

The Sustainable Land Use Strategy Five Key Steps for Success

Introduction

1. In December 2009, Scottish Environment LINK launched [Living with the Land](#) 'Proposals for Scotland's First Sustainable Land Use Strategy'. That paper sets out LINK's proposals for the vision, principles and definitions that should underpin the Sustainable Land Use Strategy (SLUS). LINK continues to advocate all of the proposals set out in that paper to the Scottish Government and more widely. However, LINK was encouraged, at a meeting with Scottish Government in January 2010, to identify a small number of priority issues it would wish to see the Government focus on in taking forward development of the SLUS. This paper identifies five key steps that LINK considers are fundamental to the success of the SLUS, as follows:

- Defining the status of the SLUS
- Defining the scope of the SLUS
- Establishing the formal process for producing this and subsequent versions of the SLUS
- Achieving better policy integration
- Underpinning the SLUS with the ecosystem approach

Defining the Status of the SLUS

2. The SLUS should be the 'parent' of all other strategies that have implications for, or guide, land use in Scotland. By this, we mean that the SLUS must set the high level objectives for sustainable land use and reducing greenhouse gas emissions and that the objectives of all other strategies, of relevance to and with implications for land use, must ultimately be in accordance with those of the SLUS. Such objectives must translate ultimately into the proposals and policies necessary to meet those objectives.
3. We recognise that such alignment of strategies and objectives will take time and may not be achievable within the first cycle of the SLUS. We therefore propose that the SLUS should, at the very least, identify all relevant strategies that set objectives for land use and set out the process and timetable for review and revision of those strategies. We draw particular attention to the National Planning Framework, which has a basis in statute, and suggest that future iterations i.e. NPF3 and beyond, should accord with the objectives of the SLUS. The SLUS should also identify where there are gaps to be filled e.g. in relation to strategies for landscape and the historic environment, and propose a timetable for completion. It should also, in particular, emphasise the need for urgent and comprehensive review of the agriculture strategy given the scale of agricultural land use, its impact on Scotland's environment and its significant role in relation to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Defining the Scope of the SLUS

4. We urge the Scottish Government to ensure that the scope of the SLUS remains broad, encompassing all Scotland's land – both urban and rural. It must cover land uses covered by the current planning system and those that are not and seek to provide a strategic and integrated approach for both.
5. We wish to emphasise that the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 requires the strategy to set out '*the Scottish Ministers' objectives in relation to sustainable land use*' and '*their proposals and policies for meeting those objectives*'. These must, in turn contribute to achieving the required reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, to achieving objectives in relation to adaptation to climate change and sustainable development. We recognise that this is ambitious and, as noted under 'Status' above, may not be fully achievable within the first cycle of the SLUS. However, unless the first SLUS sets out a clear commitment to achieving sustainable land use in Scotland, the necessary high level objectives to do so and the process for developing associated proposals and policies, we believe it will fail to meet its statutory requirements.
6. 'Living with the Land' identified a wide range of land use activities and issues that the SLUS will need to address, as discussed at Paragraphs 31-35. At this stage, we do not wish to prioritise any of these issues but anticipate that individual LINK members and Taskforces will want to submit further material on specific issues, for example, achieving more sustainable agriculture, woodland expansion, community cultivation, housing and public transport etc.

Establishing the process for producing the SLUS and subsequent versions

7. We believe that the process the Scottish Government follows in producing the first SLUS, and subsequent versions, will have a significant bearing on the overall success of the strategy. We therefore wish to make a number of suggestions for both the current process and for the future.
8. We welcome the openness that has been demonstrated so far in engaging with stakeholders such as LINK and urge that the whole process remains as open and accessible as possible, as set out in the Scottish Government principles for open government for engaging with the public. In particular, the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 requires public consultation on the draft strategy; we believe important lessons can be learned in this regard from experiences (good and bad) in producing the NPF. More specifically:
 - We support the proposal for regional stakeholder workshops to be held in the Spring but ask that stakeholders be given sufficient notice of these and their locations. We recommend strongly that Scottish Government employs external facilitators for these workshops to ensure these deliver coherent and constructive inputs to the draft SLUS. The value of using external facilitators is that they are seen as independent of Government and stakeholders and

should have the necessary skills and experience to guide discussions. It will be critical, for example, to avoid, as far as possible, debate becoming polarised towards fixed sectoral interests.

- We urge the Scottish Government to debate the SLUS in Parliament in June 2010 before the draft document enters into a formal consultation period in the autumn.
- We offer to organise an event in September 2010 (funds and capacity allowing), in advance of the formal consultation period, to help raise awareness of and stimulate discussion on the SLUS and to continue the process of stakeholder engagement.

9. The process for monitoring implementation of the SLUS, and for future revisions to it, must be established early on. Specifically:

- We suggest that plans for monitoring the SLUS and reporting on its implementation (including annual reporting to Parliament) are included in the first SLUS and that it should set out the process and timetable for revisions to both the SLUS and related strategies.
- We urge the Scottish Government to set up, on a permanent basis, a National Stakeholder Forum to engage with a wide range of stakeholders on the implementation of the SLUS and future revisions to it.

Achieving better policy integration

10. The requirement for a SLUS is an opportunity to promote improved policy integration across Scottish Government on land use issues. We believe this will be achieved if the SLUS promotes genuine alignment of the objectives, proposals and policies set out in the NPF and subsidiary strategies such as those for agriculture, transport, biodiversity and forestry. In doing so, the SLUS offers the chance to identify land use conflicts e.g. between agriculture and built development, forestry and agriculture or housing and space for community cultivation, and help resolve them. It should also help to promote complementarities e.g. multifunctional forestry, natural flood management or housing schemes with multifunctional greenspace.

11. Achieving policy integration of this nature raises questions about Government culture and structures. The SLUS will require mechanisms and processes to be developed so that all parts of government and individuals have the skills and knowledge to work towards more holistic and integrated land use policy and delivery and to avoid departmental and sectoral isolation. It is encouraging to see that this process has already begun with the establishment by the Scottish Government of a high level Steering Group to take forward work on the SLUS. Policy integration also requires effective stakeholder engagement and assessment mechanisms such as Strategic Environmental Assessment; again, we welcome the evidence that both of these are underway. Many of these points on policy

integration are helpfully summarised (see Table 1) in the third¹ of three research projects undertaken as part of the Scottish Government Land Use Study. This Study was intended to inform the SLUS and we therefore refer to it.

Underpinning the SLUS with the ecosystem approach

12. Our land resources provide us with a wide range of goods and services that are vital to human health and wellbeing. But many of the ways in which we use land are not sustainable as witnessed by, for example, declining biodiversity, greenhouse gas emissions, water pollution and landscape degradation. Living within environmental limits is a key principle of sustainable development that the SLUS must contribute to under the requirements of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. More broadly, LINK believes that the SLUS and land use should be underpinned by the principles of the ecosystem approach². As well as promoting management within environmental limits, this means management for the long term and at different scales, accounting for true value, making trade-offs clear and involving stakeholders in decisions.

Table 1: Guidance on policy integration

Content should:	Processes should
Build upon but add value to existing policies, strategies and plans.	Be transparent
Be based on sound analysis.	Encourage policy learning/innovation
Provide a long-term vision.	Build on trustful partnerships and wide participation with open dialogue
Integrate economic, social and environmental issues.	Link national and local levels
Provide clear, achievable objectives.	Incorporate various assessment mechanisms, including external scrutiny
Acknowledge conflicts and trade-offs explicitly	Be backed by adequate institutional capacities (skills and funding) and political commitment
Be endorsed by senior politicians, civil servants and other public employees	Provide clear schedules of implementation
	Develop priorities and objectives to be followed in the budgetary process
	Address conflicts at outset rather than pushing them down the line

Main sources: UNCED (1992); OECD (1996); PIU (2000); Stead et al. (2004); Briassoulis. (2005); EEA (2005); Dwyer et al. (2007); Nilsson& Eckerberg (2007).

Source: Pareto Consulting (2009) The Role of the Public Sector in Realising the Benefits of Scotland’s Rural Land. A report for Scottish Government.

¹ Pareto Consulting (2009) The Role of the Public Sector in Realising the Benefits of Scotland’s Rural Land. A report for Scottish Government.

² See Paragraph 20 of ‘Living with the Land’ for further discussion.