



Communities Strategy for Scotland's National Forests and Land

Consultation response - analysis

You said

We received 45 responses to the consultation covering a range of issues. A number of respondents provided comments on the Purpose and Priorities of the Strategy, including asking for greater clarity on the role of Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) and the relative importance of the priorities and outcomes.

Various respondents highlighted specific areas that should be given greater priority, including biodiversity and wildlife, inclusion and diversity, integrated land use and access. Some responses gave a view that there was less community activity than previously, and other responses emphasised the need for clear targets to measure success.

In terms of actions, respondents highlighted a number of specific initiatives such as woodland crofts and woodlots. A key message in the responses was the need to improve engagement both within the current Land Management Plan processes and for more regular and interactive involvement of communities in decisions and operations in their local forests. Responses emphasised the need for this to be resourced adequately in terms of staff time, training, and resources.

We did

We have amended the wording of the Strategy to take into account the responses as far as possible, while retaining the aim that the Purpose and Priorities recognise the important role communities play in decisions on land use and making best use of the national forests and land. We have included additional information to provide more background to FLS' role in managing the national forests and land, as part of the wider Scottish Forestry Strategy, Land Use Strategy and contributing to the Scottish Government's national outcomes.

We have also expanded the information on current community activities on the national forests and land, to provide a better baseline for monitoring progress and provide a basis for further engagement through the Action Plan on what is working well and what needs to be improved.

The actions and how these can be resourced to align with the priorities in the Strategy will be taken forward through the Action Plan.

Consultation Process and Method

The consultation was launched on 31st May 2022, and ran for 12 weeks until 23 August. The consultation was published on FLS’s communities web page and contained 5 sections on the Purpose and Principles of the Strategy and a further question on what success would look like.

The Purpose and Principles were:

Purpose

- To fully realise the contribution of Scotland’s National Forests and Land to building vibrant, sustainable, wealthier and resilient communities, recognising the rights and responsibilities of all to work together to sustainably manage our forests and land.

Principles

- Principle 1 – Supporting the transition to a fairer, greener Scotland
- Principle 2 – Supporting sustainable and thriving rural communities
- Principle 3 – Informing and Engaging Communities in decision making

The consultation was publicised through a news release to local press across Scotland, on social media, and directly by email to over 500 community bodies including community councils, development trusts, and representative bodies. Respondents were invited to submit their responses to the questions via an online form or by email.

Each section included a closed question asking respondents to answer yes, no, or maybe on support for the purpose and principles, and if they agreed, disagreed or neither with the success criteria. Each section also included an open-ended question for additional comments, and a final section was included if the respondent wished to make any further additional comments.

Responses

FLS received 45 responses to the consultation from 44 organisations and individuals, 38 via the online form and 7 by email. One community body advised that they did not feel able to respond because of the style of the consultation.

Community councils	10
Community bodies	9
Third sector and membership organisations	9

Statutory agencies and government bodies	6
Individuals	10
Total organisations and individuals	44

Analysis

Of the 45 responses received, 42 responded to all the closed questions and the majority provided additional comments to some or all of the sections. 3 respondents responded to none or some of the closed questions and are included in the figures where a response was made. Their comments on the Strategy are included in the analysis where relevant.

Overarching themes across all the questions highlighted the need for:

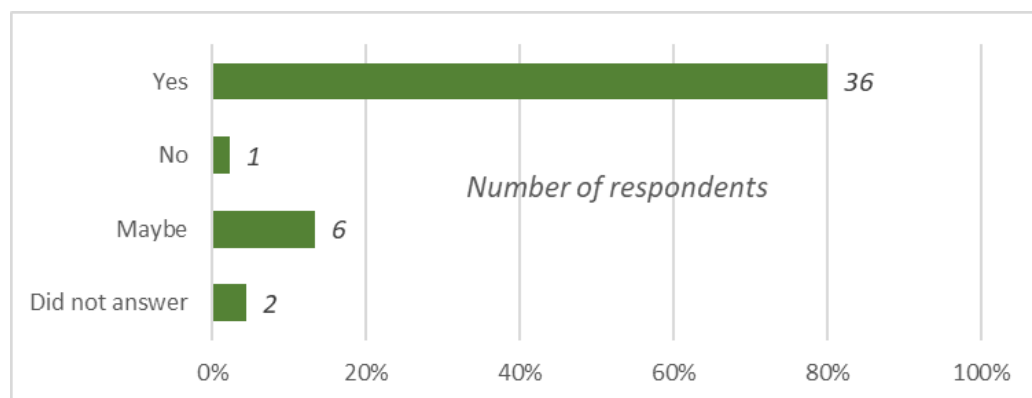
- FLS to give the same priority to community activities as to its commercial and financial aims and objectives.
- Improved community engagement and communication, particularly that this should be a genuine, 2-way dialogue.
- The Principles set out in the Strategy should be sufficiently resourced to deliver the action plan, including staff training.

Purpose

Do you support the Purpose of the Communities Strategy (page 4):

To fully realise the contribution of Scotland’s National Forests and Land to building vibrant, sustainable, wealthier and resilient communities, recognising the rights and responsibilities of all to work together to sustainably manage our forests and land.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe



The majority of respondents who answered this question, 84%, supported the Purpose of the Communities Strategy. A further 13% were maybe in support, and one community body did not

support the Purpose. 35 respondents made additional comments. There were 12 requests for text clarifications.

Main Themes

An overall response to the Purpose was the need for clarification on scope of the Strategy. FLS remit is to manage the 640,000 ha of national forest and land owned by Scottish Ministers on behalf of the Scottish people. Responses highlighted that this was not clearly understood by everyone and that it is the remit of the wider Scotland's Land Use Strategy to set out the vision, objectives, and policies to achieve sustainable land use in Scotland and the Scottish Forest Strategy to set out the vision and framework for Scotland's forests and woodland. Responses from key stakeholder organisations also felt that some of the wording on roles and responsibilities was ambiguous and could be further clarified.

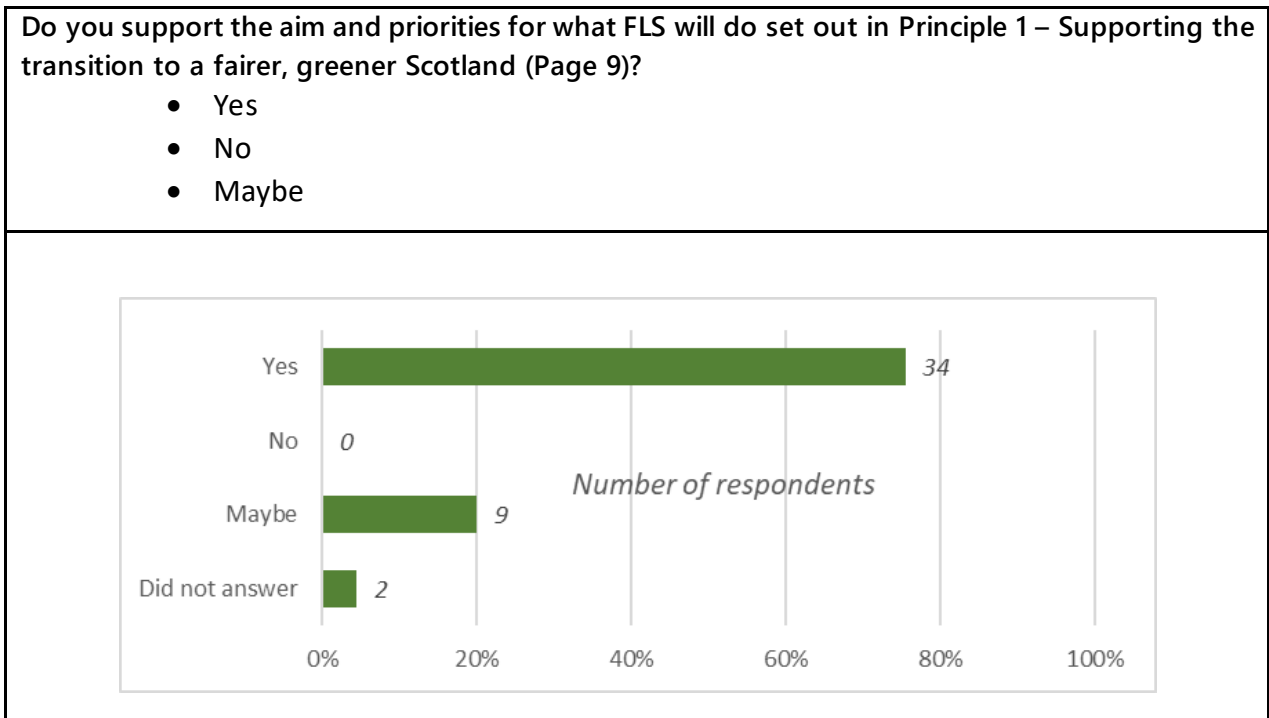
Other key themes in the responses to this question were: FLS priorities and resources; improving communication and collaboration with communities; and increasing opportunities for community involvement in the development of the national forests and land, particularly income generating opportunities.

- FLS priorities (15): respondents made additional comments on FLS priorities, particularly the important role communities play in delivering wider objectives for the national forests and land. Other respondents asked FLS to recognise its responsibility to work with communities and address concerns that this was given less priority than FLS' commercial forestry operations, and some asked that wildlife and biodiversity be given higher priority. 2 respondents noted the consultation must be more than a PR or tick box exercise.
- Capacity / staff training (7): a key theme was the need for FLS to invest in resources and staff time to deliver the Strategy and support better community engagement. Specific suggestions include FLS providing forestry training for communities, including joint FLS/community training and that FLS should take on a project development and delivery role for communities. An impression was expressed that resources for operational activity have increased at the expense of staff / capacity to carry out meaningful engagement.
- Communication (9): improving communication, engagement and collaboration was highlighted, emphasising the importance that this should mean genuine 2-way conversation with communities at local regional and national levels.
- Development opportunities (5): it was important that communities were consulted on and given the opportunity to participate in the development of the national forests and land, particularly for income generation. Responses highlighted the opportunities for improving path networks and access through greater community involvement, and the contribution that woodland crofts and woodlots could make to rural communities.

Other issues identified were: that biodiversity should feature more strongly; that the Strategy should cover both urban and rural communities; the contribution to Scottish public health priorities; and that there should be reference to the National Gaelic Language Plan.

Responses which highlighted specific local issues were passed on to the appropriate Regional staff.

Principle 1



The majority of respondents who answered this question, 79%, supported the aim and priorities for Principle 1. A further 21% were maybe in support. 29 respondents made additional comments.

Main Themes

The main themes identified in this section were the need for FLS to strengthen communication with communities and the need to prioritise communities affected by socio economic disadvantage in the Just Transition to Net Zero. There were 15 comments on text changes, the majority of which recommended avoiding the use of the term covid and introducing the principle of a Just Transition to replace the term Net Zero.

- Communication (9): respondents commented on the need for FLS to strengthen communication with communities, with supporting comments (5) to ensure staff receive appropriate training and resources to do so. There was recognition that FLS working with Regional Land Use Partnerships will have a role to play but with some concern about scale, and that one size fits all will not work, with a preference for FLS to nominate

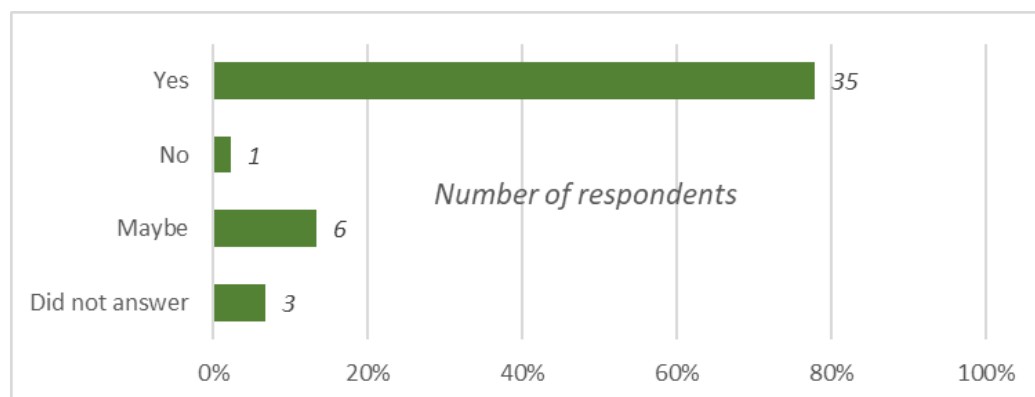
designated points of contact for local communities. Increasing the use of Gaelic to more effectively engage with the Gaelic speaking community was also requested. There was also a request for FLS to embrace new way ways of working with communities including ownership and control as a shared responsibility between community and land manager.

- Priorities (8): Respondents made a range of comments with broadly the same emphasis in supporting increased access and biodiversity, and emphasising the role of FLS in supporting communities to benefit from assets local to them (4). Respondents highlighted affordable housing initiatives, the wide range of benefits woodland crofts can bring, and recognising socially disadvantaged communities in certain island communities. The importance of considering land use where there is a clear primary use in decision making such as flood management or carbon storage was also highlighted.
- Equality and Diversity (10). The importance of opportunities for appropriate access to green spaces was also highlighted again, particularly for disadvantaged communities, with one response emphasising that the link between mental health and wellbeing should be strengthened using the example of the NatureScot programme of Green Health Partnerships as an example of good collaboration.

Principle 2

Do you support the aim and priorities for what FLS will do set out in Principle 2 – Supporting sustainable and thriving rural communities (Page 9)?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe



The majority of respondents who answered this question, 83%, supported the aim and priorities for Principle 1. A further 14% were maybe in support and one community body did not support the aims and priorities. 30 respondents made additional comments.

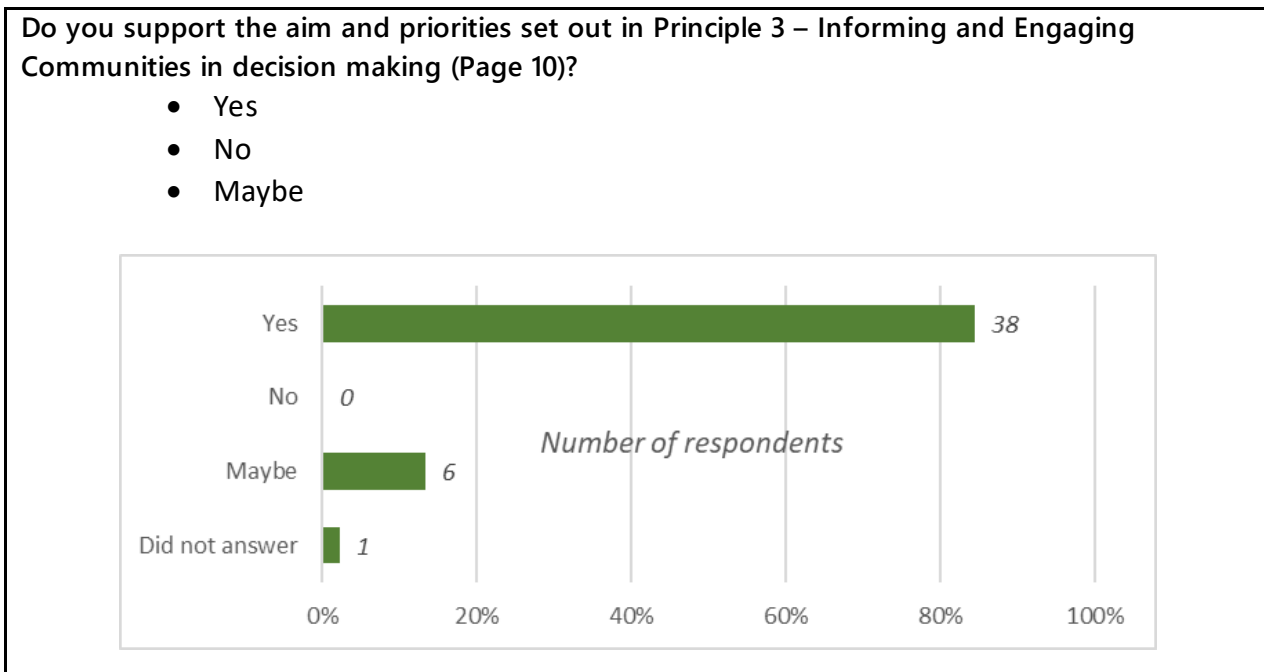
Main Themes

The main theme in the responses was feedback on asset transfer process, through which communities can request to buy, lease, or make use of land (7). Most stated support for the principle of asset transfer and several respondents (5) noted that FLS Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS) was an example of best practice. However, the strongest message was that the asset transfer process was complex and created barriers for community groups, in particular stressing the increasing burden on volunteers. 2 responses highlighted the issues of the current high value of land, and that there should be more consideration of discounts, particularly for health and social benefits. Respondents asked for a review of the CATS scheme particularly in comparison to the previous National Forest Land Scheme.

Related to this were opportunities for the national forests and land to contribute to more affordable housing provision (5). 2 responses emphasised that delivery of innovation and partnerships would require leadership, local resources, and staff training.

Other themes covered included biodiversity, delivery of health outcomes, particularly for both urban and rural communities, and support for the priority to increase social, economic, and environmental benefits.

Principle 3



The majority of respondents who answered this question, 86%, supported the aim and priorities for Principle 1. A further 21% were maybe in support. 31 respondents made additional comments.

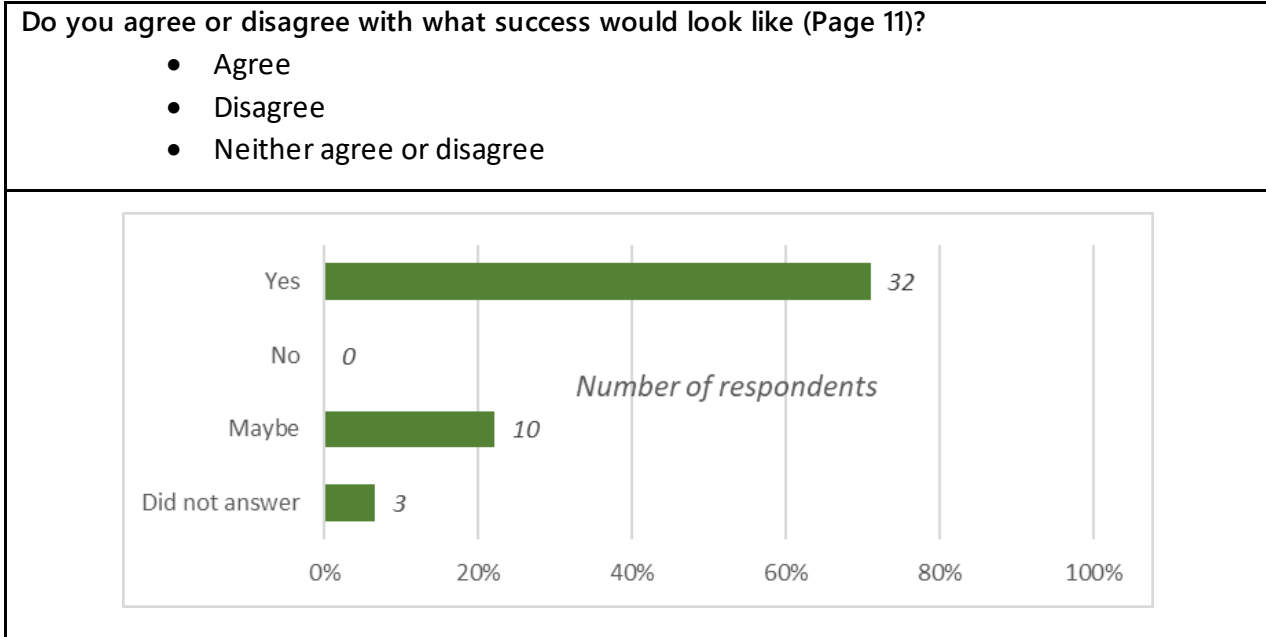
Main Themes

Two main themes emerged with 15 comments concerning staff capacity and training and 20 comments on strengthening communication and engagement.

- Comments included the challenge of a 10-year Land Management Planning cycle which can be subject to in-year change, concern that the scale of the plans makes community concerns and opportunities difficult to capture. Concern was expressed that there is limited scope for engagement and online consultation can limit participation. Respondents also emphasised the importance of meaningful engagement avoiding the impression of predetermined outcomes and include timely feedback.
- A significant number of comments in this section were on the need to ensure appropriate staff, resources, and training is in place ensure community engagement was effective. Comments also included a lack of staff on the ground or that staff were too thinly spread to ensure appropriate contact with communities. Comments also included the request for a greater presence of staff at Community Council meetings, for example through simple update reports on operational activity planning.
- Comments included a need to explore innovative ways of speaking with communities to ensure a wide range of participation including seldom heard communities. Raising the profile of Gaelic was also mentioned; both the need to communicate in Gaelic with the Gaelic community and for greater use of the language in FLS plans to better connect the Gaelic community with the land.

There were 6 comments on text clarification in particular a move away from the term “Informing” and more in general to revisit the text in this section to tighten the wording to ensure understanding of the scope of the Strategy in terms of public land not just forestry, and to be clear the intention is genuine community participation in decision making.

What would success look like?



The majority of respondents who answered this question, 76%, agree with what success would look like. This section had the lowest clear support, with 24% neither agreeing or disagreeing. 29 respondents made additional comments. There was one comment that effective communication with communities must include Gaelic.

Main Themes

A common theme touched on by some respondents was that success should mean that FLS has a clear priority to work with communities, going beyond statutory requirements to act as an exemplar (6). Other comments (2) were that unless FLS set measurable targets for delivery, the Strategy would be meaningless.

Comments on the text were that the criteria should prioritise the transition to net zero in the first sentence (3).

Additional comments

Do you have any other comments, concerns or additions you would like to make about the strategy?

36 respondents made additional comments.

Main Themes

Respondents used additional comments to re-emphasise the importance of genuine community engagement (10) and to ensure appropriate resources including staff are in place to support community engagement (9) including a request to use easily understood language and terminology in consultations such as Land Management Plan.

There are a further (7) requests for text clarification, and one response which suggested the role of Forestry and Land Scotland is not well understood. A further (3) local issues were raised.

There were arrange of more detailed responses in this section covering a wide range of issues and the offer of further input to the more detailed action plan.