



# **TIMBER FOR CLADDING & FOREST DIVERSITY IN SCOTLAND**

**Forest Policy Group  
Summary Paper  
Bernard Planterose**

**January 2010**

## TIMBER FOR CLADDING & FOREST DIVERSITY IN SCOTLAND

*This paper complements a longer paper examining the linkage between timber construction and the development of a diverse, adaptable and sustainable forest resource in Scotland. It focuses on the development of timber cladding and how this presents an opportunity to exploit a rapidly expanding market for home-grown timber at the same time as improving environmental aspects of plantation forestry. It illustrates a clear disjunction between policies to develop the cladding market and planting policies where species most suitable for cladding have largely been overlooked.*

“Promote development of the quality and diversity of timber resource required by the full range of existing and potential markets”. Forestry Commission Scotland - Scottish Forestry Strategy - part of Vision Statement

1. The Scottish Government have expended considerable research and development efforts into the promotion of timber cladding in construction over a period of around 20 years. The market is now doubling every two years yet only a small percentage of the material is supplied by Scottish forests.

“The Executive is working to remove barriers to durable use of timber in construction which can substitute for more energy intensive materials and retain the carbon fixed in the timber”. Source: Scottish Climate Change Programme

2. The leading edge of sustainable construction in Scotland has been utilizing home-grown larch as its preferred cladding material for around 25 years and many sawmillers report increasing difficulty in securing logs of suitable quality and size.

3. The demand for home-grown Douglas Fir has also been steadily increasing over 25 years and its potential both as a cladding and structural building material is further increasing that demand as part of the overall drive for low embodied energy materials in construction.

“If the wood construction products sector continues to grow as it has in the past ten years there is the potential to store an estimated additional 10 Mt carbon (36.7 MtCO<sub>2</sub>) in the UK’s new and refurbished homes by 2019. This would save a further 20 MtC (73.4 MtCO<sub>2</sub>e) as a consequence of substitution of or more carbon-intensive materials.”  
The Read Report 2009

4. During this period of increasing demand for home-grown larch and Douglas fir, well supported by Government promotion and policy, concomitant efforts to expand or even maintain the supply through FE’s own planting programmes or FCS strategies or support structures have been lacking.

5. Meanwhile, restocking with these species has actually decreased in favour of Sitka spruce which is better able to deal with the excessive numbers of three species of deer throughout the country.

“Actively manage wild deer to minimize losses to woodland establishment and growth”  
Source : Strategy for Wild Deer in Scotland – Deer Commission Scotland

6. Along with larches and Douglas fir, a small range of minority conifers and hardwoods grown in Scotland make suitably durable cladding material. Of these oak is particularly notable as an established timber of choice by architects. Supplies of home-grown oak are only sufficient to supply small scale one-off projects and most oak is therefore imported.

“Encourage the hardwood timber sector” . Forestry Commission Scotland - Scottish Forestry Strategy

7. The time is now right for a strategic effort to establish new resources of these species to supply the existing and future expanding market for timber cladding as part of the drive for sustainability in construction. This effort should be seen as “making sense” of all the promotion and research into cladding carried out by Forestry Commission Scotland and Centre for Timber Engineering to date.

“encourage small businesses supplying local markets” . Forestry Commission Scotland - Scottish Forestry Strategy

8a. Forestry Commission should encourage additional planting of the target species (primarily oak, sweet chestnut, European larch, Douglas fir, and western red cedar). Take up rates for timber plantations of these species is low, suggesting that an enhanced intervention rate is required.

8b. More outreach work is required to encourage woodland occupiers to plant and manage stands of the target species. Workshops and practical demonstrations should be organized with partner organizations.

9. The promotion of timber cladding without a concomitant effort to encourage re-stocking and expansion of the Scottish forest resource of the required species represents a wasted opportunity for Scottish foresters and sawmillers and a lack of integration of policy.

“ A broader range of forestry related businesses ...including new value-adding enterprises, local timber processing based on softwoods and hardwoods...” Forestry Commission Scotland - Scottish Forestry Strategy- part of Vision Statement

10. In the absence of sufficient home-grown (or other sustainable) timber cladding supplies, promotion of timber cladding as part of sustainable construction by the Government will perversely lead to increased foreign timber imports and negative environmental and social outcomes. Indeed this is already happening with “Siberian larch” entering Scotland in significant quantities, some of which is known to be from unsustainable and even illegal forest operations.