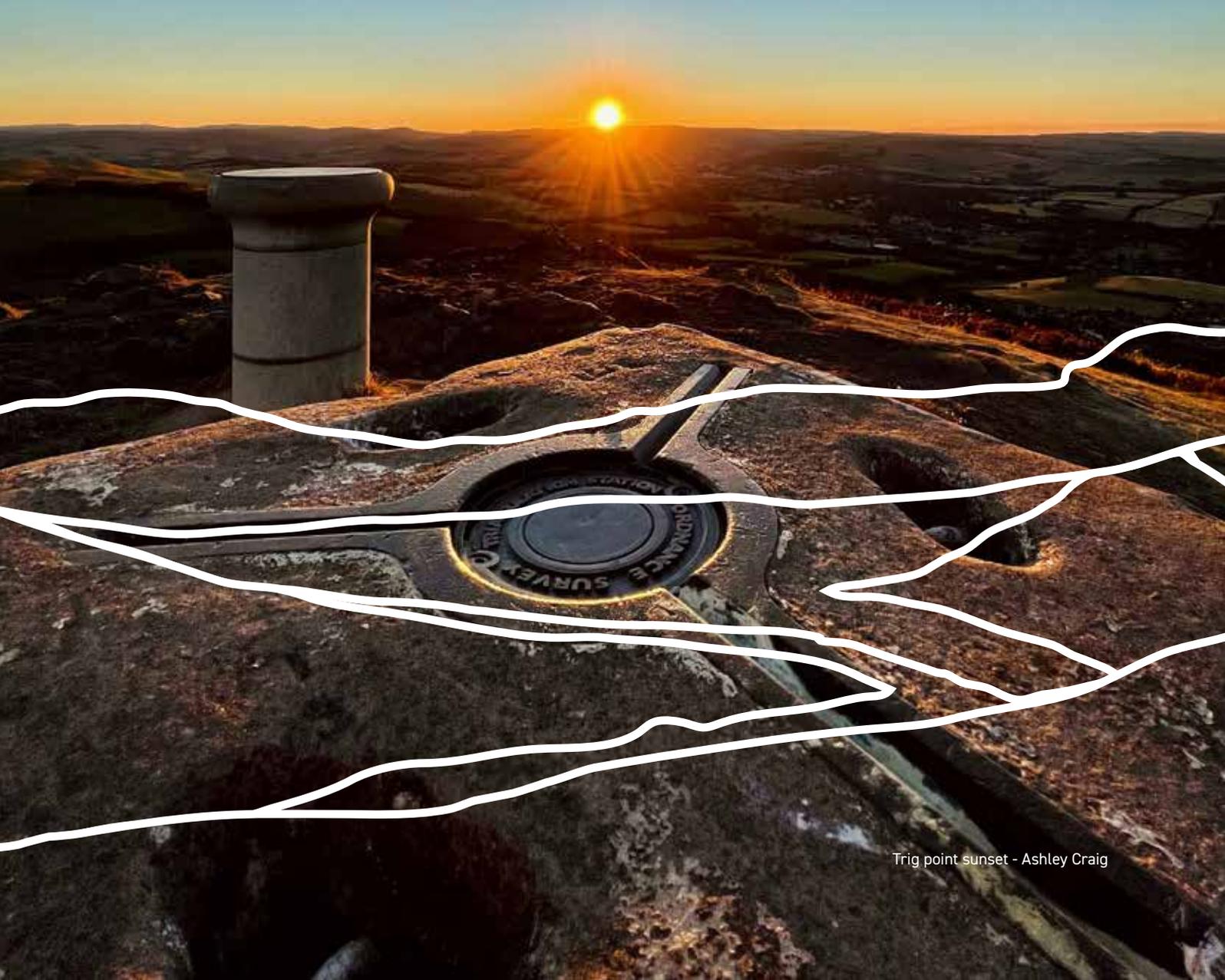




A Pilot Regional Land-Use Framework for South of Scotland

A SUMMARY



Introduction

The South of Scotland is a large rural region with an extensive land-based economy including agriculture, forestry and tourism. However, as biodiversity loss and climate change impacts increase, so does the pressure on our natural capital assets – including our soils, water, habitats and wildlife. We need to take new approaches to the ways we use and manage our land, so finite resources deliver multiple benefits for our businesses, communities and visitors. These benefits include sustainable food and timber production, renewable energy generation and wider public benefits such as spaces for recreation, tourism, wildlife, carbon storage and clean water. As the [Just Transition for land use and agriculture](#) discussion paper (Scottish Government, 2023) states: **“to achieve a nature-positive, net zero Scotland, our land and sea will need to balance competing demands and will require negotiation and compromise from all.”**

The demands we make of the land of Scotland (and the water as well) are growing and for some years there has been interest in trying to be more strategic about how we use the land. To this end the Scottish Government produced the first Land Use Strategy back in 2011 to guide decision making. The need to try to make the best possible use of land continues to grow as climate change and its impacts on society become more apparent. To explore how this might be delivered, the Scottish Government established [five pilot projects](#) to test new approaches; the South of Scotland was one of the regions chosen.

In 2021, work started to explore how a regional partnership approach to land use could be developed and how such a partnership could seek to guide collaborative land use decisions so that greater public benefits are delivered from the land with a focus on delivering against climate change and biodiversity objectives. The pilot projects were asked to consult widely on land use issues and opportunities and to develop a framework that would set out how these might be prioritised and best addressed. The pilots were also asked to seek agreement as to how this process might be implemented and managed.



Threave Castle - Galloway Glens

Public consultation

During 2022/23 a place-based programme of over 30 consultation events were held across the South of Scotland at which people were encouraged to share their views on the challenges and the opportunities that land use change presented and how they might be addressed. The consultation identified a number of land-use changes that offered opportunities to sustain the local economy and food and timber production whilst boosting health and wellbeing, reducing CO₂ emissions, tackling climate change impacts and helping nature recovery.

Creating more **native woodland** e.g. upland oak and birchwood was seen as a positive thing for nature. Native woodlands also enhance the landscape, can provide effective screening (e.g., of commercial forestry) and provide pleasant places for recreation. They lock-up carbon and produce useful products. Planted along rivers, native trees can improve water quality and fisheries.

The benefits of **commercial forestry** were widely recognised, but there were calls for this significant land use to be better considered so that it generated greater benefits and reduced potential negative impacts. Many people felt there should be more local involvement in the planning of such land use change.

Food production was also an important issue and agricultural viability and sustainability were issues raised by many. How do we continue to produce high quality food while reducing the negative impacts on the environment e.g. through regenerative approaches? The involvement of local people in food growing was another opportunity.



The value of **tourism** to the local economy and the value of access to the countryside for the health benefits was an issue of interest to many. How can we maintain and enhance the network of paths and trails that attract visitors and how do we ensure our landscapes remain as beautiful?

Renewable energy development, moorland management, community engagement, infrastructure and housing were also issues that people raised and these all have an impact on future land use planning.

The report on the consultation workshops can be read here:

<https://www.southofscotlandenterprise.com/RLUP>

As the very first step on a longer journey towards more sustainable use of land across the South of Scotland this document establishes the first Regional Land Use Framework (RLUF). This RLUF sets out a concise vision and objectives for land use across the region, providing information on existing land uses (and the benefits they provide) and drivers for land use change. It seeks to raise awareness of the many issues impacting on land use across the region and to start to help people make better, more informed long-term decisions about land use to meet national, regional and local needs. It recognises and highlights the urgency for collaboration and joined-up action to begin to address the climate and biodiversity crises.



Eildons in distance -Ashley Craig

Vision for South of Scotland RLUF

A South of Scotland region where we fully recognise, understand and value the importance of our natural capital. Our plans and decisions about land use – including more native woodland, more peatland restoration and more sustainable and regenerative farming - deliver improved and enduring benefits for all, delivering a Wellbeing Economy through a Just Transition to Net Zero and nature-positive outcomes.

Objectives of the RLUF

- To support and promote better, more informed, collaborative and integrated decisions about how we use land in the South of Scotland in a sustainable manner, addressing the climate and biodiversity crises whilst supporting a wellbeing economy
- To identify and understand competing pressures on land and identify opportunities for land use to deliver multiple benefits of value to society.
- To inform the targeting of public and private investment in support of transparent, fair, sustainable investments in land use.
- To encourage land-based businesses to work with nature and communities, helping to contribute more to South of Scotland's prosperity, including to jobs, skills development and a just transition.
- To enable urban and rural communities to be better connected to the land, with more people enjoying the land and positively influencing land use.



Leaderfoot viaduct - Ashley Craig

Existing land use

The land and its distinct characteristics are the natural capital asset which supports a range of land uses. **Farming and forestry are the dominant land uses** in the South of Scotland.

Whilst these land uses have a long history, the mid-20th century saw a rate of change for both land uses not experienced before, largely driven by policy supporting a desire to yield more food and timber. The resulting intensification of production has often been at the expense of more biodiverse ecosystems, with widespread uptake of more intensive, but very productive agricultural activities and more afforestation.

Dominant types of land cover across the South of Scotland now include grassland, woodland (particularly coniferous forestry) and arable and market gardens. Data on existing land use is available on a range of maps, but these are often not at the level of detail needed to help very local decisions. Access to such detailed information will be important if we want to make the best local decisions.

As well as the obvious goods that the land provides (such as crops, meat, timber and wool) we also benefit from the way the land delivers and stores water, clean air, pollinating insects, wildlife, recreational space, valued landscapes and carbon storage. These other benefits are often under-valued and sometimes ignored. The RLUF seeks to take steps to ensure that all these 'natural capital' benefits are better understood and valued so that we can all benefit more from future land use



Smailholm tower - Ashley Craig

Future land use change

It is important to note that food (and fibre) production is vital for all of us and an economy based on the productive use of land will remain of high importance. Stakeholder engagement and wider debate have identified some of the priority changes in land use that are going to be needed to address the climate and biodiversity crises. For example, significantly more native woodland creation and peatland restoration, renewable energy generation and more efficient and environmentally friendly food production that helps restore nature. We need to ensure that the impacts of land-use change are fully considered so that we can maximise the benefits of such change whilst minimising the negative impacts. Many people saw afforestation as a land-use change that could be better considered.

The role of the framework

The purpose of the RLUF is to inform and help guide decisions about land use. The RLUF recognises the need for inclusive engagement between those making decisions about land and the wide range of people and interests affected by such decisions. Transparency and debate about the evidence (e.g., on what uses are best suited to specific areas of land) and justifications for seeking specific land use changes in different locations will be critical, taking into consideration the full range of benefits provided by the land as part of a just transition.

This RLUF starts to explore where these priority land use changes might be best delivered, drawing on the best available data. However, we recognise that more data will be needed to guide specific local decisions. We also suggest that some of these discussions would be best had at a more local level (e.g. at a sub-catchment or local landscape scale), framed by the regional perspective set out in the RLUF. The “Place-Making” process may lend itself to these debates, so that land-use can be considered alongside other areas of wider community interest e.g. linked to Local Place plans.



Next steps

The RLUF is an informal document and has no legal status. It is intended to provide information which may inform decision making and highlight the existing funding opportunities to enable land use change. It also includes a list of short- and medium- term actions that we think will support delivery of the RLUF's vision and objectives, under the Regional Economic Strategy. The RLUF includes a set of recommendations to Scottish Government around governance, improvements in developing future RLUFs, how RLUFs could inform the new Agricultural support scheme and Just Transition Plans Support from Scottish Government for a just transition in land use across the region will be critical, including access to better data to support land use planning and funding for landowners to incentivise and enable investment in the right land use change in the right places.

The RLUF also sets out over 30 actions for implementation that inform the development of the region as a Natural Capital Innovation Zone (as recently endorsed at the Convention of the South of Scotland). For example, we propose to

- Produce a State of Nature Report for South of Scotland so we can better determine how wildlife is doing.
- Encourage native woodland creation through strategic and catchment-based initiatives as a priority land use change delivering multiple benefits.
- Develop a programme to test approaches with willing stakeholders for collaborative planning of forestry schemes to help facilitate community benefits.
- Develop a combination of farm-scale demonstration projects and collaborative initiatives to inform the types of actions required at the farm-scale to be delivered at a landscape scale.
- Explore opportunities to produce development frameworks for renewable energy clusters in the region.
- Develop improved mechanisms for community involvement in decision making
- Develop sub-catchment plans for land use that link to local place-plans, to inform opportunities for land use change and emerging Just Transition Plans for land.

The full Consultation Draft RLUF can be viewed at the RLUF consultation page and your comments on the Consultation draft can be submitted here <https://sosrep.dumgal.gov.uk/whats-happening>

The final document will be placed on the RLUP website following the consultation <https://www.southofscotlandenterprise.com/RLUP>

This site also has links to the reports on the Pilot project and stakeholder engagement that has underpinned this RLUF and access to some of the maps that we believe can help guide future decision making.

We also invite all those interested in this approach to share their views on this draft RLUF and you are encouraged to complete the questionnaire that you will find on the site.





REP
South of Scotland
Regional Economic Partnership

View from Meigle Hill - Ashley Craig