

Summary of key findings from the South of Scotland Regional Land Use Partnership Pilot (RLUP) stakeholder engagement work October 2022/April 2023

The South of Scotland Regional Land Use Partnership Pilot aims to test a collaborative, inclusive approach to land use decision making, involving a representative range of stakeholders and using a natural capital approach that views land as an asset that delivers multiple benefits. A series of consultation events explored people’s views on current land use and future land-use change options. The work will inform the development of a pilot Regional Land Use Framework (RLUF) for South of Scotland.

Summary of method and key findings

The aim of the first round of events was to explore the benefits provided by the land and key land use challenges and opportunities perceived by people across South Scotland. We also wanted to discover whether these perceptions varied from place to place or between various “land-users”.

18 live events took place at venues across the South of Scotland as well as 2 online events (one considering the Scottish Borders and the other considering Dumfries & Galloway). A report on this stage is available on the internet here (<https://www.southofscotlandenterprise.com/RLUP>).

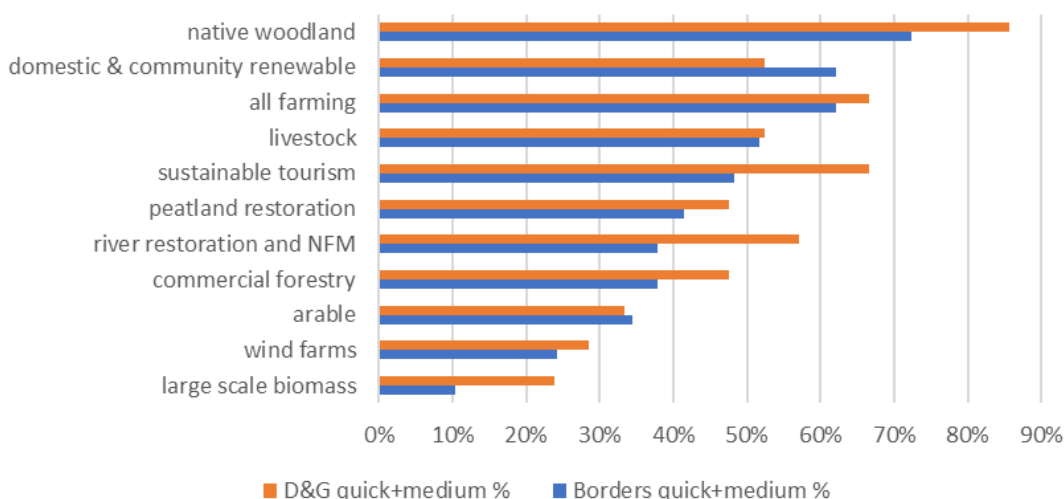
The second round of events (8 live and 2 on-line) set out to explore how some of the identified challenges and opportunities might be addressed while at the same time reducing carbon emissions, enhancing nature and maintaining a vibrant economy. We were also keen to try to explore whether these varied from place to place across the region.

These workshops asked small groups of participants to take one issue (one of those identified from the previous round) and to explore how it might be addressed through land-use change. We asked them to identify actions that could be taken easily and quickly, those that might take more time or resource and those that would be difficult – requiring change in policy or grant-support.

We also asked them to prioritise these actions and to indicate at what scale they needed to operate. In the event only about half of the groups managed to do all this in the time available and this reduced our ability to get quantitative data for analysis.

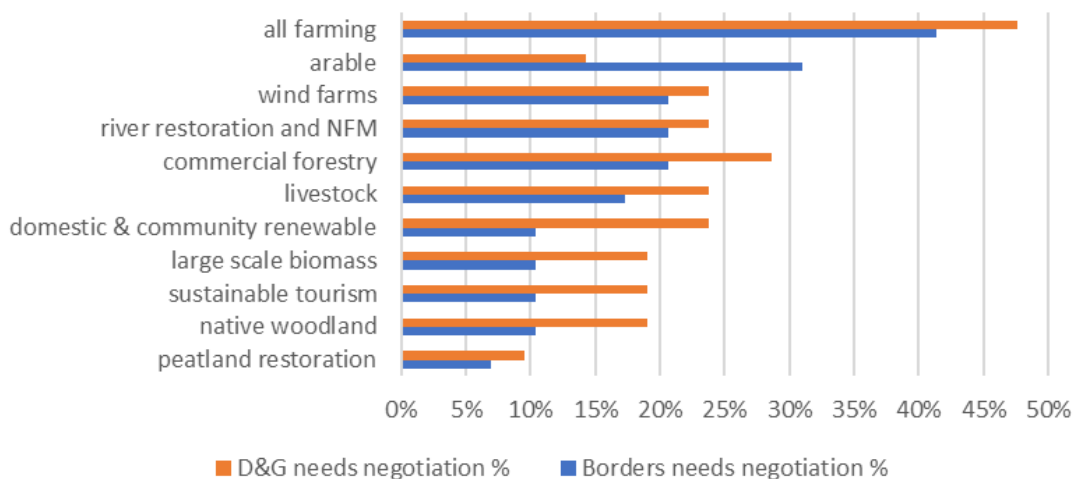
We were however able to explore how different land-uses might address a range of issues and also how these varied across the region. So, for example the following table shows that native woodland creation actions were seen by over 70% of groups as being of quick-win or medium-term benefit to the issue they were considering (and 85% of groups in D&G). On the other-hand, actions around large-scale biomass were only considered to be useful by 10% of Borders groups (slightly more in D&G).

quick and medium term land use measures



Looking at the actions that were considered important but more difficult and “needing negotiation”, there were several top-scorers. The most referenced land-use was arable (and if the two agricultural options arable and livestock are combined this comes top in both Borders and D&G). Other land-uses specified included wind-farms, river restoration, commercial forestry and domestic/community renewables.

land use measures that 'need negotiation'



We captured a significant amount of information on the tensions and potential trade-offs between land-uses. For example:

- **Commercial Forestry** is seen to conflict with other land-uses largely because of its scale. The switch from **agriculture** to forestry is a major change, and many participants expressed concern at the lack of control over it. The loss of an upland farm to forestry leaves neighbouring farms more vulnerable as the farming community is fragmented. Forestry can also conflict with **access** (where trails can be seriously disrupted) and **tourism** (e.g. clear-felled landscapes are unattractive). Wider concerns related to impacts on biodiversity, carbon and flooding.
- **River restoration** – Tensions here related to the perceived need to manage rivers differently. There were calls for a wide range of approaches - more **riparian planting, dredging, beaver introduction, improved access, re-meandering**, etc. This suggests that better advice and expertise may be needed. Some wanted more **regulation**, others called for less strict controls. Water abstraction (for agriculture) is an issue in some places.

Policy and Process

It was clear from the first set of workshops that there was strong interest in the process of establishing and running a RLUP and also in how various policies might align in relation to land-use. We therefore held an on-line workshop on each of these topics. Participants were divided into groups, each with a facilitator and a scribe who used “Miro” Boards to record proceedings.

Policy workshop

The on-line workshop discussed a range of issues around policy and made the following recommendations to the RLUP:

- Decision making should be based on current policies but needs to be more transparent and involve more people and include the local community. This might need facilitation and needs to be supported by access to good data (economic, environmental and social).

- Decisions should look at the medium to long-term while acknowledging current Government policy. They should result in clarity about the ambition so that businesses can plan and invest accordingly.
- Local benefits should be a priority. There was suggestion that this might need to bring land-use planning closer to development planning.
- Monitoring and regulation should be carried out and results published.
- Where scale was specifically mentioned, it was suggested this should be at the catchment or sub-catchment scale.

Process workshop

The on-line workshop discussed a range of issues around process and made the following recommendations to the RLUP:

- There is an opportunity to use the place planning process to create a really robust plan that will identify local priorities and ideal integrated local land use that seeks to support collaboration. It could include “limits of acceptable change” (e.g. how much forestry / windfarm is enough).
- This plan could then be used as a basis for dialogue between communities and developers. This would ensure trust is built throughout the process and that the local community is empowered and it would improve the chance that their views will be listened to.
- Engagement should be open, ongoing and should start early and it should use existing structures wherever possible with facilitation provided if needed.
- Representation on any Forum needs to be as broad-based as possible. It should combine expertise with local knowledge. It must not just be the usual suspects.

Our recommendations

Based on an analysis of the findings and drawing links with relevant wider research and policy developments, the report seeks to distil some key recommendations for the RLUF.

Firstly, it sets out recommendations for regional land use priorities. The priorities identified were:

- Biodiversity protection and enhancement
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation
- Native woodland
- Commercial forestry expansion (see note below)
- Agricultural viability and sustainability
- Access and tourism
- Renewable energy development

Given some of the tensions and trade-offs between different land use priorities highlighted by the research (e.g. re woodland creation) the report also recommends that the RLUF should include commentary on managing these trade-offs. We suggest setting out some high-level objectives and principles, alongside the regional land use priorities, to help to determine priorities and work through trade-offs in different places.

Secondly, the report sets out recommendations around nature-based solutions. We recommend that the RLUF should seek to identify and map broad opportunity areas for nature-based solutions, such as native woodland creation. This would involve combining our social research findings with collation of data on land use opportunities and constraints.

Thirdly, we set out a series of recommendations around shaping the RLUF process and ensuring that RLUFs deliver impact on the ground. These relate to additional targeted engagement with stakeholders in the next phase; exploring how to support more localised inclusive conversations about land use,

potentially at a sub-catchment scale and linked to Local Place planning, that could feed 'up' to inform future RLUF updates; and the need for a clearer national policy steer - about regional land use targets or preferred land use pathways and a clear indication of how this will be delivered and funded - to provide a framework for an open and inclusive debate about how to balance the multiple goals for land use at regional and local level. It will also be important to seek clarity on ongoing funding for the RLUP/RLUF process (critical for implementing these recommendations) with Scottish Government, SOSE (as core funding partner to date), pilot partners and statutory agencies to ensure continuity of support levels.

Next steps

The above recommendations will feed into the drafting of a Regional Land Use Framework which will provide a set of high-level principles and objectives for land-use decision making for the region. The draft framework will be subject to a public consultation before the end of 2023 before being submitted to Scottish Ministers.

Further details can be found on SOSE's website <https://www.southofscotlandenterprise.com/RLUP> and the RLUP Consultation Hub: <https://south-scotland-regional-land-use-partnership-pilot-luc.hub.arcgis.com/>

We would like to thank everyone who has engaged in the rich discussions so far and look forward to further partnership working in 2023.

