

12th of December 2022

Dear Consultee:

New Woodland Creation Scoping – Luss Estates Company: Blairnairn

You have been identified as stakeholder as part of our consultation for a New Woodland Creation (NWC) within the property of Luss Estates. The proposal is located at Blairnairn / Inverlauren Muir within Glen Fruin (grid reference approx. NS/31000/87500).

The site area will be circa 191.5 ha of which 143.7ha is currently proposed for afforestation with a commercial remit to produce timber. The new woodland creation has considered the *Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Trees and Woodland Strategy* and has been designed to be sensitive towards environmental factors that will be in balance with the commercial objectives for the estate.

We have completed ornithology, habitat, peat depth and archaeology assessments during 2022 and incorporated the constraints into the woodland design. The areas designated for woodland expansion have been considered in conjunction with the estates farming operations; areas selected are deemed increasingly favourable for planting with other ground retained for the commercial agricultural operations to the east and west.

Throughout the design and stakeholder consultation process, we will be developing the woodland proposal by considering the feedback received, the constraints identified along with the landscape impact and mitigation that can be applied. We have considered the species diversity and location and incorporated areas of open ground to enhance the design. At an early stage of the process, we have reviewed the design with the 3D landscape software from the anticipated key viewpoint locations.

The species proposed to be planted will major on Sitka spruce, along with mixed coniferous species, and native broadleaves. The design will also be interspersed with open ground throughout. The open areas comprise mainly of buffer zones from watercourses, archaeological features and preserved habitats along with areas of deep

peat (>50 cm) that are unsuitable for planting. Sensitive areas have been excluded from the planting design.

The information contained within this letter gathers upon desk top assessments and third-party surveys that were undertaken prior to drafting this letter (e.g., archaeology, habitats, and wildlife surveys for birds and mammals). It summarises information that will be compiled into a more substantial environmental assessment which will be presented to Scottish Forestry who will make a determination.

Although every effort has been made to gather all pertinent information to guide the design of the new woodland creation, your consultation and feedback will be most welcome; it will have an important influence on the proposals, and to provide any additional information we may have overlooked. Enclosed with this letter are a location, constraints, soils, land use, landscape and indicative species maps.

If I have left out a stakeholder, **it has not been intentional**. I would appreciate it if you could advise our team about anyone who you feel is a relevant stakeholder and has not been included.

The species map accompanying this letter details our current proposals; you will see several abbreviations. A list of abbreviations can be found on the last page of this letter.

Background Context

Forestry is increasingly recognised as a competitive land use and woodland expansion is being promoted by the Scottish Government and Scottish Forestry; the current planting target is 18,000 hectares per annum by 2024/25. Luss Estates Company has sufficient capacity to realise the benefits of creating areas of new woodland which will complement the existing agricultural activities.

The estate has developed several new woodland projects over the last few years and there will be opportunities coming forward to expand and create a sustainable production cycle of both commercial conifer and native broadleaf schemes.

The site at Blairnairn has been preferred for commercial conifer as it is adjacent to a suitable timber haul route which is a major consideration for other parts of the estate which have restricted public roads. Glen Fruin is also within an area zoned as medium-high capacity for productive conifer as detailed in the National Parks woodland strategy.

In addition to this, Luss Estates Company are encouraged to plant more trees to help mitigate against climate change and wish to sustainably manage their forests. Creating new areas of woodland will help soak up more emissions and sequester carbon which will and provide a boost to the environment and local economy.

Location

The land at Blairnairn is under the ownership of the Luss Estate Company (LEC). The current land use is for in-hand rough grazing of livestock. Adjacent landowners include a tenant farm to the east; sufficient open ground has been retained for LEC to continue to graze this land and provide a barrier to reduce the impact from naturally regenerating conifers spreading onto the neighbouring estate.

The A817 Glen Fruin trunk road is found to the south of the scheme, and the Estate also owns land below the A817 road, which is also used for grazing, and similarly to the north of the scheme.

The eastern woodland is entirely a new woodland proposal with exception of the area to the south of the A817 which is an extension to the existing shelter belt woodlands.

The proposal to the west aims to expand the previous shelterbelt, which has subsequently been felled and awaiting restocking. The expansion proposed will remove a linear and narrow woodland from the landscape and create a more sustainable and well-structured woodland expansion on either side of the original plantation.

Site Constraints

The site at Blairnairn ranges in elevations from 130-380 metres. It has a predominantly southerly aspect. Having been historically used for grazing, the main vegetation to be found are *molinia* grasses, rushes, and bracken in pockets. Soil types range from podzolics to peaty gleys; this was confirmed during a soil survey undertaken by RDS Forestry.

The Forestry Scotland Mapviewer was consulted to assess the suitability of the species chosen for the scheme based on the Ecological Site Classification System (ESC). The results of this assessment have aided the selection of the proposed species composition.

The entire proposed planting area is within the Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park. In addition to this, the planting boundary has been restricted to match the National Scenic Area / Environmentally Sensitive Area designations. The land extending into the designated areas is currently proposed to be planted with predominately native broadleaf or retained open ground.

We commissioned a third-party archaeological survey to determine the presence of features. The features can be found on the constraints map; all the features are Unscheduled Ancient Monuments (USAM). As per the recommendations summarised in the report, appropriate buffers of 5-20 metres in width will be maintained to preserve the sites. All features have been mapped, and the report is available on request.

Several small burns can be found within the site which connect to the Fruin Water. In addition, there will be several man-made agricultural drains which connect to the watercourses. To this end, all appropriate measures as recommended under the latest edition of the Forestry and Water guidelines will be adhered to prevent adverse water pollution.

We commissioned a third party to undertake Phase 1 Habitat Surveys, vegetation surveys, and a bird survey to determine any factors that may affect the viability of establishing a new forest, in addition to any adjustments required to the overall design of the scheme. Survey results have shown that bird species present are those of least concern from a conservation viewpoint, namely meadow pipit, skylark, and buzzards. A black grouse was observed 'lekking' on the site and this has been incorporated into the woodland design. Beyond this, there have not been any species identified as a high conservation status such as golden eagles or hen harrier which impacts on the proposed scheme. In total four months of ornithological surveys have been completed.

There are no known mammals of conservation status believed to be present within the site, and field surveys have not recorded the presence of anything significant. Additional assessments are ongoing.

There are no core paths within the scheme area; access will be permitted as per the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. The site is visible from the Three Lochs Way path and from the local hills and public roads.

The landscape impact assessment will continue; we will request viewpoint locations from Scottish Forestry and Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park which will allow the assessment to be progressed.

We trust that the information provided above with the accompanying maps will provide sufficient information relating to the planting scheme. We would appreciate your feedback to the proposals and any comments you wish to make by the 27th of January 2023 (consultation period extended beyond 28 days due to festive break).

Should you have any questions or queries, then please feel free to contact us.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Dixon

Stakeholder List

Organisation	Email or Postal Address
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Argyll and Bute Council - Planning	planning_handl@argyll-bute.gov.uk
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WOSAS	martin.ohare@glasgow.gov.uk
Luss & Arden Community Council	alison_charters@hotmail.co.uk
Neighbours	Performed by letter drop

List of Abbreviations

NWC: New Woodland Creation
NS: Nature Scot
UKFS: UK Forestry Standard
SS: Sitka spruce
MC: Mixed Conifer
NBL: Native Broadleaf
SP: Scots Pine
OL: Other Land
OG: Open Ground
USAM: Unscheduled Ancient Monument