

Southern Upland NEWS

Conference Report

CONGRATULATIONS to everyone concerned with the Southern Uplands Initiative for their drive and commitment to this exciting new project.

In a remarkably short space of time the SUI has grown from the germ of an idea developed by the Borders Forest Trust with WWF International to a well researched initiative supported by all the key agencies in South Scotland. It now has strong backing from the public and the NGO's via the very comprehensive recent consultation process.

The SUI aims through partnership to achieve the integration of environmental, economic and social planning in land use policies tailored for the Southern Uplands.

It is my belief that this is an idea which has found its time. With the serious problems facing the rural economy and South Scotland, the depressed state of the agriculture and forestry industries and the significant job losses in so many of the region's businesses, it is imperative that we look for new and radical approaches to help our communities to a sustainable future.



(Photograph courtesy of the Moffat News)

Southern Uplands Launch (l to r): Craig Campbell (Scottish NFU),
Richard Williamson (Corporate Affairs Manager, Buccleuch Estates),
Barbara Kelly (Convener, SUI Steering Group),
Daphne Jackson (Ettrick Community Councillor),
Willie McGhee (Co-ordinator, Borders Forest Trust)

With the prospect of the Scottish Parliament being operational in less than three months time, we must press on urgently with plans for the formal launch of the initiative mid-summer.

Already new ideas and project proposals are flooding in. Through the SUI, we will have a mechanism for pulling together these plans, identifying potential partnerships working together to create cost effective, integrated, homegrown solutions to our problems.

The *Southern Upland News* will help keep us informed of our progress.

Welcome to this conference report edition.

Barbara Kelly
Convener, SUI Steering Group

SOUTHERN UPLANDS CONSULTATION MEETING

MOFFAT Academy was the venue for a special conference on Saturday 28th November 1998 – aimed at improving life in the Southern Uplands.

Over 130 delegates attended the meeting which has resulted in the launch of the Southern Uplands Initiative. The event was organised by the Southern Uplands Initiative and the Initiative launched by Craig Campbell, policy director of the Scottish National Farmers Union. It is the culmination of work over the past year involving public agencies, voluntary organisations and landowners in the South of Scotland. Conference co-ordinator Willie McGhee of

Borders Forest Trust said "We have come together in an effort to approach rural land use management in a more integrated manner. Its aim is to give the Southern Uplands an identity. We realised there is not a great recognition about where the Southern Uplands are! It is a good way of sharing information and we have learned the value in talking to each other. We are also hoping to re-address the Highland and Islands bias and to attract investment into the area."

Speakers at the conference included Craig Campbell, who spoke about the challenges facing the Uplands and likely changes in farming; Daphne Jackson a

community councillor who spoke about rural life in the uplands; Richard Williamson of Buccleuch Estates who spoke about integrated rural development and Willie McGhee, who spoke about native woodlands.

The event was also attended by Drew Tulley, convener of the Scottish Borders Council and it was chaired by Barbara Kelly of the Scottish Natural Heritage's west areas board.

Mr McGhee said of the 250 to 300 responses they had received to date, 95% to 98% said they were in favour of the Southern Uplands campaign. There is now a Southern Uplands Partnership trust being set up and a project officer being recruited.

NEWSFLASH NEWSFLASH NEWSFLASH NEWSFLASH NEWSFLASH NEWSFLASH
The Southern Uplands Initiative is on the way to becoming a fully fledged Company, Limited by Guarantee with Charitable Trust status. This change in status will result in an evolution from the SUI to the SUP (see Conveners report)

PRESENTATIONS FROM THE CONSULTATION MEETING



SEEING THE WOOD FOR THE TREES

WILLIE McGHEE of Borders Forest Trust in a pictorial tour of the Uplands described how the SUI partners came together.

Willie said "Borders Forest Trust realised sometime ago that the often complex land use issues in the Southern Uplands needed a single umbrella organisation to cut through red tape and artificial boundaries".

One of the largest Borders Forest Trust projects, Wildwood, an ecological restoration of a complete valley in the Moffat Hills, has strayed over the political boundary between Scottish Borders and Dumfries & Galloway and it seems logical therefore to pursue a cross border approach to land management and conservation.

In 1997 Jean Paul Jenrenaud of WWF International visited Borders Forest Trust from Geneva. The purpose of the visit was to identify community based projects that related to native woodland and conservation. One of the themes of this visit was the disparity in funding opportunities between native woodland and conservation bodies in the Highlands and Islands and those in the South

of Scotland. This was compounded in relation to Borders Forest Trust by the scarcity of native woodland and lack of management of other semi-natural habitats in the Southern Uplands compared to the natural resource, and attention given to the natural resource, north of the Central Belt.

WWF International made available a small grant to BFT for a three year period to stimulate interest in some sort of land use conservation initiative that would cover all of the Southern Uplands and would bring together a wide range of people and organisations living and working in the area.

The initial contact and steering group were, and still are, composed of representatives from the local authorities, LECs, national agencies, private and voluntary sectors. The overwhelming response to the question of creating an initiative within the Southern Uplands has been positive, from farmers, foresters, landowners to community councils and agencies. The consultation exercise has distributed 50,000 leaflets and involved TV, radio and newspaper advertising and articles.

The Agriculture Sector Speaks Out

CRAIG CAMPBELL, the Policy Director of NFUS, as keynote speaker gave a frank and realistic context for changing land use policies in the Southern Uplands.

Craig said that "there was a need to ensure that farmers were enabled to farm sustainably and that the SUI could work at a local level to unite farmers and local communities to ensure that opportunities were maximised locally".

In a talk that outlined the global impacts on UK farming Craig suggested that in future farmers should be paid for positive benefits to the countryside by a de-coupling of payments from production and linking them to rural community benefits.

On an upbeat note Craig thought that people would always be needed in the countryside.

In support of the project Craig concluded that SUI partners all have clear remits and axes to grind. The Initiative would prosper from wider liaison and cross border working.

A VIEW FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR

DAPHNE JACKSON lives and farms with her family at Cossarhill in the Ettrick Valley. Daphne, in a personal presentation, gave the meeting a view of land management from the factory floor.

Describing her business options, Daphne said that the choice is “sheep, trees or tourists”.

During the late 60s and early 70s many farms were sold to absentee landlords and blanket-planted with Sitka Spruce. This has destroyed the character of much of the land, reducing the colours and the contours of the hills and undermining the viability of the local community. Modern forest managers seem to be much more sympathetic to the landscape and conservation, planting more native Scottish trees and thereby encouraging wildlife. She briefly described the Ettrick Floodplain Restoration project which she hoped would bring a few more visitors into the area.

The loss of farms and the influx of “outsiders” created a very diverse population with people commuting away to work and some working from home on computers/faxes, etc. (although mobile phones and TV do not work). Another fairly recent development is that nearly all the farmers wives have to go out to work to help sustain their families.

Farmers must be able to earn a living on the farms. Without an income, there's a risk that the valleys will be abandoned and there will be nowhere for people to come and live in or come

and visit for their holidays. Yet the young people see no future in farming at present and most aspire to other things.

Highlighting a number of issues, Daphne suggested that “another of the big problems is that it costs so much to travel – fuel prices are far too high for commuters, visitors or for the farmers getting their livestock to market”.

At home Daphne has successfully diversified into tourist accommodation and has carried out a number of habitat improvement projects within the ESA Scheme.

Daphne supported the SUI as an initiative that should help real land owners get easier access to project support and funding. A one stop shop approach makes life easier.



Sharing the Vision Changing Together

AS THE FINAL speaker, Richard Williamson of Buccleuch Estates drew together a number of themes from the morning.

In his opening remarks Richard said “Change is upon us depending on where you sit on the political fence, we are going through a period of Devolution, Revolution or Evolution”.

The notes from Richard Williamson's presentation gave a fairly robust rallying cry for the SUI.

The Scottish Parliament is starting up, land reform and National Parks are being considered, the Right to Roam is debated in the Access Forum, European and National designations (SACs, SPAs and SSSIs) are being promoted, and Rural partnerships are being established. All of these are driving things along – how can we make sure we have a voice in these processes and that we do not miss out on the opportunities they offer?

Plans are being made. Structure Plans and Local Plans and Subject Plans and Community Plans and National

Park Plans Indicative Forestry Strategies and Local Forest Frameworks, Natural Heritage Zones, Local Biodiversity Action Plans, Species Action Plans, Local Access Strategies, Tourism Strategies and Economic Strategies. How do the people of the Southern Uplands ensure they have a say in these plans and strategies? Or are they left out?

Development is needed. Farming and rural communities are changing. Tourism could be part of the answer. Should changes be imposed or should the local community have a say? Are the community the same as what the Government call stakeholders? How are these to be identified? How are they to be engaged in the process?

How does the private landowner play a positive part in this change? Time is costly, it is impossible for everyone to do everything. But the SUI could help co-ordinate responses and help the people of the Southern Uplands play a meaningful role and I therefore commend it to you.

What's Happening Now in The Southern Uplands?

Framing the Future of Forestry in Dumfries & Galloway

A PARTNERSHIP of Dumfries and Galloway Council, The Forestry Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage is seeking to develop frameworks to guide the future of forest and woodland development and management in the Mid-Galloway and Langholm/Lockerbie areas of Dumfries and Galloway. The partnership has employed Environmental Resource Consultants (ERM) to develop the frameworks, taking account of the many land use and community issues.

The frameworks are being developed with the assistance of the local community. A series of workshops was organised to allow local people to participate in the process. The workshops, held in Newton Stewart, Castle Douglas, Langholm and Lockerbie proved to be very popular. Over 80 local residents participated in the Newton Stewart workshop and 60 turned up for the evening meeting in Castle Douglas. The Lockerbie workshop attracted nearly 70 and 40 attended the Langholm event.

The workshops are intended to be the first phase of the framework preparation with the public helping to decide what issues need to be addressed. There will be another series of workshops, probably in the summer, when the first draft of the framework plans are published for public comment. The results of the first round of consultation has helped the consultants focus on areas of real concern including landscape and water quality, water resources, existing balance of land use between forestry and agriculture, recreation and tourism, the cultural and natural heritage, biodiversity, employment, land ownership and the quality of rural life.

For further information contact
SUE BENNET, Dumfries & Galloway Council
Tel: 01387 260167



THE BORDERS FOUNDATION FOR RURAL SUSTAINABILITY

SUSTAINABILITY AND THE PURSUIT OF NEW JOBS AND NEW REVENUES

The Foundation's objective is the generation of jobs and revenues in rural areas by:

- *keeping people living and working sustainably in the Border countryside*
- *enabling the Borders countryside as a resource to provide more work for rural communities which will benefit the environment*

There is a need to identify alternative farm-based enterprises based on core assets, which will generate income and provide positive management of the Borders environment. Currently alternatives are offered through heritage conservation (currently limited to ESAs), sporting enterprises, tourism and recreation. Viable farm based enterprises which benefit the Borders environment are the back-bone of a countryside management industry which needs to be facilitated.

The Foundation has devised a study which will focus on allied sporting/tourism/recreation activities which benefit the Borders economy and environment. An audit will be conducted in Part One, providing the basis for Part Two which will explore the potential for providing viable core enterprises for the rural community including farmers.

Denise Walton
Co-Ordinator

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Barbara Kelly, Convener of SUI and SNH *Board Member, led a discussion on the next steps.

Members of the audience raised a number of issues about how the SUI would develop.

How have the Southern Uplands been defined?

The geographical boundary of the Initiative is an issue requiring resolution. To date the Steering Group had confined itself to the two LA areas to keep things manageable. This meeting was welcome to express a view on how much wider the boundary ought to be.

While it is good to hear that the project aims to identify solutions rather than problems, the problems apply to the whole of Southern Scotland, why confine the project to the Uplands?

The SUI aims to address those issues which are particular to the uplands. It's strength would be in the focus it brought to bear on upland issues.

It is not regrettable that land use is polarised between farming and forestry?

The future must find a way of reducing this split so that farming and forestry are more integrated. Farmers need to be encouraged to plant more forests. The Borders forest is nearing maturity and there will soon be a harvest of trees to bring in and the next crop to plant. This is bound to create opportunities for farmers and others, but assistance will be needed if the opportunity is to be taken. The balance of land use and future opportunities are certainly on the agenda.

The problems are here and now. Can the SUI be functional within a year?

Hopefully yes, if not sooner. The time consuming stage has been completed and we expect to be up and running by mid-summer.

The Solway Firth Partnership might offer a good model for a way forward. It had to deal with a cross border situation (Scotland and England) and, while a long process was involved, it has led to the establishment of a strategy to which all parties have been able to agree. The role of the partnership was based on the idea of "co-ordination without obligation". Everyone was made welcome and their opinion heard. The partnership has added to the effectiveness of each of the partners in their specific work remit. The Forum now exists and can deal with new problems and situations as they arise.

SOUTHERN UPLAND INITIATIVE RECEIVES OVERWHELMING SUPPORT

AT A PUBLIC MEETING in Moffat on 28 November 1998 the Southern Uplands Initiative received overwhelming support for the project from the 130 or so people attending.

The climax to a period of wide public consultation, the meeting outlined the SUI aims and objectives to an audience from public, private and voluntary sectors.

A number of core aims for the SUI have been identified. These are:

- to help Southern Uplands communities shape our own sustainable future
- to provide a cross-regional forum for Southern Uplands land use issues
- to inform an integrated rural land use strategy for the Southern Uplands
- to act as a catalyst for land use projects and initiatives within the Southern Uplands
- to protect and enhance the countryside
- to promote integrated farming, forestry, tourism and other sustainable rural businesses in the Southern Uplands
- to encourage people to live and work in the Southern Uplands

The SUI will achieve its aims through a public Forum and by developing, co-ordinating and delivering projects. It will have a net beneficial effect on the Southern Uplands by empowering and enhancing the rural economy and environment.

The focus of the SUI is rural land use, particularly:

- sustainable uplands land use, and
- integrated upland land use planning and policy.

VISION

The SUI aims, through partnership, to achieve the integration of environmental, social and economic land use policies in the Southern Uplands.

How Can I Find Out More

If you want more background on the SUI or have ideas about projects that might benefit from the SUI approach you can contact:

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or

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Photographs 1&2 are courtesy of Derek Robeson, Border FWAG
Photograph 3 is courtesy of Dave Green, Midgehope, Ettrick Valley
Photograph 4 is courtesy of George F. Logan

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE SOUTHERN UPLANDS

In each forthcoming issue of the *Southern Upland News* we will feature short articles about new land use projects, events or initiatives. These can be related to work by individuals, organisations large or small, public and private sector.

Please help spread the word about what's happening in your sector or area of the Southern Uplands by writing to us with a short article, with a photograph or map if possible at:

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Forestry Commission



with thanks to all contributors and participants