the National Trust for Scotland

a place for everyone

CARBON CONSERVATION PROJECTS POLICY

Approved by Leadership Team May 2008
Previous version called 'Carbon Offsetting Policy' was approved by Leadership Team October 2007

Policy Statement

The National Trust for Scotland is committed to reducing its direct contribution to the emission of greenhouse gases and as such its contribution to human-induced climate change[1]. The Trust considers that best practice for all individuals and organisations is to focus on reducing carbon emissions at source. Offsets should only be used as part of a climate change strategy and as a last resort for any remaining unavoidable emissions. They must be purchased from a reputable supplier with accreditation to international standards[2] which incorporate strong safeguards for heritage conservation.

The Trust is not yet in a position to measure its own carbon emissions or savings or to meet verification or accreditation requirements for projects. It will therefore not get involved at present in the voluntary offset market, either as a purchaser or a provider.

Internally, the Trust will focus on reducing its own carbon emissions by implementing its Environmental Policy, particularly through the work of its Environment Adviser and the advice of its Environmental Steering Group.

Externally, the Trust will focus on persuading the Scottish Government, in partnership with Stop Climate Chaos Scotland and others, to reduce Scotland's overall carbon emissions through legally binding reduction targets.

However, the Trust will accept donations towards projects which achieve carbon or other greenhouse gas conservation, through long-term storage or emissions reduction, in addition to other environmental or heritage benefits such as biodiversity conservation, landscape protection or resource minimisation. This may either allow new projects to commence or enable existing projects to take place more quickly. The likely environmental impacts of any such schemes will be rigorously assessed to ensure that any adverse impacts are minimised over the whole life of the project.

[1] NTS Environmental Policy 2004

[2] The ENDS 2008 Report offered a scoring system to assess the carbon and sustainability quality of offsets based on schemes, standards and project types in the market as of February 2008. It found that credits from the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) were the highest quality in terms of carbon quality. CDM and voluntary-grade credits with additional Gold Standard certification have the highest sustainability quality.

These will be referred to as 'carbon conservation projects' rather than as 'carbon offset projects'. This is because the Trust is not in a position to claim verification, additionality or equivalence (see offsetting information below for explanation of terms) where these do not exist or cannot be proven, and therefore will not do so. It is envisaged that carbon conservation projects at Trust properties could cover a variety of activity, including: land management projects to maintain or improve carbon storage or sequestration; provision of more sustainable transport solutions for staff or visitors; replacement of equipment and infrastructure with more energy efficient versions or ones that use renewable energy rather than fossil fuels.

Background Information on Carbon Offsets

What is Carbon Offsetting?

People's everyday actions, such as heating buildings, driving vehicles or taking aeroplane flights, consume energy. Where, as in most cases, this energy is generated from fossil fuels, its consumption produces carbon emissions, which exacerbate climate change, as do other 'greenhouse gases' such as nitrogen and sulphur compounds. Carbon offsetting is a way of compensating for the emissions produced, by paying for an equivalent amount of carbon emissions to be saved elsewhere. The most publicised way of doing this is by protecting forests or planting trees (although the carbon reduction benefits of tree-planting are questionable), but it can also be done in other ways such as investing in renewable energy projects and energy and emissions efficiency improvements.

Verification, Equivalence and Additionality

There has been widespread criticism of carbon offsetting, covering a range of issues which can be partly simplified around considerations of verification and additionality. The verification issue centres on how it can be proved that the amount of carbon saved by the offset is in fact equivalent to the amount emitted in the first place. Linked to this are debates about measuring emissions, regulating the offsetting industry, and the need for national or international accreditation scheme[3] which can audit schemes on an independent and transparent basis. The additionality issue relates to whether the offset project would have gone ahead anyway, in other words whether there is a provable link between the payment from the emitter and the implementation of the offset scheme.

Immediacy, Permanence and other impacts

Other criticisms revolve around issues of immediacy and permanence; for example whether it is satisfactory that carbon emissions which take place immediately, or have already taken place, are offset by tree-planting which takes years or even decades to absorb the equivalent amount of carbon, and how it can be guaranteed that the offset will be in place for long enough to have the desired effect. Some commentators suggest that involvement in carbon offsetting raises awareness of personal and organisational carbon emissions and of issues surrounding climate change. Others, however, argue that doing so distracts from the real and urgent need to reduce carbon emissions at source, and may even be counter-productive by implying that polluting activities can continue at existing levels. There are also concerns

[3] Currently the situation for assessing and certifying carbon offset credits is complex. There are several different **types of credits** which result from the way they are produced and their regulatory context (eg CDM Certified Emission Reductions from projects created under the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism; and Voluntary Emissions Reductions (VERs) a type of voluntary offsets, which are project-based credits produced outside a legal framework and which may or may not be verified by a third party. There are various **standards** that have been developed to certify offset quality some of which set stricter criteria than others and some of which look at wider sustainability issues as well as 'carbon quality'. Standards include the Voluntary Carbon Standard, VER+, VOS and the Gold Standard.

that some projects carried out in the name of offsetting, for example certain forestry or biofuel projects, may have adverse impacts on other environmental or social objectives.

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References

T Ewing (2008) The ENDS Guide to Carbon Offsets. Environmental Data Services, London