



southern uplands partnership
living land, living community

The Southern Uplands Partnership

Scottish Borders “Green Meet”. 22nd March 2019.

The aim of the Green Meet that took place in D&G in January was to get a range of environmental organisations, individuals and agencies together to discuss environmental ambitions and actions for the region. Informal discussions between organisations had shown that there was a desire to have a stronger voice with an established network for better collaboration and support between environmental organisations and projects. The first meeting was organised and run by the Crichton Carbon Centre recognised that the environment is critical to sustainable social and economic development and also that much more effort was required to address climate change.

The idea of the Borders meeting was to review the outcomes of the D&G meeting and to suggest additions or modifications that would ensure that issues and opportunities for the Borders are included in a shared South Scotland approach. This should help to ensure that decisions made by the new development/ enterprise initiatives are environmentally sound.

The meeting was chaired by Cllr Mark Rowley and the following organisations were represented:

- Scottish Natural Heritage
- SEPA
- RSPB
- Tweed Forum
- Tweed Foundation
- Borders Forest Trust
- Scottish Borders Council
- Energise Galashiels
- Greener Melrose
- The Green Party
- Philiphaugh Estates and Ettrick & Yarrow Community Development Company
- Scottish Land and Estates
- South Scotland Golden Eagle Project
- Scottish Wildlife Trust (Local Group)
- Tweed Ecology
- Butterfly Conservation
- Borders Organic Gardeners
- John Muir Trust

- Campaign for a Borders National Park

A number of individuals also attended as did some folk from Dumfries & Galloway.

Everyone was invited to give a 2 minute “pitch” on what they wanted to see happening for the environment in the Borders and between these, a very broad range of issues and opportunities were covered.

These included: the value of the Land-Use Strategy pilot work; making more of what we had; the need to stop the loss of natural capital; the opportunity to link to the health and well-being agenda; the potential of biodiversity off-setting and “biodiversity net-gain”; developing the concept of place; rewilding; the urgent need to address declines of certain priority species; better management of public land; better use of volunteers; getting the right trees in the right place; enhancing public access; developing a major environmental attraction (eg the Dunion project); developing a National Park; spreading the benefits of the railway more widely eg across to Selkirk and Hawick; challenging traditional approaches to land management; improving coordination between stakeholders; looking at the bigger picture – what is a sustainable community?; developing a better understanding of the value of the environment and capturing better data; making more of the UN Sustainable Development Goals; using the rich cultural sector to engage with the public; adopting the one planet prosperity model; building on the carbon codes and using these to nudge behaviour change; restoring FWAG; looking for middle ground between commercial forestry and native woodland restoration; promote local hardwood timber use; need to tackle systemic problems by actively increasing natural capital; protecting the Tweed and the economic value of salmon. Climate change and the impacts it is having and will have was a common thread, as was the uncertainty of the future in relation to Brexit.

This information exchange on its own was a valuable exercise and one that several people suggested ought to be repeated more regularly.

The rest of the meeting was spent in two group discussions. These considered the ambitions, themes and opportunities that had been identified by the D&G group to see whether they fully covered the Borders situation and if not, what needed to be added or changed. The following is based on the report-back session and on notes submitted after the meeting.

Discussion on Our Ambitions

There is an urgent need for someone or some group to CHAMPION a green economy (or green economies) and sustainable development and to influence both SOSEP and Borderlands, “a unified green voice” emphasising that the environment is a healthy investment, and is a foundation of business prosperity.

The name of a new “grouping” is important. Suggestions included:

South of Scotland Green Voice

S Scotland Green Economy Voice

S Scotland Green Economies group

There was some discussion on how any new group could influence decision makers (as Countryside LINK does). It was agreed that duplication must be avoided and that existing mechanisms should be used wherever possible.

It is understood that the Borderlands initiative has a “natural capital” ambition and it was felt that there were other “hooks” in these initiatives that could be useful. We all needed to know more about what these were.

It was felt that there were opportunities in developing clearer ties with the health and well-being agenda, which was of increasing importance and perhaps better understood than the green agenda.

Reworded ambitions:

1. “Shared Vision”

We value and enhance our natural environment, we want to promote green energy, reduce waste, support sustainable and integrated land-use; green tourism, well-being, active lifestyles, education and habitat restoration. We celebrate the natural and cultural strengths of the region and we showcase the region as an amazing place to live and work. We recognise that an environmental sector which creates new jobs and training is an important growth opportunity for the region.

2. Environment linked to economy

The environment is integral to our sustainable rural development. We need to better understand and communicate the link between the environment and the economy, especially to those making decisions about local investments such as the staff and Boards of SoSE and Borderlands. We want to focus on win-win scenarios and avoid the polarisation of “commerce versus greens”.

3. Tangible targets

We would like to see the UN Sustainable Development Goals being explicitly referred to in all strategy documents. We suggest that tangible, simple and relatable targets for the environment should be set, such as “200 miles of clean beach” and “half a million native fish in our lochs and rivers”. We recognise that many targets have already been set and these must not be forgotten. Targets can help us develop projects and communicate and record achievements but they can also be distracting. Targets should be based on the best possible data and regularly reviewed.

4. More partnership working

We want the group to facilitate and support more partnership working and skill sharing, not just between ourselves, but with land managers, local businesses, education providers and local communities. Administrative borders should not be barriers. We seek to

influence Council Planning Departments (eg get them to use the Land Use Strategy and consider wildlife corridors). This is especially important as Councils are currently shedding environmental knowledge and experience.

5. Better communication

We need to support communication between ourselves so we can be more efficient at project development and reacting to funding opportunities. We also need to raise the profile of individual organisations and initiatives, and to publicise the exciting and progressive work that is already being undertaken in the region along with the range of skills the region already has to offer.

Themes (these were distilled from the D&G meeting)

The Environment and the Rural Economy

- We need to understand and demonstrate the value of the natural environment to the south of Scotland economy. This will require baseline data so that change can be detected and monitored. Simple objectives might be best, for example aiming for a 10% increase in tourism based on our natural and cultural heritage. Galloway Glens projects could be used as case studies.
- It is important that we engage with SoSEP/ SoSE to develop strategic projects that will deliver for both the environment and the economy.
- The South of Scotland could lead development of new approaches to informed decision making, community involvement and skills & employment opportunities in relation to land management.
- The marine and coastal environments are important to the region. Coastal communities and businesses face their own pressures and challenges.
- We should build on successful events in our region which already draw people to the region (e.g. the Wild Film Festival, Spring Fling, Environmental Arts Festival) and on existing innovation such as Ethical Dairy (Cream o Galloway) and other regional innovatively green farmers.

Land Use

- The intensification of forestry and farming in the area creates pressures on the local environment, as well as opportunities for action. We should develop a strategic approach to woodland creation, considering the capacity for woodland creation in the context of overall land use, taking into account habitat and species data, minimising impacts and delivering multiple benefits for land managers, land users and local communities.
- There is a desire for a richer living landscape with more holistic management and habitat restoration.
- There is a need to recognise and value the benefits of habitat restoration, such as biodiversity and water quality, to facilitate a return to more natural landscapes. This needs ongoing support – not short-term grants.
- We should explore concepts such as a “Land Ethic” and strengthen the idea of “land stewardship”. We should seek to recreate the old FWAG model, but update it so that

it can offer even more holistic advice (ie including ecosystem services, sustainable energy, access, etc)

- We should strive for better ecosystem resilience eg. to reduce risks of disease and fire caused by climate change.
- We should not forget about the cultural value of our landscapes.
- Main land use issues & key drivers identified by stakeholders under the Scottish Borders Land Use Strategy pilot were:
 - Food production/Food security
 - Timber production & woodland expansion (native & commercial)
 - Natural Flood management
 - Diffuse pollution control
 - Carbon storage (soil & vegetation)
 - Access & recreation
 - Biodiversity
 - Renewable energy
 - Development

Engagement

- We need to engage with communities to help them become more resilient and empowered.
- An environmental partnership must engage with, and be relevant to, the land owning/managing community.
- The meeting was recognised as just the first step – future input should be sought from beyond the organisations present to include land owners/managers, communities and business.
- It is important that the new environment “partnership” works across the South of Scotland. We can learn from each other’s experience.
- Encourage for Forestry Schools as a way of increasing understanding of environment (and potential jobs) in young people.

Innovation

- The region is already a pioneer in land use, climate and carbon. Better links could be made with Crichton Campus and research institutes such as James Hutton Institute. A rural Research Hub could compliment research being undertaken in other parts of the Scotland in quite different land management situations eg. peatland research in the Flow Country. Southern Scotland should play a lead role.
- Place is a key topic. Local Authorities are developing place-based policy as is SoSEP. The environment is clearly fundamental to sense of place, and there are opportunities to increase awareness through this approach. The Biosphere has developed some useful tools for achieving this.
- There is an opportunity to audit biodiversity, habitat condition and extent, and link back to natural capital. This would help target future funding, would help monitor success, and should encourage innovative practice.

Plastics

- Marine litter is a significant issue for the region, and plastic is negatively impacting all our natural landscapes, particularly our coastlines.

How does the Scottish Borders region differ from D&G?

The Borders has significant “Common lands”; this provides opportunities, eg Selkirk common-good fund land needs better footpaths and community facilities. In D&G there is very little common land, but much publicly owned land.

Borders has developed expertise in re-meandering water-courses (Eddleston, Biggar).

Scottish Borders Council has pioneered the approach to biodiversity offsetting in Scotland and it would be good to see this being applied in D&G and beyond.

The Borders has active “green” communities (Greener Melrose, Tweed Green, Greener Hawick).

D&G folk usually think of Carrifran and the other Borders Forest Trust projects as “belonging” to the Borders, but Borders folk note that geographically the projects are in D&G. Is there a danger of the success of these initiatives falling between two stools or is this an opportunity, celebrating the fact that BFT is genuinely a cross-boundary south of Scotland initiative?

Opportunities for Action (roughly grouped by SoSEP themes)

Communities

- Encourage collaboration and innovation in the environmental sector. Consider how to re-start lapsed success stories (Rural Resource Centre, Ecoschools, rangers). A well-funded Biosphere could help implement the vision.
- Explore links between the environment and health and wellbeing – with a view to greater value being given to the environment in this way and unlock future funding opportunities; eg walking as a therapy.
- Help communities develop a local sense of place, based on good understanding of the way the environment impacts on and supports their lifestyles.

Farming, Fishing, Forestry and Land Management

- Support the re-establishment of something like the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group in the region – to better support local land managers and environmental/farm management. Consider also extending the range of advice provided to include all ecosystem services.
- Consider Natural Capital Accounting and “biodiversity offsetting” as mechanisms that could generate new funding streams. Build on the excellent SBC Biodiversity Offsetting project, and pilot Biodiversity Net Gain through forestry grant schemes

and planning frameworks. Specifically encourage D&GC to adopt the “biodiversity off-setting” approach developed by SBC.

- Establish how carbon offsetting could help support environment action.
- Look at new ways to limit negative impacts of land management practices.
- Make better use of biodiversity data in planning/forestry.
- Help encourage more balanced land use; look at new mechanisms that might support new native woodland creation (particularly to connect existing habitats).
- Support mixed purpose woods (not just exotics or natives), wood pasture and agroforestry.
- Implement the Land Use Strategy (ideally there would be pilots by both Tweed Forum and Biosphere, each using slightly different approaches but using real local data, and focussing on incentivising green outcomes.)
- Develop more environmentally friendly approaches to management of public-owned land (e.g. less intensive mowing of public places, less herbicide use.)
- Introduce “locational premiums” for woodland creation to encourage planting in the right areas.
- Consider the potential of large-scale habitat restoration projects as a means of reinvigorating rural areas.
- Help develop marine protection zones.

Education and Skills

- Help shape future funding mechanisms (eg agri-environment) by evidencing what has worked for the region and what hasn't.
- Introduce an effective process to regulate the execution and maintenance of environmental projects and initiatives supported.
- Seek ways of raising awareness of the range of job potential for young people in the rural and environmental sectors.

Key Sectors (currently Tourism and Care & Wellbeing)

- Encourage nature-based tourism to strengthen links between the environment, sustainable land use and the rural economy.
- Strengthen outdoor health and well-being opportunities by enhancing trails and paths and fostering closer links to the Health service.

Business Support

- Support the wood processing sector for hardwoods and alternative soft woods; add value to local wood.
- Support diversity in landuse, in order to support smaller local businesses (wood, food, textiles) and green tourism (in addition to growing commodity crops).
- Add value/celebrate local food- butchers, orchards, wildfoods.

Infrastructure

- Extend the Borders railway and design as a green corridor

Culture and Creative Industries

- Integrate the environment and the arts, building on art events already well established in the region, as a mechanism to engage people with the environment. Foster a cultural 2-way exchange.
- Make more of the traditional textile heritage (cloth, weaving, crafts, wool fest, museums).
- Make more of horse-culture, riding the marches, as well as mountain biking, events festivals and fairs
- Develop a Tweed brand; or a National Park (lite)
- Celebrate Borders/D&G culture and rural crafts

Other

- The Borders is effectively one river catchment whereas D&G is a series of separate catchments. This makes a big difference. Nb 2020 is “year of coasts and waters” – here will be opportunities here.
- Mainstream global Sustainable Development Goals into the regional development agenda especially the low carbon transition.
- Use the Galloway Glens and other existing projects, such as Solway Coastwise, as models and evidence for future projects.

Next Steps

- 1. Establish an informal environmental partnership – with a simple, relatable name**
- 2. Engage with SoSEP, SoSE and Borderlands**
- 3. Develop a small number of strategic projects for the region (land use/natural capital, green tourism/clean beaches and rivers; outdoor education/green transport)**
- 4. Update skills directory for the South of Scotland environmental sector detailing existing organisations, their skills and current projects**
- 5. Establish informal email group for easier information sharing between organisations (eg. policy, consultations, funding opportunities)**
- 6. Identify those missing from the meetings so far – who else needs to be invited/kept in the loop?**

End