

From Green Gold to Wild Woodlands

Understanding stakeholder visions for woodland expansion

Vanessa Burton (University of Edinburgh)

Context

Despite woodland expansion being advocated via a number of policy documents, barriers to woodland creation in Scotland remain. These include contested views about land use among multiple stakeholders, concerns around trade-offs with other land uses, and a lack of synergy between policies and plans.

Approach

A mixed-methods approach combining a document analysis, stakeholder workshop and semi-structured interviews was used to elicit 'visions' for woodland expansion. These visions articulate the different values for woodlands and describe how different stakeholders see woodland expansion ideally unfolding over the 21st century.

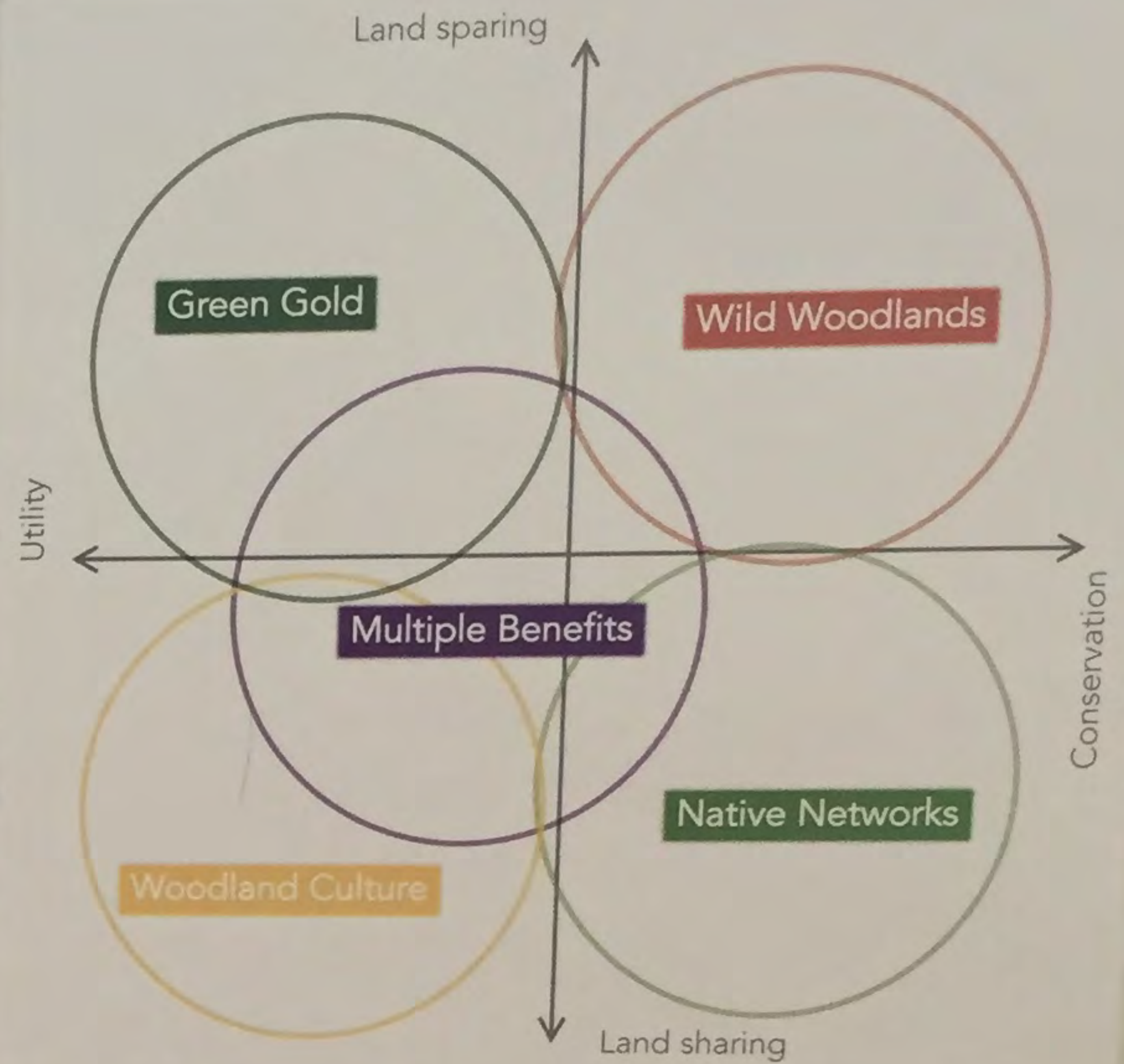


Figure 1. Illustration showing how an axes formed of four 'critical elements' was used to elicit the five visions. This is a widely used approach for developing scenarios. The two gradients of utility > conservation and land sparing > land sharing were chosen based on recurring themes from the document analysis. A process of inductive coding extracted information from existing documents relating to how stakeholders viewed woodlands and their development going forward. These themes were then clustered onto the axes, unveiling five potential woodland futures.

Why visions?

Scenario planning offers a framework for developing more resilient policies in the face of uncertainty. Visions are a type of normative scenario, which revolve around a positive description of a desired future. They can provide useful tools for long-term decision making by: posing challenges to accepted ways of thinking; stimulating dialogue between stakeholders; and helping to build consensus on shared priorities.

Key Findings

The results articulate different values for woodlands and provide a synthesis of a wide range of stakeholder's views on potential ways forward for woodland expansion. The visions can support strategic land use planning going forward.

Common ground

- o Great deal of consensus at a national level
- o Woodland expansion can provide valuable public benefits
- o Long-term funding mechanisms (e.g. PES) are required to provide support for these
- o Landscape scale collaboration and decision making can improve governance around woodland expansion and land use change
- o Collaborating with local people and land managers is essential

Divergence

- o Some visions advocate more radical changes
- o Changing conceptualization of biodiversity i.e. from conservation > restoration
- o Changes to agricultural and sporting practices, particularly in the uplands, allowing more natural regeneration of native woodland
- o Acceleration of Land Reform and Community Empowerment as prerequisites to two visions (Woodland Culture and Wild Woodlands)

There is a window of opportunity in coming years to change incentives and regulations relating to woodland, and other land uses, which have previously been strongly determined by the Common Agricultural Policy.

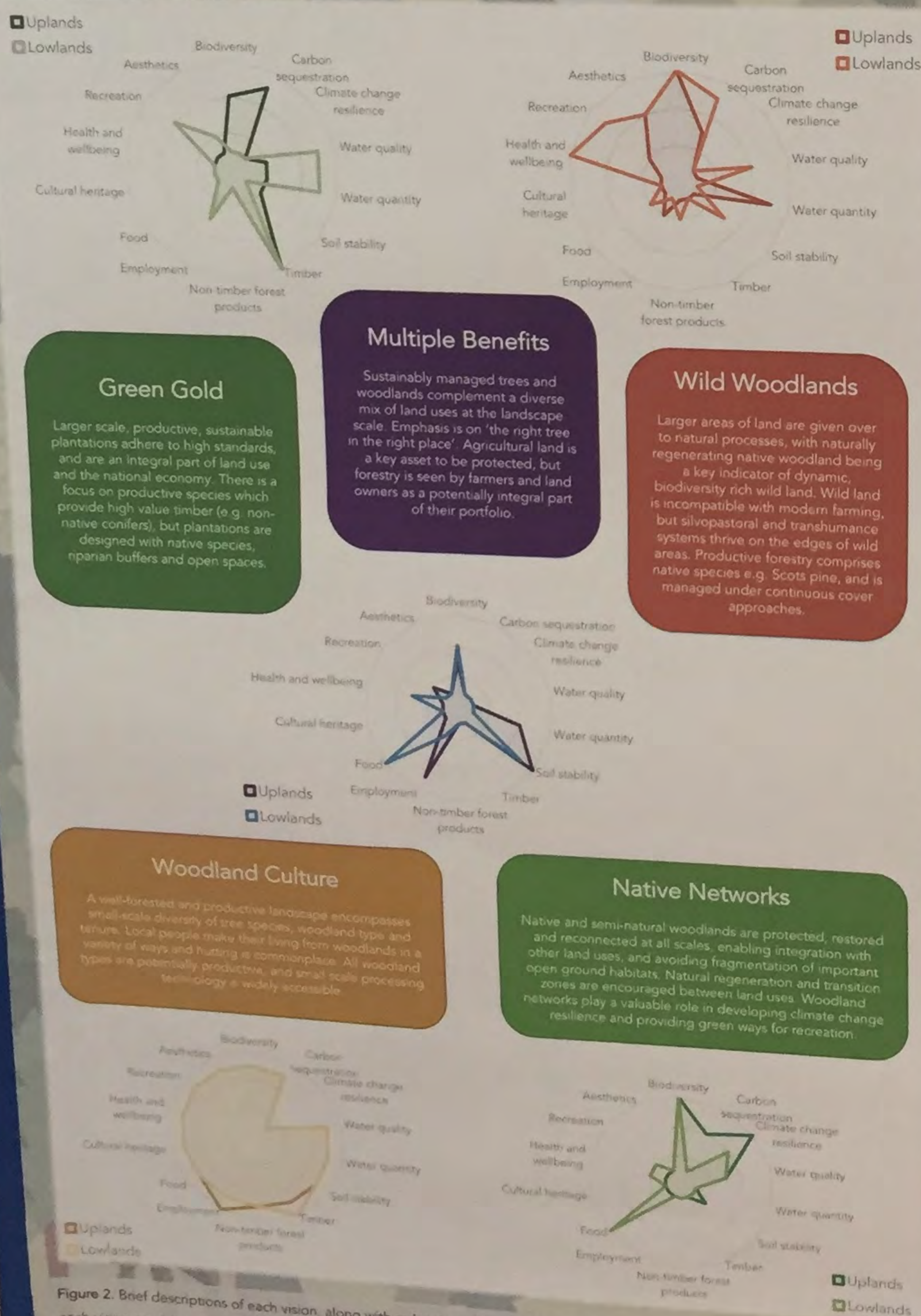


Figure 2. Brief descriptions of each vision, along with radar charts illustrating the ecosystem services (ES) which participants envisaged each vision providing. The ES preferences were elicited from the workshop and semi-structured interviews, where stakeholders were asked for feedback and input into how they saw the visions looking and working into the 21st Century.



vanessa.burton@ed.ac.uk

@vee_burton