**Note of the meeting of the National Forestry Stakeholder Group**

**14 March 2023**

**Forestry’s contribution to the delivery of community benefits and community wealth building**

This was the fifth meeting of the National Forestry Stakeholder Group. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the development of a framework for increasing forestry’s contribution to the delivery of local community benefits and community wealth building (a shared ambition set out in Scotland’s Forestry Strategy Implementation Plan 2022-25) to deliver Scottish Government (SG) priorities in this area.

Dave Signorini, Scottish Forestry – CEO, chaired the meeting, which was opened by a pre-recorded speech from the Minister for Environment and Land Reform, Mairi McAllan. The speech highlighted the following points:

* Forestry in Scotland is currently delivering a wide range of benefits.
* While private investment is needed to meet our woodland creation targets, it is important that the benefits forestry delivers are shared between public, private andcommunity interests.
* To achieve this, we need to consider what is both practical and achievable, but at the same time challenge the status quo and foster innovation.
* There is a public consultation currently underway to help shape the future forestry grant scheme. It includes questions on community engagement, community benefits and community wealth building. Participants are encouraged to respond – closing date 17th May.

Amy Nicolson, Scottish Forestry – Green Infrastructure & Communities Advisor, presented an overview of the discussion paper (provided to participants prior to the meeting), including the strategic context for this work, relevant SG policies and priorities and some case studies of community benefit delivery from woodland.

She explained that the ambition is to develop a community benefits and wealth building framework over the next 12 months and concluded by setting out the questions for discussion and introducing the breakout rooms.

The meeting then split into two groups to discuss the following questions in turn:

1. What benefits can forestry deliver more of for our communities?
2. How can we realise the opportunities to increase community benefits from forestry and grow forestry’s contribution to community wealth-building?

Key points from the breakout rooms included:

* A call for practical definitions of community benefit (e.g. differentiation between local benefits and public benefit) and community wealth building (CWB) to help people understand how they could be delivered (e.g. CWB includes local businesses as well as community owned businesses).
* Both rural and urban communities can realise a wide range of economic, social and environmental benefits from forestry (e.g. climate change adaptation, increased tourism, local amenity).
* Good and genuine community engagement is a fundamental building block to support the delivery of community benefits from woodlands.
* All communities are unique and the opportunities are varied, so a range of models (ownership, leases etc) will be necessary to respond to community needs, circumstances and deliver desired outcomes.
* Community capacity building and support is crucial – useful to facilitate knowledge sharing between communities.
* Need to recognise the role of local authorities, as can be a good route for supporting communities to get involved in local woodlands.
* There is scope for greater local value added in terms of small scale and local timber processing.
* Identify lessons from other sectors such as community renewables and how ‘honest brokers’ have been used to support communities and their interaction with private companies.
* Useful to gather evidence of current forestry sector employment and where employees are located, as some state there is a misconception in rural areas that “there are no forestry jobs left in their areas” or the available jobs are not occupied by local people.

Summing up, Dave Signorini thanked attendees for their input into a very constructive meeting. He explained that this was the beginning of an ongoing conversation and journey to work together to develop and implement a framework for increasing community benefits from forestry and growing its contribution to community wealth building.

**May 2023**