

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Executive Director of Infrastructure and Regeneration

Planning Committee: 24 September 2014

Subject: Kilpatrick Hills Forest Design Plan 2014 – 2024

1. Purpose

- 1.1** To advise the Committee of a draft Forest Design Plan prepared by Forestry Commission Scotland for the Kilpatrick Hills and seek approval of the Council's formal response to the consultation on the document.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** To note Forestry Commission Scotland's proposals for the Kilpatrick Hills as set out in the draft Forest Design Plan and approve the Council's response outlined in Appendix 1.

3. Background

- 3.1** A forest design plan is a document that lays out proposals for the future management of existing and creation of new woodland. They are intended to be far reaching, with an increasing emphasis on delivering social, economic and environmental benefits. The plans are approved for an initial period of 10 years, with the period beyond (50+ years) approved in outline. This allows for a review of the document and revision if necessary.
- 3.2** The original Forestry Commission landholding within the Kilpatrick Hills comprised Auchentorlie to the west, Knockupple and Merkins to the north and Auchineden to the east. Land at Cochno Hill was acquired in 2007, and subsequently the central area, extending from Dumbarton Muir down to the A82 at Gavinburn, was acquired in 2011. Most recently, the small plantation block north of Merkins at Wester Cameron was acquired in late 2013. This new Forest Design Plan has been produced to reflect the consolidation of Forestry Commission land ownership (see Appendix 2).

4. Main Issues

- 4.1** The Kilpatrick Hills Forest Design Plan covers an area of approximately 3,500 hectares, of which around a half comprises existing forest with the remainder being moorland and blanket bog. The majority (over 70%) of the existing woodland consists of similarly aged conifers, mainly Sitka spruce or Lodgepole pine, planted in the late-1960s to mid-1970s. Access issues mean intended timber production has been limited, as has progress in increasing age and species diversity. The conifers are generally exceeding critical height, and extensive windblow is already present across the site.

4.2 The Forest Design Plan addresses the management of the existing forested areas of the Kilpatrick Hills and proposes new areas of woodland. It envisages that the overall forested area will increase only slightly, with additional new planting being counterbalanced by the removal of woodland on some areas of blanket bog and upland heath, most notably the entire Knockupple plantation. This is in addition to the restructuring of the remaining plantations, with the harvesting of nearly 360,000 m³ of timber and subsequent restocking.

4.3 New broadleaved planting is proposed upon the southern slopes of the Kilpatrick Hills, around Gavinburn, Glenar buck and Duntiglennan Farm, as well as within the interior of the Kilpatricks, predominately along riparian routes and follows on from planting already carried out at Cochno Hill. Overall, species diversity will increase significantly, with the introduction of a broader range of conifers, productive broadleaves and a wide range of native woodland types.

4.4 Biodiversity

Changes to the structure of existing plantations along with new planting is designed to create an enhanced forest habitat network, creating habitat network links with existing and proposed riparian woodland networks and other isolated areas of woodland. A minimal management regime is proposed in the short-term for the areas of blanket bog and upland heath that represent the main priority habitats within the Kilpatrick Hills and form large contiguous areas across the site. This will allow the vegetation to recover from previous intensive grazing, increasing the mosaic of habitats available. The proposals are expected to benefit a wide range of bird species and the plan aims to improve habitats for protected species.

4.5 Landscape

The landscape of the Kilpatrick Hill is noted as being particularly important, including through its designation in the Local Development Plan. The existing conifer blocks within the Kilpatrick Hills, however, appear incongruous and poorly shaped in relation to the landform. The Forest Design Plan highlights opportunities to enhance the landscape by reshaping the external margins of the woodland; creating graduated edges which visually improve the transitions between woodland and open moorland; and creating internal forest structures which better reflect landform and ground conditions.

4.6 At Gavinburn, below the Kilpatrick Braes, the existing policy woodland character of the landscape will be enhanced through underplanting within existing areas, and the woodland will be extended further up the hill, reforesting some of the currently open ground which was historically woodland. Planting will be at relatively low densities to preserve the open character of the current woodland and important views up to the crags.

4.7 Access

The construction of new internal roads is required in order harvest timber from Kilpatrick Hills, and subsequent restocking. In total, 12.1 km of new internal roads is planned in addition to two operational access roads, both of which

are located within the Stirling Council Area. Forestry roads are permitted development.

4.8 Community and Recreation

The Plan includes the construction of new paths, the upgrade of some existing paths, and the promotion of some as long distance access routes. Shorter access loops are also being created close to the urban areas. This will improve the path network and greatly increase the opportunities for recreation in the area for the local communities and visitors. The Council is working with the Forestry Commission to improve parking and access at Cochno and Old Kilpatrick.

5. People Implications

5.1 None.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 None.

7. Risk Analysis

7.1 None.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

8.1 It is not considered that the report or recommendations raise any equalities issues.

9. Consultation

9.1 The Council's Access Officer was consulted during the preparation of this report. In preparing the Forest Design Plan, Forestry Commission Scotland carried out wide ranging stakeholder engagement. Those involved in this included the Council, and East Dunbartonshire and Stirling Councils, SEPA, SNH, Historic Scotland, the RSPB, local community groups and individuals.

10. Strategic Assessment

10.1 The Kilpatrick Hills Forest Design Plan supports the Council's priority of improving environmentally sustainable infrastructure.

Richard Cairns

Executive Director of Infrastructure and Regeneration

Date: 8 September 2014

Person to Contact: Pamela Clifford, Planning & Building Standards Manager,
Housing, Environmental and Economic Development,
Council Offices, Rosebery Place, Clydebank, G81 1TG

Appendices: Appendix 1: Response to Consultation
Appendix 2: Location Plan

Background Papers: Kilpatrick Hills Forest Design Plan 2014-2024

Wards Affected: 2 – Leven
3 – Dumbarton
4 – Kilpatrick