

Looking Forward: Supporting the Uplands

Summary of the Upland Alliance Stakeholder workshop, hosted at DEFRA - London 22 September 2016

Context and focus of this note

The Upland Alliance stakeholder workshop, attended by over 80 people, had 3 main aims:

- To share insights on how to motivate and support upland land management;
- To explore the potential impacts of four upland support scenarios as a means to identifying key issues, concerns and opportunities for future policy;
- To collate recommendations for policy planning and evidence-gathering.

This event was seen as the start of a conversation, not its conclusion. It is hoped that the day's discussions can inform and stimulate further knowledge exchange around the country and among policy-makers in England, ensuring that new policy is as well-informed as possible.

Two over-arching conclusions were reached:

1. The uplands are of high value for the public benefits they provide society

These include biodiversity, drinking water, carbon storage, stunning landscapes, places for public recreation and well being, and vibrant rural communities and economies. Over 70% of the uplands are a farmed landscape. CAP payments to upland farmers and landowners equate to less than £3.30 for each of the 70 million visits annually to upland National Parks.

2. Public money should be focused on delivering and enhancing these public benefits

This broad range of public benefits for the environment, rural economy and communities are not paid for through markets for food, livestock and timber. Future support should be structured to engage farmers and landowners and reward them to create, maintain, and enhance these benefits for society and minimise impacts of land use that impose costs on society.

The Uplands Alliance thanks Defra for hosting the event and to the following organisations for their financial contributions which made this event possible as well as many others who helped facilitate and convene the day.

Defra, Natural England, The National Trust, CLA, NFU, TFA, Moorland Association, University of Exeter, the Foundation for Common Land, RSPB

Process for the Workshops

The day heard from three speakers; Mark Reed (Newcastle University) Minette Batters (NFU) and Sonia Phippard (Defra) on the opportunities for change that leaving the EU offers the uplands. Stakeholders were encouraged by Defra to be **radical in conception but realistic in implementation**.

Other speakers noted that the future of the uplands is about both production (of food, forest products, energy etc.) and the environment: to consider one without the other would be to ignore important aspects of history, culture and future public demand. A 'triple-bottom-line' approach to valuing, enhancing and harnessing upland assets - economic, environmental and cultural – was suggested.

Following this the Uplands Alliance presented four scenarios for how the uplands might be supported by the Government after we leave the EU. These were drawn up not as "options" for consultation but to stimulate conversation and enable us to consider likely responses and risks from contrasting approaches.

The scenarios were:

1. Resilient Land based Businesses
2. Vibrant Cultural Landscapes
3. Local Schemes for Local Outcomes
4. Outcomes rather than Actions

The eighty participants were placed in eight mixed discussion groups, each including representatives of farming and forestry sector groups, environmental NGOs and agencies, policy makers and academic researchers. Eight different groups worked on four contrasting scenarios, looking at the positive and negatives of each scenario and what the Human **Response** would be as well as the Environmental **Results**, Associated **Risks & Research** Requirements.

Common points emerged from their analyses: this report has therefore been structured by firstly considering areas of 'Broad Consensus' and secondly collating the findings as identified by the 4 R's of response, results, risks and research needs.

Capturing What is Good

An initial session reviewed past policy considering what has worked well. Stakeholders noted these points.

- One strength was where schemes reached all the people and all the land, rather than covering just a few areas and excluding others e.g. ESA, UELS and HFA; noting that broad and shallow schemes can provide a landscape-scale incentive for improved management.
- At the same time, being able to focus particular initiatives on particular localized issues is also valuable (e.g. **flexibility for bespoke management** for important species or habitats with HLS, or sensitivity to local communities).

- There is a **willingness of many actors to work together in partnerships** to plan and to get things done, at a landscape scale.
- Finally, the value of **longstanding and trusted relationships** between farmers, advisors, environmental experts and community groups, wherever these have developed, should be recognized and acknowledged in any future approach.

It was agreed few schemes succeeded without clear communication, trust and goodwill on all sides and simple, clear approaches were favoured.

KEY POINTS OF BROAD STAKEHOLDER CONSENSUS

Recognising and celebrating the Uplands

Upland farming and management contributes much more value to society than its business success alone would recognise, and livestock production is, and has long been, at the heart of the system of land and resource management. The current level of CAP support for the uplands – the basic payment scheme and agri-environment support combined – represents less than £3.30 per visit to England’s National Parks, each year, probably less than the public might guess. It is important to better communicate the value of upland management – ensuring the public understands the links between food/forest/energy production and sustainable management of biodiversity, water and carbon in the Uplands which are highly valued for public access. It should be easier to gain public support and understanding, if future policies can be clearer about their desired outcomes and explicit in addressing the negative impacts of some land management practices.



Better Valuing and Delivering Public Benefits

Society and policy should capture and reflect the value of upland environmental goods and services in multiple ways. It should be possible to encourage good business and environmental management together, integrating the concepts of vibrant cultural landscapes with sustainable rural businesses. The overall policy approach must empower rural land managers and businesses to deliver public benefits within diversified income streams, including voluntary, market-led and public mechanisms.

A strong commitment to community

There was a widespread desire that upland policy should support a broad mix of upland land uses with a range of farming and other businesses. These can sustain the wider community and the particular cultures of the uplands, maximising life chances for rural people, and are preferable to a slow disappearance of all but the largest businesses.

Need for Phased Change

Marginal systems are very policy-dependent - sudden shifts in public funding could stimulate significant collateral damage to environment and communities. So, changes should be planned, phased and adequately supported for the long term. Any schemes need to be sufficiently attractive to ensure high take-up, because all the land matters and can generate value.

An appetite for a new, more locally-flexible approach at landscape scale

There is an appetite for change from the present framework: seeking a simpler approach with less bureaucracy. The approach should generate a clear, shared vision at local level of what the policy aims to achieve, with simple agreed indicators to track and demonstrate those achievements. A national framework is desirable to ensure national and international aims can be recognised and met, but it should enable local 'wriggle-room'. A landscape-scale approach to future management would foster collaborative working, which could have social and cultural benefits as well as environmental. But importantly too, it should also be a support system which enables individuality, entrepreneurship and experimentation – no single approach has all the answers and diversity will promote resilience, to help manage future uncertainties. New support systems should encourage creative and innovative land use.

A call for commitment to ownership by all

Approaches should value local knowledge, enabling shared learning and exchange of know-how on equal terms between farmers, landowners, agencies, scientists and local communities. A new support system should deliver a powerful sense of shared ownership in the farming/ land managing community. Decision-making needs to involve all the stakeholders in a balanced and open way. There is a call for simple toolkits, clear and adaptable approaches, with effective and pro-active, inclusive facilitation to encourage engagement, allowing long-lasting and trusted relationships to form between farmers, experts and policy-makers. In reshaping the approach, reaching out to diverse groups and talking to people with different perspectives is important.

Collated Response, Results, Associated Risks and Research Needs from the Workshop Discussions.

NB These are not agreed conclusions and it is recognised that not all participants will agree with these statements but they are the top-ranked points from the group discussions

Human Responses

Future policies and schemes need to consider how individuals and businesses will respond; will they deliver the intended result or not? Proposals that do not engage and motivate the farmer and landowner are likely to be less attractive, will have lower take up and be less likely to deliver the policy objective. Encouraging individual pride in the delivery of public goods is important as to date too many upland agreement holders have not been engaged with the intended outcomes from their schemes.

Safe and predictable policies may provide funds to all but are less likely to deliver change and would they deliver what society wants? It needs to be recognised that many upland farms are not viable businesses without adequate financial payments and the number of farms will decline without them. Payments should not be considered as subsidising inefficient businesses but as due rewards enabling farmers and landowners to deliver a broad range of public benefits that are not sufficiently rewarded by the market including supporting isolated communities.

It was also recognised that future schemes should reward the active delivery of public benefits and not distort rents and land prices. Schemes should encourage innovation and not stifle business.

Environmental Results

We could improve the efficiency of delivering environmental outcomes by learning from past experience; assessing what worked well and was cost effective and what was not. Proposals should be explicit about what they are planning to deliver and not expect co-benefits to arise by magic, noting high base payments will make the delivery of specific environmental outcomes less likely. Similarly reduced funding that alters the driver towards financial profit may reduce delivery of environmental improvements.

There was enthusiasm to be able to prioritise local environmental issues that may not be addressed under a purely national scheme and common land was highlighted as requiring a specific focus to ensure its use continues and delivers better and wider outcomes. Proposals that encouraged a landscape-scale approach were welcomed and schemes should actively support delivery of public benefits from marginal land.

The long time frame for delivering environmental improvements was recognised; payments should recognise and reward milestones in improving habitats as farmers will be nervous about embracing schemes where often, delivering specific outcomes is outside their control and so payments made on this basis could be uncertain.

Associated Risks

Schemes need to provide sufficient funding; are the public willing to pay enough to deliver the public goods they want in the uplands? Conflicting policy objectives need to be addressed and resolved to avoid negative unintended consequences. Reduced capacity in government was also highlighted as a risk, reducing its ability to support schemes and outcomes.

A move to a market-led approach could increase the vulnerability of marginal upland businesses placing the provision of public goods at risk. This is in part due to the relative weakness of market mechanisms for paying farmers and landowners for public goods; government support therefore is required. A natural capital approach may assist.

Where partnerships are proposed to deliver locally they would need to be well-structured with clear and appealing terms of reference to ensure they fully represent the relevant range of interests, noting different sectors have varying capacity to attend meetings.

There is a risk in focusing payments on specific benefits or outcomes that schemes become complex and expensive to apply for, deliver and monitor; reducing take up by farmers and landowners. Conversely, supporting the status quo was raised as potentially fossilising farming businesses and reducing the incentive to deliver improvements and change.

Research Requirements

The research needs identified varied from “What do we value and seek from the uplands?” to more specific needs such as, “How to create simple metrics systems for assessing environmental outcomes and for monitoring and auditing change.”

We need to know, “How many farmers and businesses would disappear if you take away direct support?” and more about current farm business performance, factors of success and options to improve, thinking more broadly about successful business models which go beyond single outputs, for instance, “How far can environmental and social values be incorporated into product value that retailers recognize and consumers will pay for?”

We should research how best to achieve scheme simplification without compromising outcomes. Also finding simpler ways to monitor success using simple metrics, and involving beneficiaries in monitoring and learning: citizen science for farmers and other land managers.

We should learn more from good examples in other countries – what factors determine success in partnerships? What scale of operation seems to be the most appropriate?

Demonstration farms could help provide evidence of what works, where, in English upland locations. Farmers could be more directly involved in this kind of experimentation and learning.

Key questions for further research and investigation:

1. Is it possible to make all upland farms viable without large-scale underpinning aid? (How many people, with what impact upon communities? What types of business are fully compatible with environmental and social goals for upland areas?)
2. If broad-based support were removed and trade barriers with the rest of the world reduced, would consumers and the UK food industry abandon the UK farmer and source from cheaper places? Do consumers and the public recognize the environmental value bound up in what they buy – are they willing to pay (more) for food produced from sustainable landscapes? Developing markets for quality upland products is not easy – could policy help to achieve this, working together with major food chain actors?
3. How could such an approach focusing on cultural landscapes retain flexibility in the system, encouraging initiative and avoiding fossilizing farming businesses?
4. Do we fully understand the co-benefits of different land management options: would this scenario ensure delivery of the full range of ecosystem services – are they coincident with what would be seen as ‘valued cultural landscape’?
5. Do we know enough about what interventions work where for various outcomes? Would local areas be ambitious enough in what they sought to achieve? How can we ensure that local decision-making processes aren’t hijacked by special interest groups?
6. Could local schemes (like LEADER) end up too complex to administer if the centre is risk-averse?
7. How could we measure success – should local areas agree a common set of metrics to use?
8. Would new outcomes-based approaches be WTO-compatible?
9. Would farmers be willing to take on the risk of non-delivery of uncertain outcomes? How would take-up be ensured?
10. Would an outcomes-based scheme be sufficiently attractive and widespread to maintain farm businesses, or would it lead many to fail?

Concluding comments

The participants were asked to summarise their discussions into the statement; “Looking Forward we need to” The collated versions are provided here.

Looking forward we need to:

- 1) Inform and Engage the Public
 - Communicate what the uplands provide to local communities, visitors and the wider public
 - Explain the links between management, public benefits and healthy food
 - Articulate and clarify the diversity and value of landscapes
- 2) Encourage Businesses to Flourish and Deliver Public Goods
 - Ensure schemes are attractive and take-up high
 - Ensure payments fairly and sufficiently reward businesses
 - Recognise livestock production is at the heart of upland management
 - Encourage the delivery of public goods as a business diversification
 - Ensure join up between land management, the rural economy and communities
- 3) Encourage Locally Relevant Delivery within a National Framework
 - Establish a national framework to ensure national priorities are delivered locally
 - Have properly convened partnerships to decide local outcomes
 - Involve farmers and other landowners in the co-design of schemes to lead to co-delivery and ownership of desired outcomes
 - Keep metrics simple to monitor outcomes
 - Include effective and trusted facilitation services
- 4) Incorporate good learning from previous initiatives including
 - Schemes open to all e.g. ESA, HFA & UELS
 - Projects e.g. Farmer Networks, North-West Livestock programme
 - Partnerships combining different knowledge can be especially productive

In conclusion a common message is the need to engage the public – better articulating the benefits of our uplands and explaining how they are connected to food supply, ecosystem services, public enjoyment and wellbeing. Developing a dialogue that increases mutual understanding will ensure policies are focused on delivering value for money to all. Understanding these linkages is important for policy makers and the Treasury as well as the public – if we improve public awareness we strengthen future policy.