

Scotland's Fourth Land Use Strategy consultation October 2025

About the Institute of Chartered Foresters

The Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF) is the Royal Chartered body for Foresters and Arboriculturists in the UK. We have 2,300 members who practice forestry, arboriculture and related disciplines in the private and third sectors, central and local government, research institutions, universities and colleges throughout the UK. The Institute regulates standards of entry to the profession. It provides support to its members, guidance to professionals in other sectors, information to the public, and educational advice and training to students and tree professionals seeking to develop their careers in the forestry and arboriculture industry.

Background

The ICF responded to the consultation on the third iteration of Scotland's Land Use Strategy in 2021. The Institute welcomes the opportunity to comment on this fourth update to Scotland's Land Use Strategy. The current Land Use Strategy provides a vital underpinning to Scotland's Forestry Strategy, which the ICF strongly supports.

Our response

The ICF has not submitted a response via the Citizen Space portal but requests that the Rural Skills, Land use Policy and Partnerships department of Scottish Government accepts this statement as our response. This statement has been produced in consultation with our membership.

Statement

The need for an integrated approach to land use that incorporates trees, woodlands and forests, as well as other vital natural assets such as soil, biodiversity and freshwater, is clearly recognised and advocated by our members, so we applaud any landscape-based approach. However, we believe that the information produced about current land use does not go far enough. It stops at the land use level and does not continue to the outputs from the land, such as how much food, timber (fibre) or renewable energy is produced. We believe that commercial activity and the economy need to be more explicitly referenced. The growth of the bioeconomy and changes in global supply chains are affecting all primary industries. These products are the primary indicator of economic success – and the Ecosystem Services provisioned. A more joined up approach to land use is needed to help those not connected with the land to understand the value of it to Scotland.

Affordable housing should be central to the Strategy, especially in the Highlands, where lack of accommodation prevents, for example, foresters, sawmillers, ecologists, contractors, teachers, and doctors from taking jobs. Without suitable homes, land management stalls, start-ups cannot launch, and communities risk decline as young families and professionals leave. The Strategy must include low-rent, high-quality rural housing to support new entrants into land-based jobs and strengthen communities. Past land use changes led to villages like Forestry Commission Villages; similar solutions are needed now.

New developments also provide a unique opportunity to plan for integrated grey, blue, and green infrastructure, embedding resilience to flood risk, urban heat, and air pollution. By integrating blue and green infrastructure with sustainable urban drainage systems, we can shape an environment where people will want to live.

There needs to be a more consistent approach to regulating land use. We would like to see similar standards for ploughing, drainage and community engagement for all land uses rather than different rules for farming and forestry. Farming and forestry are currently regulated in different ways, with different government departments and different regulatory frameworks. This creates barriers. The UK Forestry Standard should be a benchmark for developing an integrated land use standard.

The effectiveness of tree planting in supporting resilient land use hinges on both the potential of the land and the opportunity cost of displacing existing uses. Planting “down the hill,” where land is more fertile, often produces more productive, diverse, and better-structured forests. Economic modelling will be essential to encourage investment from farmers and landowners, showing that large-scale forestry can be a viable long-term business. Since forestry benefits from economies of scale, collaboration between landowners—either through joint projects or expansion of existing woodlands—will be key. The creation of viable, local forestry enterprises can boost resilience while unlocking opportunities in timber, recreation, and related sectors.

Most of Scotland was in water scarcity for the first time this year. Scots use 40% more water than the rest of the UK. How will water supply and consumption be made more fit for unfolding climate emergency in the next five-years?

We would further encourage the Government to be much clearer in the Strategy about the approach to the implementation plan – including engagement with local, regional and national stakeholders. There is no clear evaluation of what previous Strategies have delivered and how any lessons learned will be addressed in the new Strategy.

Forestry is unique in its ability to bring widely ranging interests and elements together into cohesive, multi-functional solutions. That is why the ICF is **committed to working with government in the design and implementation of a successful approach to land management**, supporting a flourishing sector that delivers for climate, nature, people and economy.