

Wild Land

Community Land Scotland
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Community Land Scotland is familiar with the concept of wild land and wildness and welcomes the distinction made between these concepts and the notion of 'wilderness' which, in Scotland, given its history, is not a useful concept.

A number of the members of Community Land Scotland have areas of land within their ownership which fall within the draft map of Core Wild Land Areas, and, whether or not any such map existed, are aware that visitors to their areas visit, in part, because they can gain a sense of remoteness and solitude, and be close to nature. In this sense, Community Land Scotland have a keen appreciation of the economic value of 'wild land', as may be perceived by locals and visitors.

Community Land Scotland's members, of course, have wider economic and social development ambitions for their areas, additional to encouraging visitors. That development activity leads them to want to beneficially utilise their land assets in appropriate ways. This inevitably and quite properly leads them into activities which impact on the landscape and which could be in the form of the creation of workspaces, new access paths and interpretation facilities, wind turbines, hydro water retention, forestry, the development of housing, and the like. Community Land Scotland members would actively want to promote such developments whenever and wherever appropriate, but with no desire to impact adversely or disproportionately into any sense of wildness visitors might want to experience.

Wildness is, by definition, a subjective and human sense and will be experienced and appreciated differently by different individuals.

In introducing mapping to complement Scottish planning policy which map we recognise is portrayed in the supporting policy narrative as being "intended to be used as a strategic tool", rather than a precise instrument of control, none the less, holds the potential to become a precise tool to guide specific land uses. This may happen by the 'creep' of original intention, through the production of broad and more formal guidance, into specific application. Whether or not that happens, any such map provides boundaries which in turn present opportunities, often for those who do not live in the areas concerned, to mount arguments as to why particular and locally legitimate developments should not proceed, simply because they fall within the boundaries of the particular map. This would be the case even though the map was considered to be only "intended to be used as a strategic tool".

In this context, any map, were it to gain any sort of official recognition, would have to be very precise, and the current proposed map is not, having being derived from a theoretical model and on which, as the policy narrative surrounding this consultation concedes, a "field survey has not been undertaken in support of the analysis (of) the map." This carries the distinct danger that the map does not account, on the ground, for any degree of precision, the sort of precision which would be vital if the map was to have or develop any status of any kind. This must point to any map being subjected to proper field work before any question of its adoption for policy purposes.

However, beyond this, there are a number of matters that the underlying policy thinking, and hence mapping, needs to consider more fully.

The areas mapped have a significant overlap with the 'fragile areas' of Scotland. The map also overlaps with many areas purposefully and shamefully cleared by past generations of landowners. It is these actions to clear land which have given rise, in part, to any sense that such land is now 'uninhabited and often relatively inaccessible countryside where the influence of human activity on the character and quality of the environment has been minimal' (SNH). Viewed from today and the perspective of many living in or around these areas, the only reason they are uninhabited is because of past actions by owners. The impact of humans' none the less remains significant, and there are strong feelings that it could have been and should have been even more significant down the ages, helping sustain more vibrant and sustainable communities today.

The continuing ownership patterns of the land in question, putting much of it in very few hands, has perpetuated a situation where there has been no possibility of significantly re-populating the land. The areas within the Core Wild Land identified will today still have a human population significantly below that which it sustained in times before the clearances. The land will unquestionably contain abandoned settlements and hill shielings which, although today may look like "extensive natural and semi-natural areas - often rugged, relatively remote and showing limited obvious management or development" (SNH), or where "the evidence of past and contemporary uses of these areas is relatively light" (SNH), none the less masks the fact that these areas once contained significant human population. It is the objective of many, consistent with wider economic and social development policy, that these areas should once again contain significant human population. There is at least a danger that the creation of any form of official map of such areas, designating them as wild land, would be used and have the effect of preventing any re-population of land, even if that re-population was to be done in ways which sought not to diminish unnecessarily or disproportionately, a sense of wildness.

Before taking any further steps to have any draft map adopted in any formal way, it would be important to overlay any such map with the former human settlements contained within these areas. Such an exercise might help reveal the extent to which it can really be said this is wild land, or the extent to which it can be seen as, in part at least, the product of historic actions to clear the land of people, and contemporary land owners' policies.

Community Land Scotland is not opposed to further exploration and strengthening of the concept of wild land and wildness and sees benefits in recognising the concept. However, the merits of any map, but particularly the map provided for this consultation, should not be confirmed until there had been local fieldwork, and until such time as former human settlements had been over-layed.

Conclusion

Community Land Scotland would not wish to see new impediments of the legitimate aspirations of local people for economic and social development, local people who may, in part, market their area through the concept of wild land. It is very important that any eventual move to add a more specific and precise map to Scottish planning policy on wild land, also acknowledges past human settlements which might yet be re-populated or acknowledged as having the potential for re-population, that any such maps are seen as sitting firmly within the wider policy descriptions of wild land characteristics and potential use and wider economic and social development policies.

In all the circumstances it is felt that considerably more work and discussion is necessary before adoption of the current draft map is considered.