



Supporting Scotland's Transition: Land Use and Agriculture

October 2025

Introduction to Scottish Environment LINK

Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 40 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.

Its member bodies represent a wide community of environmental interest, sharing the common goal of contributing to a more sustainable society. LINK provides a forum for these organisations, enabling informed debate, assisting co-operation within the voluntary sector, and acting as a strong voice for the environment. Acting at local, national and international levels, LINK aims to ensure that the environmental community participates in the development of policy and legislation affecting Scotland.

LINK works mainly through groups of members working together on topics of mutual interest, exploring the issues and developing advocacy to promote sustainable development, respecting environmental limits. This consultation response was written by LINK's Land Use and Land Reform Group.

Question 1

The draft vision provides me with an understanding of the ambition of a just transition for land use and agriculture.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☒ Mostly agree
- ☐ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer.

This draft vision provides a very general description of ambitions for land use and agriculture in 2045. LINK members mostly agree with the ambitions included in this vision, particularly with regards to the Scottish Government's commitments to regenerative agriculture, sustainable forestry, healthy peatlands and integrated land use planning. Equally, LINK members support the social transition and transformation that is described in this vision.

There is value in having a positively framed long-term vision for how the agricultural sector and rural communities will relate to the rural environment in the context of nature restoration and meeting net zero. The plan must, however, engage with the specifics of localised challenges facing sectors and communities, along with the specific actions needed to remediate these challenges.



This plan should more clearly detail the challenges that are likely to arise in a transition and how to meet these to achieve a just transition. If, for instance, this plan contained detailed statistics of which communities and/or industries are likely to be impacted by the transition in land use and agriculture, and the specific support measures and packages that would be introduced to redistribute these impacts, then this would feel more meaningful and strategic. Whilst the vision is admirable, it feels largely intangible in the context of what will be very localised and sector-specific challenges. It would perhaps be better described as a vision for Scotland's sustainable land use, rather than a just transition plan.

Question 2

The outcomes for jobs, skills and economy provide an accurate description of what will be needed to achieve a just transition.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Mostly agree
- ☒ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer.

These outcomes provide a very general overview of aspirations for jobs, skills and economy and lack sufficient detail to be meaningful.

It is unclear what will be needed to achieve a just transition with, for example, 'land use and agriculture is open and accessible to all' or 'changes have been well managed' in the transition to sustainable agriculture. The plan should include specific land use and agricultural sector analysis that highlights areas required for potential change, potential social impacts, and what support measures need to be put in place to remediate these impacts.

The associated actions and means of monitoring and evaluating progress should be expressed in SMART terms (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound).

Question 3

The outcomes for environment and adaptation provide an accurate description of what will be needed to achieve a just transition.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☒ Mostly agree
- ☐ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer.



As with our response to Question 2, LINK members agree in principle with these general aspirations but believe that the framing of these outcomes is too general. The associated actions and means of monitoring and evaluating progress should be expressed in SMART terms (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound).

The outcomes should explicitly reference Scotland's biodiversity and climate ambitions of reaching net zero greenhouse gas emissions and the recovery of biodiversity that are at the core of the transition.

Question 4

The outcomes for communities and place provide an accurate description of what will be needed to achieve a just transition.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☒ Mostly agree
- ☐ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer.

As with our response to Question 2, LINK members agree in principle with these general aspirations but believe that the framing of these outcomes is too general. The associated actions and means of monitoring and evaluating progress should be expressed in SMART terms (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound).

In addition to these comments, LINK members suggest amending an existing outcome or introducing a new outcome to more explicitly reference the increased use and understanding of public access rights to rural places with reference to the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

Question 5

The outcomes for people and equity provide an accurate description of what will be needed to achieve a just transition.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☒ Mostly agree
- ☐ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer.

As with our response to Question 2, LINK members agree in principle with these general aspirations but believe that the framing of these outcomes is too general. The associated actions and means of



monitoring and evaluating progress should be expressed in SMART terms (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound).

In addition to the above points, LINK members suggest that the first outcome also explicitly refers to the agricultural transition to a nature-positive Scotland as well as net zero. Agriculture is a leading cause of biodiversity loss in Scotland.

Beginning the journey

Question 6

Education is a priority area that needs to be addressed to begin a just transition for land use and agriculture.

- ☒ Strongly agree
- ☐ Mostly agree
- ☐ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer.

Scottish Environment LINK members have been campaigning for outdoor, environmental and nature-friendly, land-based education for many decades. LINK members strongly agree that education needs to be addressed to achieve a just transition.

In the context of a just transition for land use, however, LINK members are even more keen to express the need for education and training specifically for land managers and people in the agricultural sector. Scotland will not achieve the necessary changes in land use without training and funding our farmers and crofters. Investment in training, advice services and knowledge exchange is necessary to support the industry to undertake the changes in practice that the government expects.

These objectives, their associated actions and means of monitoring and evaluating progress should be expressed in SMART terms (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound).

Question 7

Local focus is a priority area that needs to be addressed to begin a just transition for land use and agriculture.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☒ Mostly agree
- ☐ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer.



LINK members agree that a focus on addressing the local impacts of any transition is essential. However, LINK members are unsure as to how meaningful the associated actions are in ensuring that local communities feel engaged in the transition to a net zero and nature positive Scotland.

The actions listed refer to additional frameworks, strategies and plans, however, taking a 'local focus' is highly context-specific and the objective is not written in relation to meeting the ambitions of a transition to a net zero nor a nature positive Scotland. Returning to the 'What a Just transition is not' section (p. 6), a prioritisation of a local focus can come into conflict with the national ambitions for transition, and this should therefore be articulated very carefully to avoid confusion. Perhaps this priority area could be rephrased to better consider the specific mechanisms for ensuring local and national concerns are democratically and fairly considered together to decide what takes precedent in different contexts, i.e. through Regional Land Use Partnerships and Frameworks.

These objectives, their associated actions and means of monitoring and evaluating progress should be expressed in SMART terms (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound).

Question 8

Collaboration and innovation are priority areas that need to be addressed to begin a just transition for land use and agriculture.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☒ Mostly agree
- ☐ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer.

LINK members agree that collaboration and innovation are distinct, yet critical means of achieving a just transition. However, LINK members are unsure as to how meaningful the associated actions are in ensuring that local communities feel engaged in the transition to a net zero and nature positive Scotland. These objectives, their associated actions and means of monitoring and evaluating progress should be expressed in SMART terms (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound).

Question 9

Equity, and value and respect are priority areas that need to be addressed to begin a just transition for land use and agriculture.

- ☒ Strongly agree
- ☐ Mostly agree
- ☐ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree



Please give reasons for your answer.

Equity and respect must be core values in a just transition; however, LINK members are unsure as to how meaningful the associated actions are in ensuring that these approaches will translate into meaningful outcomes. These objectives, their associated actions and means of monitoring and evaluating progress should be expressed in SMART terms (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound).

Question 10

Communication is a priority area that needs to be addressed to begin a just transition for land use and agriculture.

- ☒ Strongly agree
- ☐ Mostly agree
- ☐ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer.

Accurate, engaging and accessible communication is vital in a just transition; however, LINK members are unsure as to how meaningful the associated actions are in ensuring that these approaches will translate into meaningful outcomes. These objectives, their associated actions and means of monitoring and evaluating progress should be expressed in SMART terms (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound).

Particularly in a cultural context where mis- and disinformation are rife; actions should also consider the risks of these impeding the progress of transition to a net zero and nature-positive Scotland. The language of a 'just transition' itself can be contentious among some rural communities and therefore greater effort should be made to communicate what this means in practice for and with communities and land-use sectors.

Question 11

Are there other short-term objectives that should be considered in order to begin a just transition for land use and agriculture?

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No

If 'yes', please provide additional information.

LINK members are concerned by the language of 'beginning the journey' and what is required 'in order to begin' that runs throughout these objectives. The transition to meet Scotland's net zero ambitions



has already begun and the Government aims to match this progress with its ambitions to restore nature by 2045. Ensuring that this process is 'just', as this plan indicates, will require an attunement to conflicting interests at different times. Framing this process in terms of what must be in place 'in order to begin', LINK members suggest, implies a false uniformity that may hinder the ability to respond to context-specific issues.

Returning to the response to Question 1, if this plan contained detailed statistics and models of which communities and/or industries are likely to be impacted by the transition in land use and agriculture in order to meet Scotland's net zero and nature positive ambitions – including their geographical distribution – and the specific support measures and packages that would be introduced to redistribute these impacts, then this would feel a more meaningful and strategic basis upon which to plan for appropriate responses. Whilst LINK members largely agree with the articulated vision and objectives, together these feel intangible in the context of what will be localised and sector-specific challenges.

Finally, most of the actions that are listed as ensuring adequate responses to meet the ambitions of the objectives contain statements of affirmation towards existing policies, e.g. 'continue to work with', 'continue to support', etc. Consequently, the current approach assumes that these actions will meet the high-level ambitions of each objective without analysis or critical substantiation.

Monitoring and evaluating a Just Transition

Question 12

The draft indicators provide a good basis to measure progress towards the jobs, skills and economy outcomes.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Mostly agree
- ☐ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer.

N/A

Question 13

Are you aware of other data that could be used to monitor progress towards the jobs, skills and economy outcomes?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No



If 'yes', please provide additional information.

N/A

Question 14

The draft indicators provide a good basis to measure progress towards the environment and adaptation outcomes.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☒ Mostly agree
- ☐ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer.

Many of these indicators will be useful in developing associated targets to map progress towards desired outcomes, however, as with the response to Question 3, LINK members are concerned that, in this framing, the environmental and adaptive outcomes of a just transition do not explicitly reference Scotland's biodiversity and climate ambitions – including net zero greenhouse gas emissions and the recovery of biodiversity.

The 'Woodland creation' indicator should be split into native woodland and non-native woodlands.

Question 15

Are you aware of other data that could be used to monitor progress towards the environment and adaptation outcomes?

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No

If 'yes', please provide additional information.

Other indicators should include levels of riparian woodland planting, agricultural run-off, freshwater quality, deer numbers and prevalence of invasive non-native species.

Question 16

The draft indicators provide a good basis to measure progress towards the communities and place outcomes.

- ☐ Strongly agree



- ☐ Mostly agree
- ☐ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer.

N/A

Question 17

Are you aware of other data that could be used to monitor progress towards communities and place outcomes?

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No

If 'yes', please provide additional information.

Some of the key indicators of community participation in place-based decision-making include the number of Local Place Plans, number of functioning Rural Land Use Partnerships & Frameworks, Regional Adaptation Plans and Regional Spatial Strategies. These are key mechanisms that should be in place to ensure that a transition for land use and agriculture is locally and regionally sympathetic, and yet absent in this plan.

Question 18

The draft indicators provide a good basis to measure progress towards the people and equity outcomes.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Mostly agree
- ☐ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer.

N/A

Question 19

Are you aware of other data that could be used to monitor progress towards the people and equity outcomes?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No



If 'yes', please provide additional information.

N/A

Question 20

Using a combination of indicators and anecdotal evidence could measure progress towards the plan objectives.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☒ Mostly agree
- ☐ Mostly disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer.

These are all helpful indicators to help measure progress of short-term objectives, however, as with our response to Question 1, these are general indicators for general outcomes. If, for instance, this plan was alternatively framed so that there was detailed modelling of which communities and/or sectors are likely to be impacted by the transition in land use and agriculture, and the specific support measures and packages that would need be introduced to redistribute these impacts, then this would provide a more meaningful and strategic plan of action. Without this approach, these means of monitoring progress feel largely intangible in the context of what will be very localised and sector-specific challenges.

Question 21

Are you aware of indicators or alternative evidence sources that could be used to measure progress towards the plan objectives?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If 'yes', please provide additional information.

N/A

Assessing impact

Question 22

Are you aware of any ways in which the proposed outcomes and objectives need to take into account the different experiences, both positive and negative, current or future, of the following groups:



- **island communities;**
- **young people**, (children, pupils, and young adults up to the age of 26);
- those with **protected characteristics** (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation); and/or
- **groups or areas at socio-economic disadvantage** (such as income, low wealth or area deprivation)?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If 'yes', please provide additional information.

N/A

Question 23

Are you aware of any potential **costs and burdens** that you think may arise as a result of the outcomes and objectives within this consultation?

☒ Yes

☐ No

If 'yes', please provide additional information.

As with the response to Question 1, this question depends on the way that a just transition is approached. As previously suggested in this response, if this plan aimed to model the social and economic costs and burdens placed on communities in a transition, with tangible suggestions as to how to minimise these costs and burdens, then this would feel more meaningful and strategic. Without this detail, this plan feels largely intangible in the context of what will be very localised and sector-specific challenges.

Question 24

Are you involved in any organised groups, (for example a campaigning group, industry working group or public sector forum, which does not have to be climate-related), that considers how the land use and agriculture sectors are changing or could change in future?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If 'yes', how does the group consider and engage others on just transition issues?

N/A



Question 25

Can you tell us of actions you or your organisation are taking, or plan to take, that will contribute to achieving any short-term objectives outlined in this draft plan?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

If 'yes', please provide additional information.

N/A

Question 26

Please provide any further comments on the proposals set out in this consultation in the box below.

LINK members feel that there is merit to many of the general indicators that are included in this plan; however, LINK members are nevertheless concerned that this vision-led approach to just transition planning is at risk of obfuscating some of the pressing localised challenges that currently face particular sectors and rural communities, along with the specific actions needed to remediate these challenges, thereby reducing the practical usefulness of this plan.

LINK members suggest that this plan should more clearly detail the conflicts and challenges that must be addressed and how to meet these to achieve a just transition. If, for instance, this plan contained detailed statistics of which communities and/or industries are likely to be impacted by the transition in land use and agriculture, and the specific support measures and packages that would be introduced to redistribute these impacts, then this would feel more meaningful and strategic. Whilst the vision is admirable, it feels largely intangible in the context of what will be very localised and sector-specific challenges. It would perhaps be better described as a vision for Scotland's sustainable land use, rather than a just transition plan.

The Scottish Environment LINK consultation response supported by:

Bumblebee Conservation Trust
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John Muir Trust
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