree the proposed responses to the consultation undertaken on the Strategic Environmental Assessment – Environmental Report as set out in Appendix 2;
- (iii) Agree the proposed responses to the consultation with NatureScot undertaken on the Habitat Regulations Appraisal as set out in Appendix 3;
- (iv) Approve the Angus Forestry & Woodland Strategy 2024-2034 as set out in Appendix 4; and
- (v) Authorise the Chief Planner and Service Leader – Planning and Sustainable Growth to make any minor technical and typographical changes, as well as any presentational and graphical changes to the Angus Forestry & Woodland Strategy 2024-2034 and update and refine the supporting interactive map, where required.

**4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 At its meeting on 16 January 2024, this Committee (Report No [10/24](#)) agreed to approve the draft Angus Forestry & Woodland Strategy 2024-2034, and its draft Environmental Report, for public consultation for a period of six weeks. The draft Habitats Regulation Appraisal was consulted with NatureScot during this period, as required by the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994, but was also put on the Council's Engage Angus HQ for public access.

## **5. CURRENT POSITION**

- 5.1 Public consultation on the Angus Forestry & Woodland Strategy 2024-2034 and the Environmental Report took place between 19 January and 1 March 2024. The consultation was promoted on the Engage Angus portal and through regular posting on the Council's social media channels. Both the Strategy and an interactive digital map which supports the Strategy were available on Engage Angus. Details of the consultation were also emailed direct to 27 organisations, or a message left on their contact page on their website. These organisations included those who represent forestry, landowners, farmers, sporting interests and deer management. In addition, the Strategic Environmental Assessment – Environmental Report was also on the site and was sent to the Consultation Authorities (NatureScot, SEPA and Historic Environment Scotland) for consultation as per legislative requirements. The Environmental Report was also advertised in The Courier newspaper on 19 January 2024.
- 5.2 There were 57 responses to consultation on the strategy itself and Appendix 1 to this report, summarises and groups the 57 responses into themes; provides the proposed response to them from the Council; and any appropriate changes proposed to be made to the Strategy. Appendix 1 sets out each individual response in detail, who made that response, respondent identification number, questions asked, and responses colour coded to response themes. This has been created from data received on Engage Angus in relation to the consultation.
- 5.3 A brief summary of the responses to the consultation are set out below:
- Support for vision, objectives, and the ten policies and two proposals varied slightly but they were all supported by between 60% and 90% of respondents with the policy for Historic Environment being supported highest at 89.3%.
  - The consultation attracted responses from a wide range of interests including forestry, nature conservation, countryside sports, deer management, countryside access and the general public.
  - Strong opposite opinions on the balance between woodland for nature conservation and productive forestry.
  - Strong opposite opinions on deer data and management.
  - Strong support for woodland and forestry as a mechanism to help natural flood management.
- 5.4 A summary of the proposed changes to the Strategy, in response to these comments, are summarised within Paragraph 6.1 below.
- 5.5 Additional optional questions on the Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Report and the Habitats Regulations Appraisal were also included as part of the consultation and information on these is set out in Appendices 2 and 3.

## **6. PROPOSALS**

- 6.1 Overall there is generally strong support for the Strategy as proposed. As part of the consultation responses, some changes are proposed to the Strategy, and these are summarised below for the information of Members:
- A statement has been added to section 5.2 indicating that the focus of woodland expansion should be away from prime agricultural land except where it meets the policy expectations of the Strategy.
  - Small changes to wording and statistics to correct or update and increase clarity and understanding for on topics which can be technical in nature and increase emphasis.
  - Updating glossary to assist understanding.
  - Updating of policy wording and supporting text to ensure consistency with statutory requirements particularly in relation to designations and protected species.
  - Additional clarification and amendments included in relation to the protection of countryside access routes (section 5.10) and expansion of Woodland of High Nature Conservation Value in relation to distances for natural regeneration and for sites currently Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (Section 5.1)
  - Change of wording in relating to deer numbers for clarity (section 5.9)
  - Small changes to executive summary to reflect changes elsewhere in Strategy.
  - Addition of appendix 3: Statement of Participation

6.2 It is proposed that Members agree to these changes and approve the Angus Forestry & Woodland Strategy 2024-2034.

6.3 Subject to Committee approving the Forestry and Woodland Strategy 2024-2034, it was proposed to have a launch event and publicise the approval of the document. However, due to the announcement of the Election on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2024 and the pre-election period protocols that we are now in; the formal launch of the Strategy will be delayed until after the Election.

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

## **8. RISK MANAGEMENT**

8.1 Section A159 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended) introduces a requirement for Local Authorities to prepare a Forestry & Woodland Strategy identify Woodland of High Nature Conservation Value. The Strategy is required to form part of the evidence base for the new Local Development Plan and is required to support policies within NPF4. If the final Strategy is not approved by Committee, the resulting delay may leave a gap in our evidence base, inhibit our ability to address the biodiversity and climate crisis, and will not accord with the requirements of legislation.

## **9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

### **Strategic Environmental Assessment**

9.1 A Strategic Environmental Assessment – Environmental Report was approved for consultation at the Communities Committee of 16 January 2024. Consultation on the Environmental Report took place at the same time as the Strategy. A summary of consultation representations together with the proposed responses is attached as appendix 2.

### **Habitat Regulations Appraisal**

9.2 A Habitat Regulations Appraisal (HRA) which assesses impacts upon Natura 2000 sites (Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas), was also approved for consultation at the Communities Committee of 16 January 2024. Consultation on the HRA, as required by the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994, took place with NatureScot only, and was undertaken at the same time as the Strategy. A summary of consultation representations together with the proposed responses is attached as appendix 3.

### **Carbon and Biodiversity**

9.3 The policies and proposals within the Strategy will lead to increased biodiversity and an increase in sequestered carbon through woodland and forest expansion, whilst protecting stored carbon within peatlands from forestry.

## **10. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT, HUMAN RIGHTS AND FAIRER SCOTLAND DUTY**

10.1 A screening assessment has been undertaken and a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required for the following reason: It does not impact on people.

## **11. CONSULTATION**

11.1 In the preparation of this report consultation has been undertaken with the Director of Finance and the Director of Legal and Democratic Services. Consultation has taken place with Scottish Forestry and NatureScot as part of the steering group overseeing the study. In addition, a public engagement exercise was carried out prior to the consultation draft being prepared.

**NOTE:** No background papers, as detailed by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

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List of Appendices:

Appendix 1: Angus Forestry & Woodland Strategy – Summary of Public Consultation

Appendix 2: Strategic Environmental Assessment (Environmental Report) - Summary of Consultation

Appendix 3: Habitat Regulations Appraisal – Summary of Consultation

Appendix 4: Angus Forestry & Woodland Strategy 2024-2034