

## **SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4 - THINK PIECE – BLOG - FORESTRY AND WOODLAND**

### **Introduction**

The Scottish Government is keen to bring together views and ideas from a wide range of sectors and to explore the priorities Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) should address.

In this penultimate in a series of Think Pieces Jo O'Hara, Chief Executive of Scottish Forestry, sets out her thoughts on Scotland2050 and specifically Forestry and Woodland. The opinions expressed are that of the author and we hope that they will stimulate debate and discussion.

### **The issues and opportunities:**

*Time is slippery. For a person, 30 years is nearly half a lifetime; for a community it's just over two full school cohorts. For a fast growing timber tree it is nearly enough time to go from seedling to harvest; for a slow-growing tree, it's just the start of a life that could span centuries. For a forest it's just a blink of an eye – but a blink in which the forest could disappear.*

The Scottish Government published its Forestry Strategy in February 2019, with a vision for 2070. By 2050 we will be well on our way to achieving that vision, and may have exceeded expectations, given the climate imperative. The Forestry Strategy shows that Scotland recognises the strategic value of our forests more than ever before and is grasping their huge potential for people and the planet.

By 2050, Scotland will be a net zero carbon nation, using and producing more products based on materials that we have grown rather than mined or extracted – particularly wood. We will have many more trees that will be grown as vital habitats for nature – wild forests and green forest wildlife veins and arteries running through the country. We will have more functional forests acting as vital infrastructure to minimise flooding, shading and cleaning the air in our cities. And we will have people's forests providing woodland classrooms and green treatment spaces, helping people to heal, stay healthy and play. Often, a single forest will be doing all of these things in one place, much like Glentworth Forest in Peebles does today.

The boundaries between 'the forest' and people's everyday lives will be blurring, and that will mean that the disciplines of development planning and forest planning will be working closely together. Development planners are already incorporating tree-based green infrastructure into their thinking, and forest planners are using development planning techniques as they design and site planting and forestry planting and harvesting to address multiple demands – access, landscape, nature, water, neighbours.

Both disciplines are unavoidably place-based and inherently optimistic. Both are driven by a belief that a considered approach will make things better in the future than they might otherwise have been. They both have to deal with trade-offs in time and place. And they are both ultimately about the interactions between people and environment, now, and in an uncertain future.

## **Planning solutions:**

To meet our climate targets we need to grow more forest AND use more wood-based materials. Scotland is blessed with a lot of land that is suitable for growing trees for many different purposes. However, we must focus on growing the right trees in the right places: that needs careful planning in space and time to enable a positive and equitable change.

The planning of intensive land uses such as built development, and extensive land uses such as forestry and agriculture are interdependent: managed forests need roads and people, and forests can be used to fulfil functions previously delivered by development – schools, flood defences, gyms. We must also protect our wild-places, and fully recognise their value when taking development decisions.

NPF4 as a spatial plan is therefore vital. Collectively considering what we should do with buildings and infrastructure in relation to the wider landscape, where we should do it and how that should play out over time.

## **Summary:**

In the next 10 years more new forests and woods will have been established in Scotland than at any time in the last 30 years. These will be small and large, productive and natural, urban and rural, but they will still be very young. At the same time we will be harvesting more wood from our existing forests than ever before, and more people will be using wooded places for work, fun, learning and healing.

Longer term we could become more of a forest nation, internationally renowned for our fabulous wild wooded landscapes; our sustainable, low-carbon wooded towns and cities, and with jobs in new technologies to sustainably grow and harvest forest products for new uses as part of a growing bio-economy.

NPF4 will help this happen by making the space to better connect how we predict, plan and manage the interactions between extensive and intensive land uses.

## **Biography**

Jo is the Chief Executive of Scottish Forestry – the Government's forestry advisor and regulator. She is also a chartered forestry professional.