



THE HEATHER TRUST
Promoting Integrated Moorland Management

REGIONAL LAND USE PARTNERSHIP

How they might work

Context

Land matters to not just those who own and manage it, but to everyone. It matters because how land is used impacts climate change, water management, biodiversity and our health and wellbeing. Its management can impact these things in a positive way or a negative way. It matters in other ways too, such as by providing rural jobs and a rural economy that benefits rural community cohesion and services, and it is an important backdrop for Scotland's tourism sector.

Scotland's Land Use Strategy, born from the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, sets out to enable use and management of land to occur in ways which are positive for environmental and public goods delivery. It recognises that there are other legitimate factors that influence choices about how land is used – such as the rural economy - and that there are therefore competing interests. This makes decisions about best use of land complex and subjective.

Delivery of the first land use strategy (2011-2015) focused on running two Land Use pilots, one in the Scottish Borders and the other in Aberdeenshire. Although each approached things in their own way, the outputs were around mapping the various uses that land in the area could be put to whether or not these represented economically viable choices at that stage – “Opportunity Maps”. This shone a spotlight on the type of management that would need support from somewhere other than traditional markets.

The second Strategy (2016-2021) proposes to take this work to the next stage through the piloting of Regional Land Use Partnerships (RLUPs). The Scottish Government has however not moved these forward thus far and it says this is because it has had to devote resources elsewhere such as to Brexit negotiations.

How these partnerships would operate and the level of decision-making they would undertake is not yet clear, but there is an opportunity to explore this if pilots are now developed, and there seems to be a renewed interest from Government in this. The Scottish Land Commission has also shown interest in enabling pilots to occur.

This is timely and could help the Scottish Government with rural policy proposals post-Brexit.

As the various constituent parts of the United Kingdom prepare to leave the EU, UK governments are thinking about what will replace the CAP in terms of rural policy and rural support payments. All governments want to see future payments deliver better outcomes for the natural environment and for the health and wellbeing of the nation. This aspiration can be described in four broad categories: climate change mitigation; improved management

of water for quality and flood alleviation; improved biodiversity; and improvements to health and wellbeing through improved access to and enjoyment of the countryside. So distinct synergy with the aspirations of the Land Use Strategy.

The design of future rural policy is the focus of much current debate and discussion, so what role could Regional Land Use Partnerships have in the delivery structure and thus meld the Land Use Strategy into Rural Policy?

The delivery structure of future rural policy

As with the delivery of any government policy, there is a need to think about the spatial scales that decision-making will be made at. How top-down and how bottom-up?

We already know that the question that governments want future rural policy to answer is broadly “how do we achieve better environmental outcomes from the countryside?”. And since all governments in the UK have international obligations in relation to the environment, it is logical that high level strategic objectives for rural policy should be set by national governments.

We also know that most land that is used for agriculture, sporting interest and much that is used for forestry is owned privately, and that decisions about how private land is used, subject to compliance with legislation, lies with those owners and managers. To get the best outcome, any future policy will need to engage and inspire land managers since delivery cannot be forced upon them, so there is a need for a considerable amount of bottom-up in the detailed design of on the ground action – and this appears to be widely recognised by governments north and south of the border.

What is arguably missing so far is: a) regional tailoring, so that each region is enabled to contribute to the national objectives in the best way it can; and b) identification of the place within the delivery system at which “others” with a legitimate interest in how land is managed might become involved. Regional Land Use Partnerships could deliver these missing elements.

Regional Land Use Partnerships – what might they look like?

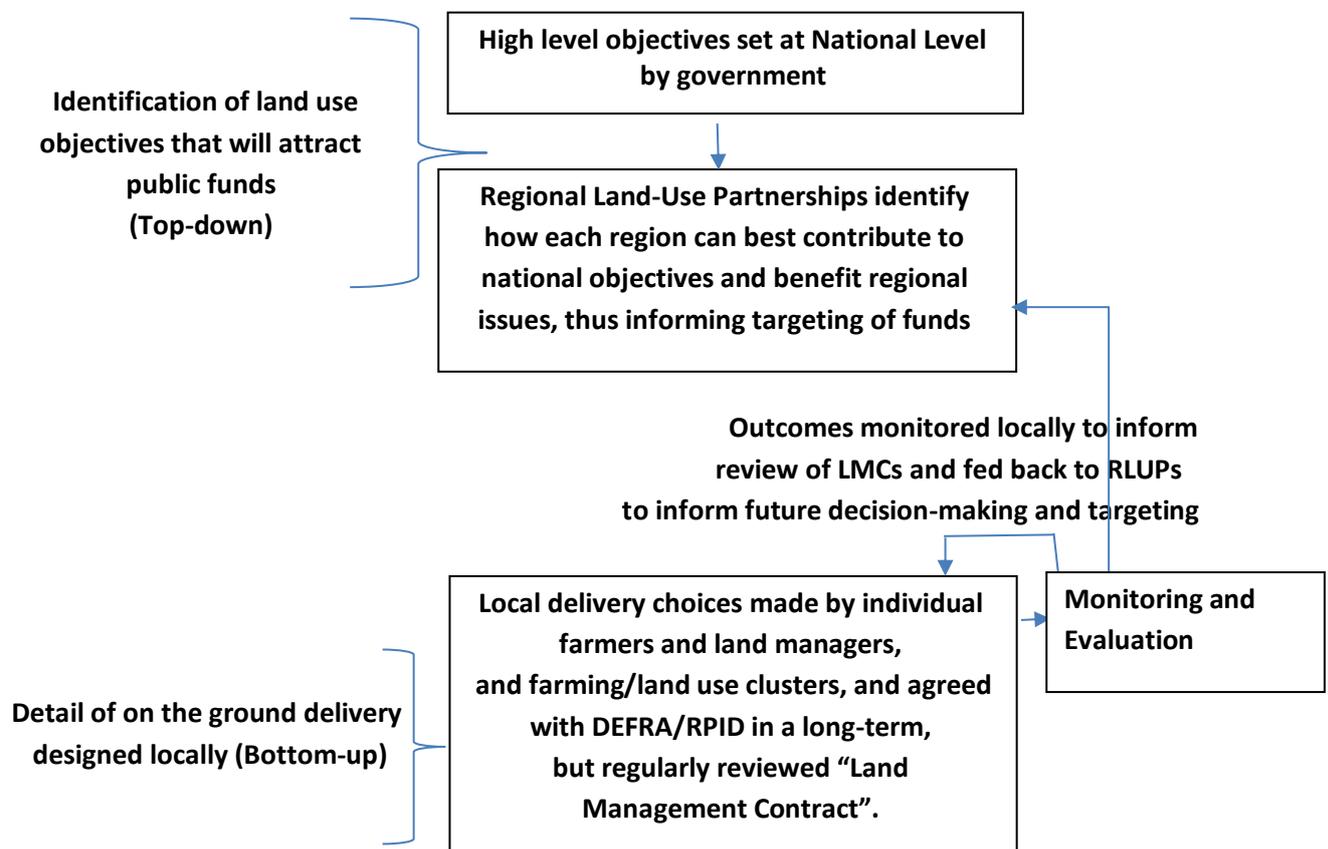
Regional Land Use Partnership would likely be made up of farmers and other land managers, and community, environmental and other relevant interests. Although the term region is used, this does not mean they would be necessarily be aligned with local government regions. River catchment, deer management group area, designation such as biosphere or national park for example might all be sensible ways of defining a regional land use partnership’s geography. Region in this sense can be thought of as an area that has some defining environmental or cultural characteristics that mean it would be sensible to set delivery priorities for it as a cohesive whole. It would be less than national, but large enough so as not to interfere with the individual and group choices being made by farmers and other land managers at the very local level.

The role of Regional Land Use Partnerships could be to identify how best their area could contribute to national objectives, while balancing this against, or finding synergies with, the desires of those in the region to see certain things delivered such as a landscape maintained

to enhance the tourism potential of the area or help alleviate flooding in settlements in the catchment or maintain and enhance rural employment and so on. They could provide a platform to tease out areas of potential conflict between the interests, to develop relationships and better understanding of differing perspectives and to ultimately find enough consensus to enable targeting of the rural support budget for that region.

Through time, as monitoring of outcomes develops, they could analyse the success of its targeting of regional funding in terms of on the ground delivery and tweak it to achieve improvements.

The process might look something like the below -



Questions

1. Is there value in the regional level? Or can rural policy be designed with just the national and local elements? What would be better?
2. How can we ensure the regional level does not just turn into a talking shop with vested interests fighting their corner without compromise? In short how can we ensure RLUPs actually reach decisions?
3. What would RLUP pilots test right now?
4. How do others envisage RLUPs? As above or doing a different job?