



NORTH EAST SCOTLAND AGRICULTURE ADVISORY GROUP – 15 SEPTEMBER 2021

NORTH EAST SCOTLAND REGIONAL LAND USE PARTNERSHIP PILOT

1 Reason for Report / Summary

- 1.1 To inform and engage with the Group members and seek their views on the NE Scotland Regional Land Use Partnership Pilot as the project moves forward to establishing a Regional Land Use Partnership.

2 Recommendations

The asked to:

- 2.1 The Group is asked to consider the pilot project and offer views on the type of Board proposed.**

3 Purpose and Decision-Making Route

- 3.1 In early February 2021 Aberdeenshire Council was advised by the Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary that its Expression of Interest to participate as a Regional Land Use Partnership (RLUP) pilot region, submitted on behalf of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils, had been successful. The submission followed an invitation from the Scottish Government in mid-January 2021 to all future Regional Spatial Strategy Groupings in Scotland.
- 3.2 The enabling of Regional Land Use Partnerships had been a commitment in the Programme for Government in 2019/20, and this was reaffirmed in the 2020/2021 programme. The Scottish Land Commission (SLC) published recommendations for Regional Land Use Partnership implementation on 3 November 2020. One recommendation from the Commission was that in order to support synergies between the Indicative Regional Spatial Strategies (iRSS) and Regional Land Use Partnership objectives that this geographic scale should be adopted. The Scottish Land Commission Report is available to view at [Advice To Scottish Government on the Establishment of Regional Land Use Partnerships](#).
- 3.3 The Scottish Government is proposing to work with the pilot regions to test approaches to partnership governance that will best reflect local situations and priorities. This work will help inform future decisions on wider establishment of Partnerships across Scotland. It is hoped that once established, Regional Partnerships will help national and local government, communities, landowners and stakeholders work together to find ways that optimise land use in a fair and inclusive way while meeting local and national objectives and supporting the journey to net zero.

4 Discussion

- 4.1 Scotland's Land Use Strategy is a strategic document that sets out the Scottish Government vision for sustainable land use in Scotland and was first published in 2011. The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 places a requirement on Scottish Ministers to produce a Land Use Strategy every five years. The aim of the most recent and third National Land Use Strategy "Land use - getting the best from our land: strategy 2021 to 2026" is to make land use more understandable and accessible to everyone and promotes an overarching more holistic approach on how sustainable land use in Scotland might look like.
- 4.2 The third National Land Use Strategy also identifies a number of platforms already available to take forward deeper conversations regarding sustainable land use. They highlight two in particular: the ongoing development of the new National Planning Framework; and the Regional Land Use Partnership pilots. The third National Land Use Strategy was published on 24 March 2021.
- 4.3 The initial aim of this Regional Land Use Pilot is to establish a Regional Land Use Partnership Board or other representative body by the end of March 2022. Once the governance structure is established, the pilot will then focus on developing a Regional Land Use Framework by 2023. The Framework is expected to take a natural capital / ecosystem approach to identify at a landscape level potential land use changes with positive climate and environmental impacts. The Regional Land Use Framework is expected to play a vital role in meeting the ambitious climate change targets of the Council as well as being beneficial for biodiversity.
- 4.4 There are five Regional Land Use Partnership pilot areas selected to participate in this project. In addition to the NE Region the four other pilot areas are:
- Cairngorms National Park
 - Highland Council
 - Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park
 - South of Scotland (Dumfries and Galloway and Scottish Borders Councils)
- 4.5 Aberdeenshire Council took part in an earlier Land Use Strategy pilot that ran from 2013-2015, which was fully funded by the Scottish Government and focused on issues relating to rural land use change. The James Hutton Institute was a key partner in this earlier pilot project. During this project an online mapping tool was developed that specifically focused on woodland creation in Aberdeenshire in relation to six possible policy priorities: woodland expansion; prime land protection; reducing flood risk; improving water quality; woodland and landscape character; woodland and public access. Members of the Board for this earlier pilot included members of NESAG and identified key stakeholders: National Farmers Union of Scotland, Scottish Land and Estates, Scottish Enterprise, the Forestry Commission (as previously called), Scottish Natural Heritage (as previously called), Confor, and Scottish Environment Link.

- 4.6 Participating in this new RLUP pilot will allow the Council to build on and update this earlier work and progress in a collaborative way with the preparation of a Regional Land Use Framework. In doing so it is hoped to address the key challenges of climate change and biodiversity across the Region. Since the previous pilot was completed there has been progress in the capability of decision support tools by both government and 'institutions', along with improved data availability that could help inform the preparation of a future Land Use Framework.
- 4.7 The programme of work, as set out by Scottish Government has three key steps which we have been asked to move forward within this financial year. This financial year is phase 1 of the RLUP Pilot project. **Step One** is to review existing / established groups and key stakeholders to identify any gaps for future engagement. **Step Two** will be to consider the best governance options for the Region in collaboration with the Scottish Government. **Step Three** will involve the appointment of Board Members in order to have them in place to prepare a Regional Land Use Framework by 2023. A parallel area of work throughout the above steps will be to identify appropriate decision-making support tools and necessary data, that will help ensure that the Board or other decision-making body is effectively supported as possible when looking to prepare the Regional Land Use Framework from April 2022.
- 4.8 A key objective of **Step One** was not only to ensure that all key stakeholders were identified for inclusion within an engagement plan but also to ensure that we make best use of established groups already operating within the Region. There are opportunities and benefits from working with established groups (or groupings, partnership bodies). A further benefit from this initial step is to limit potential duplication of work, as well as secure the benefits of a group's combined knowledge, experience and collaboration. One challenge will be to consider how best to effectively engage with the range of groups in order to timeously secure their input during the preparation of the Regional Land Use Framework.
- 4.9 All stakeholders were identified, with initially just over 60 organisations identified as relevant to the objectives of the RLUP. While Step One has been concluded, the lists do remain open should additional stakeholders be proposed. An appendix to this report lists the key stakeholders identified. Given the number of key stakeholders with whom we wish to engage as the RLUP Pilot progresses through its various stages, it is considered both beneficial and necessary to engage with established groups wherever possible and appropriate. Analysis of key groups included consideration to, where these were available, their terms of reference or stated remit, as well as the frequency and timing of their meetings. All key stakeholders were mapped against their membership of selected key regional groups. It should be noted that many key stakeholders attend more than one established group.
- 4.10 The established groups identified were as follows:
- NESAG (North East Scotland Agricultural Advisory Group);

- North East Scotland Area Advisory Group - one of 11 multi-stakeholder area advisory groups across Scotland, established by SEPA with the aim of assisting delivery of river basin management planning;
- North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership (NESBiP) - established with members drawn from local government, environmental organisations, wildlife charities and hosted by the James Hutton Institute;
- Community Planning Partnerships - these partnerships are responsible for delivering positive changes for the communities of Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen;
- Climate Ready Aberdeenshire / Aberdeen Adapts - governed by a steering group consisting of senior representatives from organisations throughout the North East of Scotland.

- 4.11 Further consideration of all the established groups showed that NESAAG had the highest number of relevant interests represented, compared to other established groups. In addition, the advisory group's operational 'terms of reference' meant that early engagement with NESAAG was considered important to help inform RLUP work at Step Two of the project.
- 4.12 In **Step Two** we have been asked to consider potential Governance Structures. There are a limited number of options for the potential composition of a future Board. These options are an 'expert' group type of board, a fully political board made up of political representatives, or a mixed membership type of board. While expert opinion will be essential to the preparation of a RLUF, given the complexity of many of the issues anticipated, the need to prioritise identified changes requires democratic representation. Some identified 'experts' will be representatives from stakeholder organisations, as well as representing people whose land is identified and who have a detailed knowledge of challenges and opportunities present. A future Board will need to be able plan for strategic land use change and do so in a way that helps prioritise action, facilitates the delivery of actions on the ground, and help identify necessary means of support. The Board is therefore expected to require a mixed membership model. RLUP Partnerships are expected to be inclusive, collaborative but also democratic and this requirement is most likely to be achieved through a mixed membership model. NESAAG Members are asked for their views on the type of Board that is considered appropriate.
- 4.13 A future Board will need to effectively and regularly engage with the established regional stakeholder groups when preparing the Regional Land Use Framework. These groups can help in agreeing priorities, assist with project design and delivery of local projects. As set out in the Scottish Government's National Land Use Strategy (4.2 above), Regional Land Use Pilots are seen as being able to take forward deeper conversations regarding sustainable land use. With the establishment of an RLUP for north east Scotland it is hoped that this greater discussion can take place and opportunities be identified that both reflect the diversity and challenges for the region.
- 4.14 Step 3 has the focus on appointment of the RLUP Board members and making arrangements for support groups and functions. We have programmed actions relating to step 3 for early months of 2022. We have sought reassurance from

Scottish Government regarding the commitment to future funding necessary to support a future Board carrying out its duties. We have been advised that funding would be confirmed through the normal Scottish Government budgetary processes and therefore financial commitments will only be confirmed around the end of this year or the beginning of 2022. To address this potential identified risk, we intend to progress the appointment of a Board in the early months of 2022, when hopefully confirmation of available budget will have been received.

- 4.15 It is worth noting that the recently published “Draft Shared Policy Programme” of the Scottish Government included a further statement of commitment to the current Regional Land Use Partnership Pilots, summarising the Government’s expectation that the pilots should test and develop ways to:
- take a democratic, inclusive and local approach to governance and decision making;
 - adopt a natural capital approach to land use change;
 - produce Regional Land Use Frameworks which can meet national as well as regional priorities;
 - maximise their influence in engaging regional stakeholders.

This “Draft Shared Policy Programme” is accessible via [Scottish Government and Scottish Green Party: draft shared policy programme - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/consultations-policies/scgp/draft-shared-policy-programme/).

- 4.16 A report on the RLUP Pilot was taken to Aberdeenshire Council Sustainability Committee on 25 August 2021, and the Committee asked that a further report with recommendations on a proposed governance structure be brought to next Sustainability Committee on 11 November 2021. A further report will be prepared for the next meeting of NESAG on the recommendations prepared as a result of the further work undertaken in Step Two of the RLUP Pilot Project. This further report will also allow NESAG to give their view on the adoption of a natural capital approach to land use change.

5 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

- 5.1 This report helps deliver the Strategic Priority “Resilient Communities” within the Pillar “Our Environment”, and supporting this priority are key principles relating to climate and sustainability.
- 5.2 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is (are) agreed.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial			X
Staffing			X
Equalities and Fairer Duty Scotland			X
Children and Young People’s			X

Rights and Wellbeing			
Health and Wellbeing			X
Town Centre First			X

5.4 There are no equality impact implications arising from this report

6 Scheme of Governance

6.1 NESAG is able to consider this item in terms of its remit to provide a NE Scotland focus to enable issues and concerns across the agricultural and related sectors to be addressed. This includes strengthening economic development links across the wider land-based sector and food industry, contributing to regional and local priorities, improving links between industry, the environment and biodiversity and contributing to policy development and consultations.

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Date: 2 September 2021

APPENDIX 1

Sector	Stakeholder groups and organisations
	Groups
Agriculture/Forestry/Rural	North East Scotland Agricultural Advisory Group
Catchment management	North East Scotland Area Advisory Group
Community	Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership
Biodiversity	North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership (NESBiP)
Cross Sector Environmental	Climate Ready Aberdeenshire
	Organisations
Local Authority	Aberdeenshire Council
Local Authority	Moray Council
Local Authority	Aberdeen City Council
Local Authority	Angus Council
Local Authority	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Business	Aberdeen Chamber of Commerce
River Catchments	Dee Catchment Partnership
Coastal	Moray Firth Coastal Partnership
Energy Industry	Oil and Gas UK
Water Industry	Scottish Water
Coastal	East Grampian Coastal Partnership
River Trusts	Deveron, Bogie and Isla Rivers Trust
River Trusts	Don District Salmon Fishery Board & River Don Trust
River Board	River Ythan District Salmon Fishery Board
River Fishing Interest	River Ugie Angling Association
River Trusts	River North Esk
Regional Transport Partnership	Nestrans
Public sector - national	Scottish Environment Protection Agency
Public sector - national	Nature Scot
Public sector - national	Historic Scotland
Public sector - national	Scottish Government Rural Payments & Inspections
Public sector - national	Forestry and Land Scotland
Economic	Scottish Enterprise
Agriculture	National Farmers Union, Scotland
Land management reps	Scottish Land and Estates
Agriculture	Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society (SAOS)
Forestry	Confor
NGO's	Scottish Environment Link
NGO's	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
NGO's	Scottish Wildlife Trust
Food Sector	Food Standards Scotland
Farming and Wildlife	GFWAG
Research/academic	James Hutton Institute
Research/academic	Scottish Agricultural College (SRUC)

Research/academic	University of Aberdeen
Research/academic	RGU
Tourism	Visit Aberdeenshire
Tourism	VisitScotland
Public Sector	Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Public/Health Sector	NHS Grampian
Voluntary	Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action
Voluntary	Aberdeenshire Youth Council
Public Sector	Police Scotland
Community	Aberdeenshire Rural Partnerships
Public/Health Sector	Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership
Energy / infrastructure	Scottish & Southern Energy
Professional Body	RICS

Others

Transport Infrastructure	Network Rail (Scotland)
NGO's	WWF
NGO's	Woodland Trust
NGO's	John Muir Trust
NGO's	National Trust for Scotland
Biodiversity	Scottish B-Lines Buglife Scotland
Land Management	Scottish Moorland Group (Grampian Group)
Access associations	Ramblers Scotland
Access associations	British Cycling
Access associations	British Horse Society Scotland
Food Sector	Scottish Food and Drink
Economic	Opportunity North East Food and Drink
Various	The RSA (Royal Society for Arts)
Professional Body	Royal Town Planning Institute