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Forestry and Land Scotland

Corporate Plan:
Consultation Analysis Report
December 2021





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Introduction

Forestry and Land Scotland

The Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Act 2018 was commenced in April 2019. This means that forestry is now fully devolved and accountable to Scottish Ministers and the Scottish Parliament.

As part of this change, new Scottish Government agencies were formed to take forward the work previously undertaken by Forestry Commission Scotland and Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES). Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) was established on 1st April 2019 as the Scottish Government agency responsible for managing Scotland's national forests and land, a function previously undertaken by FES. FLS looks after the national forests and land to enhance biodiversity, support tourism and increase access to the green spaces that will help improve Scotland's physical and mental health and wellbeing. It also continues to provide vital timber supplies to support the rural economy.

The Draft Corporate Plan

As an executive agency of the Scottish Government, FLS must ensure that a Corporate Plan, agreed with the Scottish Ministers, is in place and published on the website and that this is reviewed every three years. FLS published its first Corporate Plan in October 2019, for which Progressive carried out the consultation analysis.

The Forestry and Land Scotland Framework Document, published in April 2019, set out how FLS will function as an executive agency of the Scottish Government and defined its relationship with Scottish Ministers. The Framework Document stipulates:

“The Corporate Plan will set out Forestry and Land Scotland’s outcomes and targets; high level performance indicators; and give an overview of how it will deliver these over the Plan period in line with the Scottish Government’s Purpose and National Outcomes set out in the National Performance Framework.”

The first Corporate Plan drew on the knowledge, expertise and experience of Forest Enterprise Scotland. Staff and stakeholders were involved in the development of the Corporate Plan through a series of workshops; the Plan also built on the work undertaken by the Scottish Government on the Forestry Strategy 2019-2029.

FLS is now developing a new Corporate Plan for publication in April 2022. It sets out anticipated outcomes and priorities for the organisation from 2022-2025. FLS therefore commissioned

Progressive again to assist with the review and design of the consultation questionnaire and to undertake the analysis of consultation responses.

At the core of the Plan is a set of Corporate Outcomes designed to guide FLS's work over the years 2022 to 2025 and a position statement of where FLS wants to be by 2025. The Outcomes are reliant on each other, and all support the delivery of the FLS mission and vision, and ultimately the Scottish Government's outcomes and purpose.



The Consultation

FLS formally consulted on the Draft Plan. The purpose of the consultation was to seek the views of stakeholders and individuals who have an interest in the national forests and land. The Draft Plan was published on the FLS website together with a link to the consultation questionnaire hosted on the Citizens Space portal. The consultation questionnaire typically asked respondents to indicate how strongly they agreed/disagreed with the provision in the plan (tick box) and then invited further feedback. The questions covered:

- The corporate structure
- Each of the five outcomes:
 - Supporting a sustainable rural economy
 - Looking after Scotland's national forests and land
 - National forests and land for visitors and communities
 - A supportive, safe and inclusive organisation
 - A high performing organisation
- Diversity and inclusion
- Any final comments.

The consultation opened on 11th October and closed on 29th November 2021.

Consultation response

In total, 45 valid responses were received. Of these, three were written responses submitted directly to FLS rather than completed consultation questionnaires submitted via the Citizens Space portal (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Consultation responses	
Individuals	30
Organisations	15
Total	45

The organisations responding comprised:

- Public bodies and agencies: national, local, partnerships
- Representative and special interest groups: professional/commercial, sports and recreation, environmental/conservation
- Charities: conservation/environmental/heritage
- Commercial: timber, consulting.

No-one responded to all the questions, but most people answered/commented on the core questions: those relating to the FLS structure, vision and mission and the outcomes.

Table 2: Responses to each question			
Corporate Structure**	44	Outcome 5 [†]	40
Vision and Mission [†]	45	Overview of outcomes [†]	44
Outcome 1 [†]	44	Diversity and inclusion*	27
Outcome 2 [†]	44	Diversity and inclusion [†]	19
Outcome 3 [†]	45	Other comments*	28
Outcome 4 [†]	41		
Base	45	Base	45

Note responses are based on all responses to any part of a question closed or open:

[†] Questions that comprise both closed and open elements

*Questions that comprise just an open element

**Questions that comprise just a closed element

Summary of the response

The overall response to the direction of the Draft Plan was positive. In particular, respondents agreed with the provisions set out in the Plan's structure and the outcomes. They were also broadly in agreement that actions for delivery were sufficient to deliver each outcome, although some sizeable minorities disagreed. However, nearly half agreed that the Plan would impact differently on people who share protected characteristics. Table 3 summarises the response to the core questions.

Table 3: Support for the Plan measures					
		Agree strongly/ slightly	Disagree strongly/ Slightly	Don't know	Base
FLS	Structure: good overview of FLS	80%	18%	2%	44
Outcome 1	Agree with the outcome	82%	13%	5%	44
	Agree with the delivery actions	68%	25%	7%	44
Outcome 2	Agree with the outcome	77%	21%	2%	44
	Agree with the delivery actions	61%	30%	9%	44

Outcome 3	Agree with the outcome	86%	14%	-	44
	Agree with the delivery actions	70%	23%	7%	43
Outcome 4	Agree with the outcome	73%	12%	15%	41
	Agree with the delivery actions	62%	20%	18%	39
Outcome 5	Agree with the outcome	70%	17%	13%	40
	Agree with the delivery actions	54%	25%	21%	39
Overview	Plan provides a strategic overview	66%	23%	11%	44
Diversity and inclusion	Impact on protected characteristics	46%	50%	4%	28

FLS corporate structure

Question: To what extent do you agree that the Corporate Plan provides a good overview of the organisation and structure of Forestry and Land Scotland?

Almost all (44) of the respondents answered the tick-box question and most of these respondents (around four in five) agreed that the information in the Plan provides a good overview of the organisation and structure of FLS. Just 8 of the respondents disagreed; none of those disagreeing were staff.

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Agree strongly	21	12	9
Agree slightly	14	9	5
Disagree slightly	6	5	1
Disagree strongly	2	2	-
Don't know	1	1	-
Base	44	29	15

There was not a follow-up open-ended question, but comments from elsewhere in the survey and from written responses did not indicate any particular issues with the Plan in terms of providing an overview of FLS. It should also be noted that FLS has had time to establish itself and become a familiar part of the landscape for stakeholders since the first Corporate Plan consultation in 2019.

Comments from other sections of the consultation questionnaire indicated respondents were satisfied that the Plan provides a good overview of FLS and what it will be aiming to deliver up to 2025. However, some comments and suggestions were made by respondents:

- The Plan could be more focused, with fewer and more achievable objectives.
- Provide more background information on FLS and how it operates, e.g. number of staff, amount of land managed, proportion of felling done in-house and outsourced.
- For less informed readers, a more high-level presentation of the outcomes and action plans in the Plan with more details in the appendix might make it more accessible overall.
- Include a review of past performance against outcomes and objectives.

“The Plan does provide a good overview of FLS’ aims and delivery plans. To strengthen this it would be useful to hear more about the wider context – and specifically, how FLS is using this next 3-year period to help manage change over a much longer time horizon.” Organisation

“One significant [omission], which is relevant to a number of the outcomes above, is the absence of any mention of the Scottish Government’s Just Transition agenda.” Organisation

Outcome 1

Questions: To what extent do you agree with the following Outcome? To what extent do you agree the actions for delivery will be sufficient to deliver this Outcome? Please use this space to comment further.

Outcome 1:
 FLS supports a sustainable rural economy by managing the national forests and land in a way that encourages business growth, development opportunities, jobs and investments.

Most of the respondents (36) who answered the tick box question said they agreed with Outcome 1 either strongly or slightly, while just over one in 10 (6 respondents) said they disagreed with Outcome 1. No organisations disagreed with this outcome.

However, fewer respondents (30) agreed that the delivery actions set out in Plan would be sufficient to deliver this outcome. Most individuals and organisations agreed that the actions would be sufficient to deliver the outcome, although just four individuals agreed strongly (13 agreed slightly). The proportion of organisations agreeing strongly was larger (four vs. nine agreeing slightly).

Table 6: To what extent do you agree with Outcome 1? (#)			
	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Agree strongly	17	8	9
Agree slightly	19	13	6
Disagree slightly	2	2	-
Disagree strongly	4	4	-
Don't know	2	1	-
Base	44	29	15
To what extent do you agree the actions for delivery will be sufficient to deliver this Outcome? (#)			
	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Agree strongly	8	4	4
Agree slightly	22	13	9
Disagree slightly	4	4	-
Disagree strongly	7	6	1
Don't know	3	2	1
Base	44	29	15

General comments

Comments were generally positive about the Outcome and welcomed the ambition to support a sustainable economy. There were more mixed views about whether the actions were sufficient to deliver the outcome and whether there was enough detail explaining how they would do so. In particular the term 'sustainable' and how it would be achieved in practice by balancing economic and other priorities needed more unpacking for some respondents. Also, some wanted more clarity on what the priorities were in order to understand how trade-offs would be made. One respondent

suggested that it would be useful if the stakeholders that would assist with delivery of Outcome 1 were identified in the plan.

Achieving sustainability by balancing environmental and commercial priorities

The main concern that emerged was around how these priorities would be balanced in practice and whether there was enough in this part of the Plan to show how that would be done.

- Some felt that the commercial and business aspects were more heavily emphasised than other areas such as the climate, biodiversity, recreation and educational opportunities. They wanted to see FLS commit to becoming a leader in innovative forest management.
- One respondent noted the positioning of the economic Outcome in the Plan as the first of the five Outcomes as potentially indicative of a prioritising of economic imperatives.
- Some wanted to see a synthesis of these priorities where possible rather than prioritising one over the other. One respondent for example talked about increasing natural areas whilst maintaining links with the farming sector, for example by helping and encouraging farmers to plant smaller trees and bushes on land currently used for grazing.
- Some felt there could be more detail on how this Outcome, and the rural economy more generally, will address the climate crisis and feed into the Scottish Government's Net Zero plans. One respondent noted that in their view the focus in the text under Outcome 1 was focused on *sustainability from an economic perspective*.
- Two respondents mentioned the action on contributing to the Scottish Government's renewable energy targets. They believed that new renewable energy projects needed to take into account landscape and environmental sensitivities. For example, one respondent suggested that the Plan should clearly state that renewable energy projects be sited away from ancient woodland habitats.
- One respondent mentioned the COP26 outcomes and suggested including consideration of their impact on the proposed actions.

Prioritising the actions

More broadly, it was noted that there was a long list of actions to be delivered under the Outcome. Some respondents wanted to see more detail on how these would be prioritised. If trade-offs were to be made, they wanted to understand how this would be done. Again, this tied back to the desire to understand better how environmental and commercial priorities would be balanced.

Timber and forest management

Woodland creation and sustainably managed forestry were viewed as important. Again, more detail was wanted by some on how sustainability would be achieved in practice, balancing the environmental and commercial aspects. There was also a perceived balance to be struck between planting trees for carbon sequestration and ensuring forests deliver on other environmental priorities e.g. promoting biodiversity.

- The priority action for engaging more people, communities and businesses in the creation, management and use of forests was supported; however, some respondents wanted to see the need for developing skills and training acknowledged under this Outcome.
- One respondent wanted to see more on FLS' role in increasing Scotland's woodland cover, part of the vision for 2070 outlined in the Scottish Forestry Strategy. They felt that the current wording focused on 'managing' forests, whereas FLS' activities should be about increasing woodland cover rather than just looking after what is already there.

- Some wanted to see a stronger focus on innovation from FLS under this Outcome. As one respondent wrote, *it is highly likely that society will need a different type of forestry as the climate crisis develops and as we have to take steps to stop loss of biodiversity (Organisation).*
- Ensuring quality woodland creation was highlighted as important by some respondents. One noted that *forestry is being driven by strong economic forces* at present, and that there is a need to encourage innovative forestry management techniques that also promote biodiversity, healthy soils and local employment.
- Another respondent wanted to see a specific action added for FLS to take a leading role in the development of Scotland's hardwood and broadleaf timber markets to support ongoing quality woodland creation. They believed this would also contribute to the Forestry Strategy for Scotland action '*supporting the creation of a range of types and scales of new forests and woodlands using native and other tree species for a range of purposes, including production of timber.*'
- One respondent referred to Scottish Forestry's Woodland Carbon Code scheme. They were concerned that use of this scheme to generate income could result in more predominantly single species new woodlands that may deliver on carbon sequestration but without enhancing biodiversity.
- One respondent raised concerns about the sustainability of some actions and products mentioned under Outcome 1. They wanted to see a cautious approach to wood energy markets (referred to as the biomass sector by the respondent) ensuring that use of biofuels is only promoted where there are clear carbon savings and positive or neutral effects on biodiversity.
- There was a question raised about the accuracy of the figure of 50,000 provided under this Outcome regarding the number of jobs provided by forestry and timber processing. One respondent cited alternative figures that they said estimated 25,000 jobs attributable to forestry either directly or indirectly. This appears to be a reference to figures published on the forestry.gov.scot website¹.
- Some concern was expressed regarding the action on reducing restocking costs. The importance of managing costs was acknowledged, but it was felt that this should not be at the expense of reducing the restocking backlog and ensuring high quality and diverse forests, which at least one respondent felt should be the main priorities here.
- Some respondents mentioned timber transport and the emissions this caused; and wanted to see this addressed under Outcome 1.
- There was a query about the accuracy of the £285m figure regarding the Gross Value Added annually of forestry and timber. One respondent was unclear whether this referred purely to output from the national forest estate (if not, they said the figure should be £775m, and needed clarifying in any case). They also claimed the figure was derived from data at least seven years old, and felt this should be mentioned.
- There could be more sense of the breadth of timber products from Scottish forests. Examples such as panel boards for construction, flooring and kitchens; pallets for transporting goods; garden products and animal bedding were given by one respondent.

Tourism and recreation

Respondents with an interest in tourism and recreation welcomed their inclusion in the Plan under this Outcome. Encouraging sustainable tourism and recreation was key for them, with some

¹ Forestry's economic contribution: <https://forestry.gov.scot/forestry-business/economic-contribution-of-forestry>

comments echoing the underlying theme of balancing commercial and other aims. Involvement of local communities in terms of consultation, free-to-use recreational infrastructure, and exploring non-timber assets and how these could be used by community-based enterprises were also seen as important.

- One respondent emphasised the importance, in their view, of ensuring that commercial paid-for recreation was not emphasised at the expense of the wider population. As they put it, *Recreational access should be free for most users. Charges should only be for additional services - for example we would guard against increased parking charges (Organisation).*
- Another respondent voiced concerns that, in their view, FLS were withdrawing funding without adequate consultation in their locality, meaning that much publicly-funded and free-to-use infrastructure was being lost e.g. paths, cycle trails, and picnic areas. This seemed to them contrary to the Outcome.
- One respondent felt that *...there is a serious omission here in not mentioning the link to the National Walking Strategy and its actions (Organisation).*
- Some wanted to see more encouragement around other non-timber forest assets and how these could be used by local enterprises, for example tours and foraging.

Local economy

Some respondents were keen for more detail on how FLS, a national body, could calibrate its activities to support local businesses and economies and tie in with the land reform agenda. Comments and suggestions for more detail in the Plan included the following.

- Leasing parcels of woodland to local individuals and businesses who can demonstrate their management proposals would deliver community and public benefits. The proceeds of leasing can be reinvested in woodland expansion.
- More focus on and provision for woodland crofts.
- Support for small-scale local timber businesses. According to one respondent, *such [smaller] businesses often provide proportionately greater economic benefit in relation the amounts of timber they consume, particularly in rural communities (Individual).*

“We are pleased to see supporting a sustainable economy is a priority for action within the plan. Forestry is vital to the Scottish economy and timber is one of the most sustainable construction materials and it is important that going forward we secure further timber supplies for use in sustainable buildings (and more).” Organisation

“Outcome 1 refers to 'sustainability' in its name, but there is little information on efforts to address the climate crisis in the supporting priorities and actions, with the focus on sustainability from an economic perspective. Greater focus should be given to how Outcome 1 and the rural economy will feed into the Government's ambitious net zero targets.” Organisation

Outcome 2

Questions: To what extent do you agree with the following Outcome? To what extent do you agree the actions for delivery will be sufficient to deliver this Outcome? Please use this space to comment further.

Outcome 2:

Scotland’s national forests and land are looked after; biodiversity is protected and enhanced and their biodiversity is protected and enhanced.

Most (34) of the respondents who answered the tick box question said they agreed with Outcome 2, with 27 saying they strongly agreed; while one in five (9) said they disagreed. Agreement was strong overall amongst individuals, with around three in five saying they strongly agreed.

Again, fewer respondents (27) agreed that the delivery actions would be sufficient to deliver Outcome 2. Most organisations and individuals agreed that the actions would be sufficient to deliver the outcome, although the views of individuals were more mixed (just over half agreed vs. four in five organisations).

Table 7: To what extent do you agree with Outcome 2? (#)

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Agree strongly	27	17	10
Agree slightly	7	4	3
Disagree slightly	3	1	2
Disagree strongly	6	6	-
Don't know	1	1	-
Base	44	29	15

To what extent do you agree the actions for delivery will be sufficient to deliver this Outcome? (#)			
	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Agree strongly	10	6	4
Agree slightly	17	9	8
Disagree slightly	8	6	2
Disagree strongly	5	5	-
Don't know	4	3	1
Base	44	29	15

General

Respondents were broadly supportive of Outcome 2; they agreed with the underlying principles and ambition, considered they should be a key priority for the organisation, and felt that the outcome was framed clearly and concisely. One respondent appreciated the holistic view of this Outcome, given the climate and biodiversity crises are interlinked. Some suggested that this Outcome could be more ambitious and incorporate more self-reflection by FLS on their performance on biodiversity so far and what more they could do in terms of managing the forest estate. The general issues raised by respondents were as follows:

- The language could be less passive and could emphasise FLS' proactive support in improving Scotland's natural capital and biodiversity. One respondent argued that Scotland is doing relatively poorly on biodiversity and quality of the natural environment, so terms like 'safeguarding' and 'looking after' implied this state of affairs was being maintained rather than improved.
- One respondent wanted the wording of Outcome 2 to specifically mention resilience to pests and diseases as well as climate change.
- How will action against climate change be balanced in decision making against commercial aims?
- Commitment to collaborating with partners on landscape-scale approaches to habitat management and restoration was welcome, but there could be more detail on how this would work, e.g. how investment and conservation improvement approaches would align with those of other private and public landowners.
- There could be more explicit acknowledgement of the intertwined nature of the climate and nature/biodiversity crises. One respondent wanted to see specific targets on addressing biodiversity.
- There could be more detail on the information gathering activity required to develop a clear baseline of Scotland's natural assets to inform an evidence-based action plan.
- The mention of specific historic sites on FLS land was specifically welcomed by one respondent, although they felt that it would also be useful to mention the overall scale of FLS's role in managing nationally important scheduled monuments – over 300 in their estimation.

Sustainable management

There was broad support from respondents for the commitment to protect and enhance biodiversity within the Plan. Many stressed the current position includes large areas of non-native monoculture, and welcomed the opportunity to diversify Scotland's woodlands and forests.

- One respondent mentioned land destruction related to monoculture plantations as damaging to resilience in the face of climate change due to destruction of fungal networks in the ground that protect trees. They singled out 'mounding' as a particularly harmful practice in this regard.
- There were some conflicting views about 'rewilding' and natural regeneration. One respondent voiced concerns that the focus on biodiversity could push out other elements of good forest stewardship, giving as an example the difficulties with restocking that could occur if an area is left to regenerate naturally. Others highlighted the lack of mention of rewilding and natural regeneration (apart from a reference to increasing natural habitats) and where these opportunities could be pursued.
- Several respondents expressed the view that there is still an over-reliance on Sitka spruce. In the view of one respondent, the emphasis should be on diversity of productive tree species as well as biodiversity. They pointed out that a novel tree disease targeting Sitka spruce could have a devastating impact on timber production, hence the need to "*mov[e] away from extensive areas of even-aged, single species stands to more diverse structures more resilient to threats of all kinds*" – something they felt should be explicitly mentioned in the Plan.
- Following on from the previous point, it was mentioned that "*a greater diversity of timber species and product sizes will support a diversification of timber-using businesses.*"

Expanding forest and woodland area

There was support for the commitment to expand the forest and woodland area, particularly in light of the nature and climate crises. A number of respondents felt the actions could be more ambitious:

- One respondent suggested a specific action around developing and delivering a strategy to increase native woodland expansion as well as managing forests for biodiversity.
- One called for a commitment by FLS to start restoration of all of its PAWS sites and report results for condition assessments carried out on PAWS and ancient woodland.
- One respondent contrasted the action regarding helping the Scottish Government meet woodland creation targets, in their view this may be more than offset by ongoing loss of woodland cover on the National Forest Estate. They wanted to see more stringent case-by-case assessments of whether deforestation is justified on environmental grounds in specific cases.

Increasing forest and woodland resilience

Respondents supported measures to increase the resilience of forests and woodlands. In particular they commented:

- General support for a reduction in monoculture planting and more mixed plantations and native species.
- There was support for use of more naturally regenerative trees to promote resilience. Western hemlock spruce, beech and sycamore were given as examples.
- There was broad support for maintaining diverse forests with a range of species to make them more resilient against threats such as tree diseases (one respondent mentioned losing half a plantation to a species-specific disease, illustrating what can happen when plantations are not diverse).
- More detail would be welcomed on how existing forests especially in areas previously negatively impacted by forestry activity will be restructured to enhance provision of ecosystem services.

Enhancing environmental and biodiversity benefits

Issues raised included:

- Some pointed out that the Plan failed to specifically cover issues around planting on peat bogs (despite peatland restoration being mentioned in the actions), drainage of new plantations and flooding downstream of new plantations.
- As well as targeted action for vulnerable priority species, priority habitats should also be considered. Planning of new forests should consider wider biodiversity benefits as well as priority species including e.g. areas of open ground and riparian corridors.
- One respondent wanted to see an end to grazing on FLS land.
- Give more consideration to ensuring that new tree planting is sensitive and does not negatively impact sites that already have high biodiversity value.
- The reference to deer management was welcomed and could be enhanced by including a commitment to work with other deer stakeholders on landscape-scale deer management. Providing local opportunities for community deerstalking was also mentioned as something FLS could consider – one stakeholder emphasized the economic and social benefits this could bring to rural communities.

“The draft plan highlights important strategic priorities (including peatland restoration, woodland creation, increasing natural habitats) and these could be emphasised even more strongly.” Organisation

“The climate and nature crises are inextricably linked, as such it is important that these are not tackled independently of each other. It is not just about climate change impacting biodiversity; it is also about the loss of biodiversity deepening the climate crisis.” Organisation

Outcome 3

Questions: To what extent do you agree with the following Outcome? To what extent do you agree the actions for delivery will be sufficient to deliver this Outcome? Please use this space to comment further.

Outcome 3:

Everyone can visit and enjoy Scotland’s national forests and land to connect with nature, have fun, benefit their health and wellbeing and have the opportunity to engage in our community decision making.

Most (38) of the respondents who answered the tick box question said they agreed with Outcome 3. Agreement was strong, with 32 saying they strongly agreed. Just 6 said they disagreed, all individuals. No organisations disagreed.

Again, respondents were less likely to agree (30) that the actions would be sufficient to deliver the outcome, evenly split between those agreeing strongly and agreeing slightly with this (15 each). Four in five organisations agreed that the actions would be sufficient, but the views of individuals were slightly more mixed with just under two thirds agreeing and three in 10 disagreeing.

Table 8: To what extent do you agree with Outcome 3? (#)

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Agree strongly	32	20	12
Agree slightly	6	3	3
Disagree slightly	2	2	-
Disagree strongly	4	4	-
Don't know	-	-	-
Base	44	29	15

To what extent do you agree the actions for delivery will be sufficient to deliver this Outcome? (#)			
	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Agree strongly	15	8	7
Agree slightly	15	10	5
Disagree slightly	4	3	1
Disagree strongly	6	5	1
Don't know	3	2	1
Base	43	28	15

General

Respondents strongly supported Outcome 3 particularly given the increased use of outdoors spaces and visits to rural areas during the pandemic. FLS was generally felt to be performing well in relation to this outcome.

A number of other general comments were made:

- There was some concern that the FLS reorganisation into five regions had made staff more remote from forests and users of forests. One respondent claimed that the FLS website lacked contact details for local managers which did not give the impression of an organisation that is responsive to its users.
- Another respondent expressed the opinion that the public forest service was becoming increasingly centralised. They felt this could make engagement at the local level more difficult.
- There is no mention of Gaelic in the Plan.
- FLS should consider including nature recovery in relation to the action to empower communities to make innovative use of the national forest.
- Ensure community engagement does not unduly hinder developments that address public interest and need.
- Consider NatureScot's Landscape Character Assessment for Scotland under this Outcome to help inform the principle of sustainable forest management and adherence to the principle of *'the right tree, in the right place, for the right purpose'*.
- Good to see the reference to amenity value as well as tourism and recreational opportunities.
- FLS should have a leadership role in adapting to changing visitor requirements and increasing visitor pressure, promoting good practice amongst visitors (including campers).
- One respondent voiced strong concern about reduction of various provisions by FLS in their view including education delivery, visitor facilities and public events, and that the focus of the new FLS visitor strategy is on income generation.

Management and access to visitor facilities and experiences

Respondents were broadly supportive of FLS managing forests and lands as a natural resource that supports a range of tourism and sports activities.

- Rural communities were felt by some to enjoy less recreational infrastructure in their local forests than other areas, with impacts on the ability of rural communities to use the forests for recreational and health purposes.
- According to one respondent, there was scope also under this Outcome to engage communities through meeting their material needs, e.g. firewood, as well as recreation/wellbeing.
- There could also be an emphasis on the historic environment under Outcome 3 and its benefits to environmental quality, health, wellbeing and community.
- Again, the National Walking Strategy was highlighted as an omission that would be relevant to Outcome 3, according to one respondent.
- Ensure the action around maintaining safe walking and biking trails includes popular informal through routes e.g. 'desire lines' to popular hill summits that lie outwith the forest estate.
- Continue to lead by example on good practice on forestry operations signage
- Focus on 'nature corridors' between woods and forests. These could help connect and engage different communities as well as wildlife, according to one respondent, if they are combined with cycling/walking trails.
- In light of the pandemic and increased tourism and visitor pressure, FLS should take more of a lead in providing campgrounds, facilities for waste disposal from caravans, motorhomes etc. and public toilets.
- One respondent felt there was limited paths and other infrastructure for disabled people.

Involvement/engagement

Respondents were supportive of the commitment to engage and consult with communities. Some concerns and issues were raised around involvement and engagement:

- As discussed, some felt that perceived centralisation of public forestry and the reorganisation of FLS into five regions makes engagement harder.
- One respondent acknowledged the success the Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS) but claimed there was a perception that FLS considers that CATS delivers its commitment on community engagement. They emphasised that the scheme involved moving land out of FLS management and expressed the opinion that FLS needs to do more to work with communities, than just facilitate transfer of land to them, in order to genuinely fulfil the commitment to engagement.
- Another respondent felt that there is a need to educate communities more about the full set of values that underpin forest management. They felt this was important to ensure informed decisions are made that avoid focusing on short-term objectives to the detriment over longer-term ones.
- One respondent felt that although FLS performed well in relation to Outcome 3, they wondered if more could be done to emphasise the uniqueness of individual local areas, perhaps by ensuring local staff with good knowledge of their area have the freedom to follow through on their ideas.
- There was support for expanding woodland crofts, with one respondent suggesting that given the high demand, FLS should instigate a process whereby they can create woodland crofts directly rather than only via CATS.

“Post-Covid 19 we support the strong focus on ensuring effective access to national forests and land for all across society, particularly in urban areas, as well as proactively enabling communities to own, use or lease land.” Organisation

“More should be done to give local communities the opportunity to contribute to the management of FLS land, and to make it easier for community groups to buy, lease or use FLS land.” Individual

Outcome 4

Questions: To what extent do you agree with the following Outcome? To what extent do you agree the actions for delivery will be sufficient to deliver this Outcome? Please use this space to comment further.

Outcome 4:

FLS is a supportive, safe and inclusive organisation that provides exciting careers, professional development and strives to be an employer of choice.

Most respondents (30) who expressed an opinion said they agreed with the outcome, with the majority (26) agreeing strongly, while just five respondents said they disagreed with the outcome, all individuals. A relatively large proportion of respondents were unsure to what extent they agreed or disagreed with outcome 4 (6 of 41 said 'don't know', again all individuals).

Overall, most respondents who expressed an opinion agreed that the actions for delivery would be sufficient. Again, however, relatively large proportion (7 of 39) were unable to give an opinion. All those disagreeing were individuals rather than organisations.

Table 9: To what extent do you agree with Outcome 4? (#)

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Agree strongly	26	15	11
Agree slightly	4	3	1
Disagree slightly	2	2	-
Disagree strongly	3	3	-
Don't know	6	6	-
Base	41	29	12

To what extent do you agree the actions for delivery will be sufficient to deliver this Outcome? (#)			
	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Agree strongly	14	6	8
Agree slightly	10	9	1
Disagree slightly	4	4	-
Disagree strongly	4	4	-
Don't know	7	5	2
Base	39	28	11

General

Respondents generally welcomed Outcome 4. The mention of the Apprenticeship Programme was welcomed, with some respondents highlighting the importance of drawing young people into the profession and offering them career opportunities and progression. Concerns were voiced however about whether there were ample developmental opportunities for staff at present.

The key issues raised by respondents were:

- Lack of developmental opportunities, for example levels of responsibility determined by job grade making it hard for lower grades to demonstrate capability at a higher grade.
- One respondent raised concern about the perceived low level of morale amongst FLS staff.
- One respondent felt that the strategic priorities were too loosely linked to Outcome 4.
- Need to raise awareness amongst potential applicants for FLS roles of the benefits, discounts and services available for FLS staff. As one respondent noted, these help to offset the salary difference compared to the private sector.

Issues and suggestions

Some respondents considered the measures could be enhanced in some ways, and made the following observations:

- Technology (e.g. use of drones and remote sensing) could be considered more as part of workforce planning in order to help reduce workloads for some staff and contribute to better work/life balance.
- Publish data and targets on staff diversity e.g. gender and ethnic diversity of staff.
- Expand on the reference to the Fair Work Convention framework by explicitly referring to the five dimensions of the framework in guiding development of the People Strategy.
- Make it clear whether FLS is a Living Wage employer.
- Consider including reference to the Young Person’s Guarantee Scheme².

“We are supportive of this objective. It is important that those responsible for managing the national forests and land for multiple outcomes are skilled and knowledgeable and that FLS invests in its workforce providing opportunities for professional development.” Organisation

“FLS has become very tied to levels of responsibility being determined by job grade. This makes it very hard to demonstrate capability at a higher grade and progress. Careers stagnate and staff leave the organisation.” Individual

² https://youngpersonsguarantee.scot/?gclid=CjwKCAiAm7OMBhAQEiwArvGi3CZIRQGEdociGZ6KcQsSK8kt5FSnKvxli7VFI9z44GF1ZzQZgbxQAxoCkLIQAvD_BwE

Outcome 5

Questions: To what extent do you agree with the following Outcome? To what extent do you agree the actions for delivery will be sufficient to deliver this Outcome? Please use this space to comment further.

Outcome 5:

FLS is recognised as a high performing, efficient and effective, financially sustainable organisation that continues to transform and adapt.

Most of the respondents (28) who answered the tick box question said they agreed with Outcome 5, either strongly or slightly, while seven said they disagreed with this outcome. None of the organisations disagreed with this outcome. Agreement was strong, with 21 agreeing strongly and only seven agreeing slightly.

Although a majority (21) agreed that the actions for delivery will be sufficient to deliver the outcome, one quarter (10) disagreed. The strength of agreement was mixed and tending towards weak too, with nine agreeing strongly and 12 agreeing slightly. Again, all those disagreeing were individuals, with one third disagreeing and fewer than half (12 of 29) agreeing. A relatively high proportion of individuals were unable to offer an opinion, with seven selecting ‘don’t know’.

Table 10: To what extent do you agree with Outcome 5? (#)

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Agree strongly	21	13	8
Agree slightly	7	4	3
Disagree slightly	2	2	-
Disagree strongly	5	5	-
Don't know	5	5	-
Base	40	29	11

To what extent do you agree the actions for delivery will be sufficient to deliver this Outcome? (#)

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Agree strongly	9	4	5
Agree slightly	12	8	4
Disagree slightly	3	3	-
Disagree strongly	7	7	-
Don't know	8	7	1
Base	39	29	10

General

The key concern in relation to this Outcome was around the focus on financial performance and good corporate governance. Some felt that this was too narrow and that other aspects of organisational performance should be considered, particularly in relation to the environment. One respondent in particular would like to see more emphasis on FLS’s transition to net zero emissions including its supply chain, and detail on how it would be achieved. Others worried that the need for efficiency and

productivity should not come before sustainability and non-commercial priorities such as recreation and community benefit.

Some felt that the organisation could become more dynamic, less bureaucratic, and less beholden to doing things in certain ways because that is how they have been done historically.

Governance

Key issues raised included:

- There should be room for innovation and taking a risk with trying new things that may not always succeed. Some were concerned that over-emphasis on accounting could stifle innovation and creativity.
- Some felt the actions for delivery were too vague and ‘broad-brush’ with more detail needed on how the Outcome would be achieved, possibly including targets.
- Some were concerned that there was a lack of vision and innovation in the organisation needed to tackle the climate and biodiversity crises, and that there was room for more dynamism at the top of the organisation.

Key actions

Key actions raised included:

- Take action on engine idling in their fleet in order to save public funds by reducing fuel consumption.
- Look outside the organisation to the private sector in order to identify and adopt methods of developing and increasing efficiency.
- Look for ways to make FLS systems less bureaucratic and more efficient.

“We support policy that enables everyone to take positive action to engage and respond to the impact of climate change in Scotland’s upland environment. We support intentions to adhere to UKWAS certification and the UK Forestry Standard.” Organisation

“As the need to focus more on environmental efforts becomes more important, that too should be considered as part of measuring “efficiency and productivity”, not just market outcomes.” Individual

Overview of outcomes

Question: To what extent do you agree the Corporate Plan provides a sufficient strategic overview of the types of work we will deliver over the next three years? Please use this space to comment further on the coverage of the outcomes.

Most (29) of the respondents who answered the tick box question agreed the Corporate Plan provides a sufficient strategic overview of the types of work FLS will deliver over the next three years, with 16 of these saying they agreed strongly. Nearly a quarter of respondents (10) disagreed. Just two organisations said they disagreed; views from individuals somewhat were more mixed with eight out of 30 disagreeing.

Table 11: To what extent do you agree the Plan provides a sufficient strategic overview? (#)			
	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Agree strongly	16	11	5
Agree slightly	13	7	6
Disagree slightly	6	5	1
Disagree strongly	4	3	1
Don't know	5	4	1
Base	44	30	14

Respondents were broadly supportive of the strategic direction, with some commenting that it was comprehensive and reasonable. Nonetheless, there was some scepticism and a ‘wait and see’ attitude amongst several respondents regarding whether actions would achieve outcomes. Some made suggestions for further developing the content, for example:

- Some felt the Plan could have more clarity in places and that the long lists of actions could benefit from being prioritised to indicate which of them was critical over the 2022-2025 period to delivering Outcomes. One suggested prioritising and sequencing the actions as part of a longer-term roadmap.
- One respondent felt that Outcome 2 in particular could benefit from reworking. They felt that it attempted to cover too many of the Scottish Forestry Priorities for Action. In their view it was the most important Outcome for FLS as a custodian of Scotland’s forests and land, so should be the first Outcome in the document in order to reflect this. They felt it could also be split and expanded into two separate Outcomes.
- Another respondent felt the document could benefit from including a review of past performance. They believed that given the climate and biodiversity crises we now face, it was important to hold organisations to account on whether they were achieving outcomes. They made the point that the current situation reflected past failures to achieve outcomes (not just FLS but other organisations).
- Some felt that the Plan could give more detail on the wider context and in particular how FLS is using the 2022-2025 period to contribute towards managing change over a much longer period. For example, there could be further information on FLS contribution to Net-Zero targets.

- Respondents commented that some issues had been omitted (or not covered with sufficient detail/depth) within the Plan, for example:
 - Climate emergency: FLS' role in delivering Net-Zero targets needs to be set out and how it contributes to the Scottish Government's ambitions. There could be more acknowledgement of the twin climate and biodiversity crises which some respondents emphasised were intertwined.
 - Historic environment: it was suggested the Plan would benefit from taking a broad view of landscape, heritage and environment that recognises the contribution the historic environment makes towards these outcomes.
 - Language and culture: no reference to Gaelic in the plan. A Gaelic version of the plan would be welcome.
 - No mention of the Scottish Government's Just Transition agenda or reference to the report of the Just Transition Commission.
 - Lack of opportunity to comment on the implementation and monitoring of the Plan.
 - Rationale for selection of 2022-2025 priorities could be set out more clearly and explicitly for each Outcome.

"Overall, I feel the Corporate Plan is an expansive and thorough document. Sometimes the clarity of the writing dips, and I hope the finished piece has considerable consideration given to presentation and readability, but overall I wouldn't hesitate to refer to it during my work." Individual

"This current version of the Corporate Plan includes long lists of actions but it would be useful to prioritise and sequence these, perhaps as part of a longer-term roadmap." Organisation

Diversity and inclusion

Questions: Are there any key issues or opportunities we should consider to make sure that the Corporate Plan works for different equality groups or for people from different socio-economic backgrounds?

Do you think any of the outcomes or actions in the Corporate Plan will impact differently on people who share protected characteristics? (for example, in relation to their age, disability, gender, pregnancy/maternity, marital status, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, religion or belief).

Diversity and inclusion

We want to create an environment that is accessible, open and welcoming to people from all backgrounds and communities across Scotland – as a place to work, to visit and to participate.

We will continue to integrate Diversity and Inclusion into everything that we do by identifying and removing barriers, enabling us to build a more inclusive organisation services and facilities.

Are there any key issues or opportunities we should consider to make sure that the Corporate Plan works for different equality groups or for people from different socio-economic backgrounds?

Around half of respondents (22 of 45) offered thoughts and ideas around key opportunities to make sure the Plan works for different equality groups and people from different socio-economic backgrounds.

- The need for education, encouragement, and community consultation and engagement were mentioned most often.
- Some also discussed the need to reduce barriers, for example the cost of transport and other expenses associated with accessing the outdoors.
- Rural deprivation was mentioned by some respondents, and the impact of closures of trails and other facilities in the forest due to perceived underuse and/or maintenance costs. These were often well used by people on lower incomes by lower income people in rural areas, so closure had a negative impact in their view.
- More and smaller parking areas beyond visitor centres in large forest estates could benefit dispersed rural communities by providing more opportunity for informal recreation closer to home.
- Need to be mindful of the impact of car-parking charges and other means of income generation on people with lower incomes.
- Involving younger age groups, including urban children who have especially limited opportunities to access the outdoors.
- A need to reach out more widely to different socio-economic groups regarding careers in forestry, with help and support (including financial) on offer for them.
- Some barriers for different groups to address in terms of careers were identified, including: the need for a driving licence, need for own transport, lone working, lower age limits for some forest operations.

Some specific actions that could be taken were identified:

- Support and provision of land for hutting.
- Open up more forest spaces and create more small car parks to allow for low-cost recreation.
- Financial and other support for those from diverse backgrounds and different socio-economic groups to access forestry and other land-based careers (e.g. woodland crofting).
- Provide a Gaelic policy within the Plan.
- Consult with the Equalities and Human Rights Commission around developing recommendations for involving people from diverse backgrounds and different socio-economic groups.

“FLS must ensure that income generation from recreation and access does not affect those on lower/low incomes. Our region has a high level of rural deprivation and the Council has a priority to protect our most vulnerable people. Forests should be free at point of use and the introduction of car parking charges etc. limits accessibility to all.” Organisation

“Rural communities are often very low income and do not always have other places to go than the local forest trails and picnic areas. They do not need much. Once the trails and picnic areas and car parks are closed in some local communities they have little other local walks or picnic areas or similar facilities.” Individual

Do you think any of the outcomes or actions in the Corporate Plan will impact differently on people who share protected characteristics?

Amongst those who provided a response to the tick box question (28), views were evenly split between those who thought the outcomes or actions in the Plan would impact differently on those who shared protected characteristics (13) and those who thought it would not (14). Individuals were more likely to say it would have an impact on them (11 vs. 9); amongst organisations the majority thought there would not be an impact (5 vs. 2).

Table 12: Do you think any of the outcomes or actions in the Corporate Plan will impact differently on people who share protected characteristics? (#)

	Total	Individuals	Organisations
Yes	13	11	2
No	14	9	5
Not sure	1	-	1
Base	28	20	8

Ten of the 28 who answered the tick box question provided further comments on the Plan’s impact on people who share protected characteristics. Accessibility was seen by some as a top priority. Other mentions included:

- As mentioned above, access to green space for people in deprived areas was mentioned as something FLS could take a strong lead on.

- One respondent felt there was a need for some 'affirmative action' to achieve outcomes by reaching out and offering opportunities to, for example, people with disabilities and people from deprived areas.

"Make it a profitable, self-sustainable and well respected environmentally-responsible business and a locally-focussed, valued local entity. By making it successful and attractive, that will attract a wider socio-economic diversity to work for it and use the resources."

Individual

"All the outcomes and actions are desirable and sensible; however, often it may require 'affirmative action' or similar to ensure that certain groups in our population can benefit (including disabled people, those from deprived urban areas etc.)"

Individual

Final comments

Question: Please use this space to provide any other comments you think are relevant to the Corporate Plan.

The final comments reiterated those made previously. Respondents welcomed the opportunity to comment on the Draft Corporate Plan. There was strong support for the direction set out in the plan: the commitments to manage reforestation, conservation and biodiversity; and the approach to manage the forest estates to encourage business growth and benefit the health and wellbeing of communities. The Outcomes were felt to cover everything that FLS should cover. One respondent said they would like to see an organisational chart also showing how FLS roles fitted with Scottish Forestry, as in their view how the two organisations fitted together was not yet clear to everyone.

Priorities:

The Outcomes and actions under each one were generally welcomed. However, the lists of actions for each Outcome were felt to be long and in need of prioritising, making clear which ones were critical to achieve Outcomes over the next three years. Some felt that whilst the objectives set out in the Plan were worthwhile, there needed to be more focus on the fundamentals and an honest appraisal of what was critical and achievable. Respondents were also keen for reassurance and clarity that financial priorities would not be pursued at the expense of other priorities such as recreation and the environment.

Ambition:

Respondents called on FLS to be bold and ambitious in the Plan. Setting out how the priorities and actions for the next three years would contribute towards changes over much longer periods would be welcome – in particular around working towards Net Zero. One respondent wondered whether FLS could look to become a Carbon Positive pathfinder, i.e. going beyond Net Zero to sequestering more carbon than they emit. The emphasised the importance of educating the public, in particular younger people, as part of securing a sustainable future.

Climate and biodiversity:

Not everyone felt the Plan did enough to acknowledge these crises, their intertwined nature, and how FLS would address them. One respondent said that natural flood management was not included in the Plan and should be. They detailed ways in which modern forestry techniques fuelled climate breakdown (e.g. mounding) and called for a ‘paradigm shift’ in forestry management to make forestry more climate and environmentally friendly.

Delivery:

Some respondents wanted to see more detail about how Outcomes would be delivered. For example, one suggested that more could be said about who FLS is working in partnership with and how to achieve the Plan’s objectives: *Mention could be made of the work that FLS is doing in partnership with others to achieve the Corporate Plan objectives – e.g. Involvement in the emerging Rural Land Use Partnerships, involvement in Local Authority Forest and Woodland Strategies. (Organisation)*

“As a prime public-facing document the FLS Corporate Plan communicates the overall direction and priorities of the organisation to the people of Scotland. It also underpins the activities of FLS. With this in mind, I think 'economics' feature too prominently in the outcomes of the Corporate Plan and this should be reconsidered to demonstrate that, while financial sustainability is a vital part of the business, the protection and enhancement of the natural environment and the benefit Scotland's National forests and land provide to people and communities are the organisation's top priorities.” Organisation

“As we adopt business principles, and aim towards financial sustainability, please don't let profit and short term income be of a higher priority than ensuring the ability to produce timber in future by efficient and effective restocking of future crops.” Individual

“I find the respective roles of Scottish Forestry and FLS to be somewhat confusing for the layman; there seems to be significant overlap. I would find diagrams of the whole organisational structure all the way up to ministerial level helpful. This should include all the roles mentioned in the FLS Framework document as well as any others involved.” Individual

“Overall the corporate plan states some very positive messages but how effectively are the milestones set and how are they monitored to ensure the plan is being delivered.” Individual

Technical appendix

Method and sampling

- The data was collected by public consultation.
- The target group for this research study was the general public and stakeholders.
- There was no target sample size, but an estimated final response of up to 100 was anticipated.
- A total of 45 valid responses were received.
- The consultation ran from 11 October until 29 November 2021.
- The consultation was available to respondents on the FLS website, via the Citizen Space portal.

Data processing

- Our data processing department undertakes a number of quality checks on the data to ensure its validity and integrity of the responses received.
- Progressive was granted access to the FLS Citizen Space portal, and were able to download the all responses received through the portal. For questionnaire received through the Portal these checks include:
 - Responses are checked for duplicates where unidentified responses have been permitted.
 - All responses are checked for completeness and sense.
- A small number of responses were submitted directly to FLS. These were forwarded to Progressive as emails for processing. For these responses checks include:
 - All questionnaires are checked manually for sense. Any errors or omissions detected at this stage are referred back to the field department, who are required to re-contact respondents to check and if necessary, correct the data.
 - Rejected or problematic questionnaires are manually entered
 - A computer edit of the data carried out prior to analysis involves both range and inter-field checks. Any further inconsistencies identified at this stage are investigated by reference back to the raw data on the questionnaire.