

Kilpatrick Hills Forest Design Plan 2014-2024

Response from West Dunbartonshire Council

Thank you for the invitation to make comment on the final draft of the Forest Design Plan for the Kilpatrick Hills, covering the period 2014 – 2024. It is acknowledged that extensive consultation and survey work has been carried out and, overall, West Dunbartonshire Council welcomes the resultant plan and the positive contribution it will make to the Kilpatrick Hills.

Proposals to significantly increase the age and species diversity of the woodland within the Kilpatrick Hills, through the restructuring of the existing plantations and carefully located afforestation will derive a number of benefits, including in terms of landscape, biodiversity and access.

Landscape: The Kilpatrick Hills are designated as a Local Landscape Area by the Proposed West Dunbartonshire Local Development Plan. The purpose of this designation is to protect, enhance and encourage enjoyment and understanding of this locally important landscape. The key landscape and visual characteristics and special landscape qualities of the Kilpatrick Hills, include a strong sense of remoteness, wildness (particularly in the central/core areas of the Kilpatrick Hills) and open horizons; distinctive landforms; and a unique diversity of views. In this context, proposals to reshape the margins of existing geometric conifer blocks within the Kilpatrick Hills are a positive move and are supported by the Council.

In addition, the transition between the urban area and the landscapes of the Kilpatrick Hills is a particularly important feature. The Council welcomes proposals to enhance the existing policy woodland character of the hill slope below the Kilpatrick Braes, while ensuring that views of this distinctive landform are maintained. In this location, protecting the setting of the Antonine Wall is also an important consideration and the proposed planting appears to avoid the most sensitive parts of the Buffer Zone. Within the core area of the Kilpatrick Hills, care should be taken to avoid harming the wildness and sense of remoteness which can be experienced.

Habitat Network: The SSSIs located within the Kilpatrick Hills are bounded by a number of Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS), forming a cohesive network of protected habitats. The network recognises that the fragmentation and isolation of habitats can harm biodiversity and the ability of ecosystems and natural processes to adapt and respond to climate change. It is therefore welcomed that the Forest Design Plan proposes to strengthen the forest habitat network by creating habitat network links with existing and proposed riparian woodland networks and other isolated areas of woodland. By the same token, the detailed proposals for broadleaf planting within the core areas should ensure that areas of blanket bog and upland heath are not fragmented, for example by ensuring the appropriate ratio of planting to open ground. The intention to fell the Knockupple plantation and allow it to revert to blanket bog is particularly welcome.

Access: The majority of the existing tracks and paths in the Kilpatrick Hills are incorporated in to the West Dunbartonshire Core Paths Plan. The proposal to add to the network of paths in the area is extremely positive in encouraging greater access, especially given the addition of several circular routes of varying length and difficulty. The addition of long-distance routes across the area is also extremely welcome.