

WHO SHOULD DECIDE ON LOCAL LAND USE?

The current approach to land use in rural Scotland is unbelievably outdated. It is centralised in government departments and agencies. It is fragmented to suit different purposes that are all too often in conflict with each other. It fails to link all of the government's environmental, climate change, economic and community benefit targets. And the consultations of local interests are often a sham with decisions imposed in spite of our representations. Oh dear, it has to be better than this!

What is needed? First, leave the decisions to informed local communities, including local farmers and managers of land, to deliver outcomes which will benefit local natural environments, local landscape and amenity, and of course local communities resource owners.

We have the ingredients for making decisions better and involving us. We have a perfectly good national framework - the Land Use Strategy. And this is encouraging the development of Regional Land Use Strategies. We have a world class ethical basis for looking after the land and how each interest group has both rights and responsibilities in taking this forward - the Statement of Land Rights and Responsibilities approved by the Scottish Parliament. Its roll out is being led by the Scottish Land Commission. We have the challenge of delivering a new basis for supporting food production following Brexit and the promise of a new incentive scheme in 2024. We have also the promise of new environmental legislation on the same time scale.

Locally, we are well advanced. We have an excellent local framework - The Glenkens and District Community Action Plan with staff employed to facilitate its achievement. We have an excellent enabling mechanism - The Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere Partnership which has already led local discussions on land use. We have local understanding of the global and national imperatives for use of the land. There is nothing to stop us deciding for our ourselves.

Of course, we need to be sure that the newly elected local councillors and our Holyrood representatives are fully supportive of our efforts. And we do need the support of the national powers that be in future proofing decisions and actions to favour a mutually supportive contribution to providing local social and economic benefits, redressing climate change, improving biodiversity and landscape amenity.

What do we want to achieve? That is not for me to prescribe. However, I am sure there are ingredients shared by the majority of local interests. For example, farming which produces wholesome food for local, as well as wider, consumption on land that provides jobs for future generations, provides shelter for animals through tree planting, that sequesters carbon, and improves soil structure, soil biodiversity and the look of the landscape. Hopefully, this a good starting point.

Surely not more of this



But more of this

