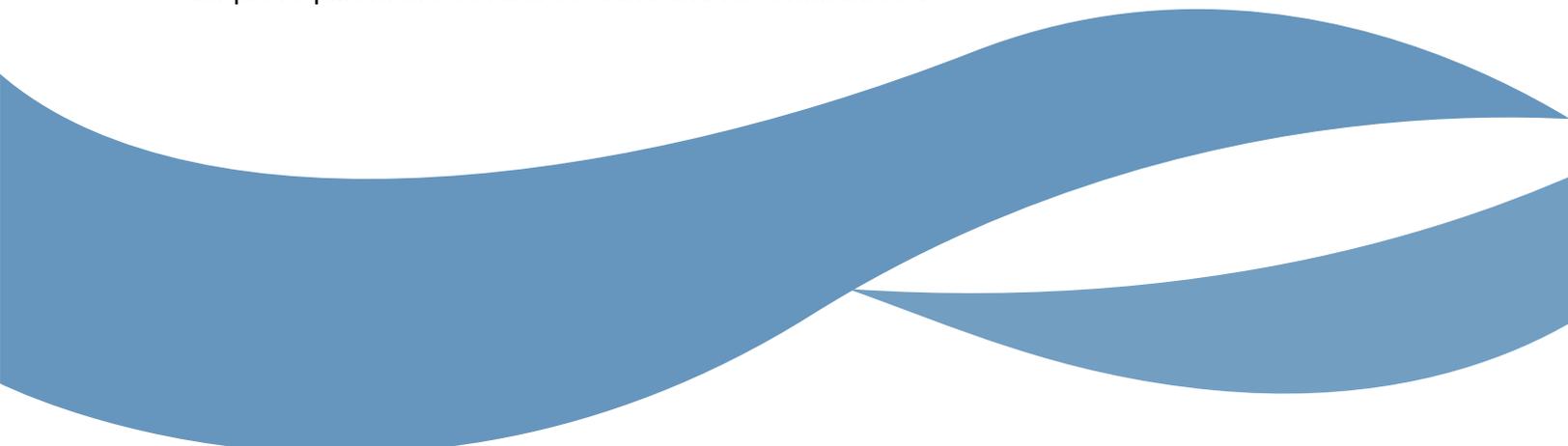


Public Petitions Committee**PE01812: Protect Scotland's remaining ancient, native and semi-native woodlands and woodland floors**

27 November 2020

About Scottish Land & Estates

At Scottish Land & Estates (SLE) our work helps to ensure that rural Scotland thrives. We are a membership organisation for landowners, rural businesses, and rural professionals. We promote the wide range of benefits land-based businesses provide: tourist attractions, leisure facilities and landscapes enjoyed by the public, as well as housing, employment, tourism & enterprise and farming opportunities. We represent the interests of our members and wider rural Scotland to the UK and Scottish Governments to help ensure that policy and legislation reflects the unique requirements of rural Scotland and its communities.



Do you agree ancient woodlands are irreplaceable, national treasures that deserve the highest levels of legal protection in order that future generations are able to benefit from them?

All Scotland's forests, woodlands and associated open ground habitats provide some level of biodiversity value and add to landscape character and quality. Ancient woodlands usually have a high value for natural and cultural heritage because of their long history of continuous woodland cover and ancient and semi-natural woodlands (ASNW) are often described as the most important single category of woods for nature conservation and biodiversity.

Many of these areas of woodland are already afforded a high level of protection and some are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) or National Nature reserves.

Scotland is committed to maintaining or increasing its woodland area and the Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Act 2018 has given increasing emphasis to the environmental benefits of forest and woodland landscapes. Improving woodland condition is a strategic driver in Scotland's Forestry Strategy and it is also a target in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. In addition, the UK Forestry Standard reinforces the importance of retaining, extending and enhancing ancient woodland because of its uniqueness.

Scottish Planning Policy also recognises the high value of ancient woods and semi-natural woodlands for nature conservation. It outlines that protection from the adverse impacts of development should be afforded to trees, woodlands, and forests (including ancient semi-natural woodland, hedgerows and individual trees) with high nature conservation or landscape value.

SLE believes ancient woodlands are already afforded high levels of legal protection.

According to SNH's website, Scotland has much less woodland than other European countries and less than half of Scotland's woodlands are in good condition. This is due to problems of poor management and neglect, over and under-grazing, invasive species and pathogens, fragmentation and climate change. Do our ancient and semi-native woodlands need our help?

Scotland's forests cover 18.8% of the total land mass area, this is higher than the rest of the UK with Scotland planting more tree than anywhere else in the UK.

The Scottish Government has an ambitious target to increase woodland cover in Scotland from around 19% to 21% of the land area by 2032. The Scottish Forestry Strategy sets out a clear ambition for Scotland to have more trees and woodlands with a 10-year framework and a 50-year vision, on how this will be achieved. In addition, as part of climate change commitments,

Scottish Government has already upped the planting targets for the future, rising to 15,000 ha a year from 2024/25.

According to the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland (NWSS) of the total woodland area 22.5% is native woodland (4% of Scotland's land area). For Scotland as a whole, 44% of native woodlands are in satisfactory condition. The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy requires that 60% of our native woodlands out with designated sites are in satisfactory condition by 2020.

While progress has been made, some of the more difficult aspects of fully integrating impact-based approaches, and particularly native woodland condition and restoration remain; these are areas which need to see further focus going forward and positive support to improve their condition should be a where efforts are concentrated.

The Scottish Government is currently consulting on its National Planning Policy Framework 4. This Framework will guide planning policy in our country until 2050. Should our remaining ancient and native woodlands be considered as priceless, irreplaceable assets and granted full legal protection?

As outlined in our response to question 1, Scottish Planning Policy recognises the high value of ancient woods and semi-natural woodlands for nature conservation acknowledging it is a national resource that should be protected and enhanced.

NPF4 looks to improve health and well-being of people living in Scotland. SLE recognises the opportunities forests and woodlands provide for people to engage in healthy activities, to take more exercise and improve their physical health. As detailed in the Scottish Forestry Strategy the 50-year vision for forestry in Scotland is that by 2070, Scotland will have more forests and woodlands, sustainably managed which support healthy and flourishing communities.

In Scotland there is a strong presumption in favour of protecting as well as expanding forests and woodlands and to make sure that forests are sustainably managed. The Scottish Government has developed [woodland removal policy](#) to provide direction for decisions on removal in Scotland, this is relevant to all woodland removal for the purpose of conversion to another land use.

The policy states that loss of woodland should only be permitted if it results in significant public benefits and that woodland removal must be kept to a minimum and where woodland is felled, it should be replanted. In some cases, compensatory planting may form part of this balance. Furthermore, all proposals for woodland removal in Scotland must be compliant with the UK Forestry Standard.

SLE believes adequate legal protections are in place.

Our woodlands are threatened by new developments, over grazing, mountain bike trails, invasive species, pollution, climate change and others. Do our ancient and native woodlands, which have helped to sustain, inspire and console us for centuries, deserve full legal protection now?

As stated above we believe adequate legal protections are already in place. Rather than more laws we would welcome a positive approach which supports landowners to do the right thing. Where bad practice is evidenced, we would support improved enforcement of existing protections.

The natural world and ‘green spaces’ are increasingly recognised as having positive impacts on our physical and mental health and wellbeing. Is it acceptable that our most treasured ancient and native woodlands can be legally desecrated?

As per our answer to question 3 we feel significant recognition and protection is already given to the importance forests and woodlands have on people’s mental health.

One of the key objectives of the Scottish Forestry Strategy includes increasing the contribution of forests to enable more people to improve their overall health and wellbeing and as previously outlined Scottish Planning Policy also recognises their value and provides adequate protections.

For more detailed information

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