

Lost in translation

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Improving decision making on the use of Scotland's land to achieve the greatest public benefit is a hugely complex task.

The Scottish Government's draft Land Use Strategy is a helpful starting point, but fails to translate its admirable aspirations into practical guidance for landowners, users and decision makers. This is a key message from the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) in its response to the consultation.

New approaches are required to ensure that maximum public benefits are achieved. No longer can single issue approaches prevail. An integrated solution is essential to secure food and fibre production, biosecurity, biodiversity and landscape conservation, climate change adaptation and mitigation, water system management, public recreation and access.

A major failing of the draft strategy is the lack of recognition of the competing uses for land. New and innovative conflict resolution mechanisms that are beyond the highly divisive processes of the Town and Country Planning legislation are required. The current process is not adequate for dealing with the increasingly frequent conflicts that arise from, for example, onshore wind turbine applications and the need to safeguard land for food production. Data on land capacity and techniques for advanced analysis are available and should be deployed to help define solutions.

The Scottish Government has an active role to play in developing these mechanisms, through integrated policies, new guidelines, and, where possible, by devolving decision making to the local level.

Having recommended the preparation of a Land Use Strategy in its report on The Future of Scotland Hills and Islands, the RSE, with expertise within its fellowship in all relevant aspects of land use, is in a strong position to assist both in the development of the strategy prior to it being laid before the Scottish Parliament in March and in the parliamentary scrutiny.

Professor Roger Crofts

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