

RECORD OF THE SIXTH MEETING OF THE NEW SCOTTISH FORESTRY FORUM HELD IN THE BEST WESTERN EDINBURGH CAPITAL HOTEL ON THURSDAY 15 NOVEMBER 2007

Present

Calum MacDonald (Chair, FC Commissioner)
Bob McIntosh (Director FC Scotland)
Simon Hodge (FC Scotland)
Ian Ross (Chair, Highland Regional Forum)
John Todd (South Scotland Regional Forum)
Simon Rennie (Chair, Central Scotland Regional Forum)
George McRobbie (Chair, Perth and Argyll Regional Forum)
Eric Baird (Grampian Regional Forum)
Bob Stubbs (Highland Regional Forum)
Bill Ritchie (Highland Regional Forum)
Hugh Miller (Grampian Regional Forum)
Tim Hall (Central Scotland Regional Forum)
Martin Craig (South Scotland Regional Forum)
Angus Yarwood, Woodland Trust
Guy Wedderburn (Belinfram/Central Scotland Regional Forum)
Jon Hollingdale (Community Woodland Association)
Ian McCall (Ramblers' Association Scotland)
Jamie Farquhar (ConFor)
Neil Langhorn (Scottish Government/FC Scotland)
Ian Francis (RSPB/Grampian Regional Forum)
Lucy Sumsion (Farm Conservation Adviser/Perth and Argyll Regional Forum)
Mike Wood (RSPB)
Margaret Watson (Scottish Enterprise)

Also in Attendance

Keith Wishart (FC Scotland, Conservator, Central Conservancy)
Bob Dunsmore (FC Scotland, Conservator, Highland Conservancy)
Syd House (FC Scotland, Conservator, Perth & Argyll Conservancy)
John Dougan (FC Scotland, Conservator, South Scotland Conservancy)
John Risby (FC Scotland, Conservator, Grampian Conservancy)
James Simpson (FC Scotland)
Gordon Patterson (FC Scotland)
Zoe Laird (FC Scotland)
Andy Leitch (FC Scotland)
Dominic Driver (FC Scotland)
Nicholas Shepherd (FC Scotland)
Catherine McCulloch (FC Scotland)
Chris Nixon (FC Scotland)
Bob Perrett (FC Scotland)

Jo Ellis (FC Scotland)
John Cummings (FC Scotland)
Liz Kirk (FC Scotland)

Apologies

Hugh Insley (Chief Executive, FE Scotland)
Roger Coppock (FC Scotland)
Priscilla Gordon-Duff (Chair, Grampian Regional Forum)
Alistair Speedie (The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)
Andrew Fairbairn (Woodland Trust)
Stuart Goodall (Confor)
Gordon Gray Stephens (Scottish Environment Link)
Sally Thomas/Ian Matheson (Rural Directorate)
Sheila Clark (Perth and Argyll Regional Forum)
Paul Ignatieff (Chair, South Scotland Regional Forum)
John Kissock (Grampian Regional Forum)
Alan Hampson (Scottish Natural Heritage)
George Lawrie (NFU Scotland)
Chris Badenoch (South Scotland Regional Forum)

1. Introduction

Calum MacDonald welcomed everyone to the meeting. He outlined the format and main purpose of today's meeting, which is about developing the next implementation plan for the Scottish Forestry Strategy.

2. Update on current issues

Bob McIntosh commented that the contribution of the forestry sector was recognised in the Scottish Government's new Spending Review. And reported on the following:

- Grants; the SRDP deal was agreed early on so money has been set aside, funding for forestry in SRDP is significant.
- Funding for the Strategic Timber Transport Fund (STTF) will continue at £5M/year for 3 years.
- Forestry Development Fund for projects not through grants, this will have a modest increase over the next 2-3 years.
- FE hold over flatline budget but increase in timber prices will help.
- Ministers' agreed a repositioning programme for the National Forest Estate. Money from sales will be recycled into acquisitions and new planting.
- Hopefully together with SRDP 10,000 ha of new planting aspiration can be achieved in the coming years.

- Update on grants – still waiting on approval of the SRDP by Brussels and very unlikely that approval will be received by the end of the year. Also unlikely that the new grants will be available before the end of February 2008.

Ian Ross welcomed the announcements about STTF and Repositioning but had some concerns regarding the land identified for the repositioning exercise and asked when details will be released. Bob replied that an evaluation of candidate sites for sale is being finalised.

Jamie Farquhar also welcomed the announcement on STTF. However, he was concerned about the SRDP Woodland Creation Scheme and asked if we can issue contracts in 2007/08. James Simpson replied that we want the contracts to go ahead regardless of late approval – still assessing proposals. Jamie also asked if the funding for SRDP was already agreed what happened to £39M for this year. Bob explained our understanding was that the SRDP is managed as a seven year programme with indicative spending allocation to forestry measures for the programme period as a whole.

Lucy Sumsion asked if Forestry Development Fund funding at local level would continue. Bob replied, yes it will continue, Conservators have some local discretion.

Mike Wood asked what the balance between new planting and managing existing woodlands will be within SRDP. Bob replied that it is difficult to say in terms of area at this stage. From the £39M total funding package – new planting measure of £18M.

Calum thanked Bob for the update and commented that exciting times lie ahead for forestry over the next few years.

3. Progress on 07/08 plan

Zoe Laird introduced a powerpoint presentation showing the progress of the Scottish Forestry Strategy Implementation Plan 2007-08. The following questions were raised after the presentation:

- Have lessons been learnt regarding setting too many milestones/indicators in the first year? Zoe explained that most regarding milestones are on track, however possibly a little bit ambitious with the indicators. Timber use and staff figures are critical so we need to find solutions. Zoe confirmed that they will keep trying although it is difficult.
- Does success suggest that we're not stretching ourselves enough as stretch is important? Calum remarked that it's a one year plan but as they look to the three year plan stretch will be important.

Simon Hodge mentioned that as we are about to go to workshops, the level of ambition is something to consider and these are aims to try and reach over the three years of the plan.

- Can community aspirations be met without legislation to permit leasing? Simon explained that although it would be better to have legislative cover, we think there are other ways of meeting partnerships' aspirations than leasing.
- The review of the national forest estate could contribute. Dominic pointed out that we have over 100 community partnerships in the national forest estate although he doesn't know how many hectares. He would find out. One of the priorities for next year is a framework for community engagement at all levels and not just for community groups.

4. Overview of thinking for 08/11 Plan

Simon Hodge introduced a powerpoint presentation providing an overview for the Scottish Forestry Strategy Implementation Plan 2008-11.

The following points were raised in a discussion after the presentation.

- Overlap between regions and the centre and what mechanisms we have in place to manage this. Simon explained that the Forum has a role in this interchange and it's input would be welcome.
- Concern about socially excluded groups, whether they are included and how to promote the use of woodlands. Dominic replied that there are many processes including equality of opportunity assessments of all initiatives.
- Will new indicators be needed? Simon commented that though we want continuity, indicators may sometimes stop being fit for the purpose. We do want to try and use data already available.
- Will there be a greater development of business development expertise in Conservancies? Simon explained that for forestry applicants this would be developed through the Rural Development Contracts process but perhaps regional workshops would be a useful way to explore what opportunities there are.
- Where WIAT II funding is coming from. Simon replied that the money is now part of FCS general baseline; some is in SRDP pot, some in FE plans and some in Forest Development Programme. New mechanisms will be used to focus resources on priorities, and although we can't say how much is allocated, we will monitor.

5. Theme workshops (Morning session)

The Forum split into four workshops to discuss the following themes:

- Timber and Business development;
- Biodiversity and Environment;
- Community development and Access;
- Climate change.

Group A - Timber and Business Development

Andy Leitch presented the following comments from the discussions held by Group A.

Main Issues Arising

- Overall, happy with the content of the programmes for both themes.
- One or two potential additional objectives.
- Focus on development of conifer seed stands.
- Need to prioritise published objectives.

Priorities

- Improving private sector production forecast.
- Continue promotion of timber use within the construction industry.
- Need to think carefully about how support is provided for the uptake of RDCs.

Group B - Biodiversity and Environment

Nicholas Shepherd presented the following comments from the discussions held by Group B.

Water, soil and air

- Role of forestry/agri-forestry to improve the quality of water and soil, and reduce carbon levels

Landscape

- New Guidelines that incorporate all aspects of the environment at the landscape scale, including degrees of sensitivity and robustness

Biodiversity

- Habitat network planning tools and guidance for integrated land use planning
- Climate change: guidance on role of native species in adaptation and mitigation
- Larger scale action on invasive species e.g. rhododendron

Group C - Community development

Dominic Driver presented the following comments from the discussions held by Group C.

Community development

- Community development improving individual quality of life, e.g.: health, access, and group activity.
- Local authority budgets more flexible - threat or opportunity?, NB: community planning partnerships, grants.
- Invest in the future - provision is not enough, long-term support for forest management needed.

Access/health

- Woodland and health: prove the link / get on and promote exercise.
- Health inequalities - where are the woods, how are they managed, and are people engaged with them?
- Don't forget access legislation, NB: core path planning.

Group D – Climate change

Chris Nixon presented the following comments from the discussions held by Group D.

Guidance

- Provide guidance on tree species/site matching & silviculture which take account of likely climate change scenarios.

Policy

- Provide a clear framework for the regional targeting of new woodland establishment

Awareness

- Maintain momentum in promoting the use of timber in eg. Architecture, Construction, Planning regulations etc.

6. Regional Workshops (Afternoon session)

Group 1 – Highland

Ian Ross presented the following comments from the discussions held by Group 1.

- Regional expression of planting targets across all types of woodlands, in line with national strategy
- Increase rural development benefits of forestry to local communities with an emphasis on market development, social housing and woodland crofts
- Work with Grampian Forum to improve information on the quality and quantity of timber particularly re Scots pine and niche markets in North Scotland
- Maximise local use and added value of timber products, taking account of carbon footprinting.
- Promote understanding of, and access to, SRDP priorities for woodland interests - communities, industry and land managers.

Group 2 - Central Scotland

Simon Rennie presented the following comments from the discussions held by Group 2, using developments arising from the Commonwealth Games as an example

- Development: winning and subsequent development of Commonwealth Games;
- 08/09 To identify and engage with the Games Delivery Team to develop saleable propositions (incl. local and national networks);
- 09/11 Establish Commonwealth Games Green Network Programme delivering propositions (linked to health, urban green infrastructure, education).

Group 3 – Grampian

John Risby presented the following comments from the discussions held by Group 3.

- Timber information -opportunities for local forestry initiatives, link funding to information.
- Biomass-consider integrated land use, provide clear guidance to focus activity (species & sites)
- Education- woodland based outdoor learning, long term need for FEI to facilitate & linked to social inclusion.
- Habitat networks- integrated grants may lose local focus and not address need for large scale

Group 4 - Perth and Argyll

Lucy Sumsion presented the following comments from the discussions held by Group 4.

- New IFS's across P&A
- SRDP and associated linkages
- Drive for renewable energy and opportunities for woodfuel

Group 5 - South Scotland

John Dougan presented the following comments from the discussions held by Group 5.

- Create an environment which will enable appropriate woodland creation
- Develop and implement actions to resolve HR challenges within the sector (Centre of Excellence)
- Develop models and approach to learn about realising benefits from tourism (Benefits vs. spend)

7. Feedback on all workshops

Simon Hodge provided a brief summary of the issues raised from the morning and afternoon sessions. He particularly mentioned:

- Good progress being made across the themes of the Strategy but now, should we focus on a few priorities or push forward on a broad front?
- More opportunities at Regional level to take the essence of the strategy and capture in regional activity, e.g. in relation to Commonwealth Games, tourism and recreation

He noted that the following issues were coming through from the meeting as of increasing importance:

- Joined up land use planning issues
- Skills and training needing a joint approach
- Increased focus on Business development
- Tourism – talking less about recreation and more about the defined economic and social outcomes
- Carbon, woodfuel and renewable energy
- Habitat networks

Forum members commented on several issues and the following points were raised.

- It was felt that we need to ensure that regional priorities are fed through RPACS and either through Conservators or otherwise. Syd House replied that it was useful to compare but in Perth and Argyll things are going fine.

- Stretch and ambition? Do we want to include items where we don't have the mechanisms to hand? Simon replied that we should have ambition but bounded by the ability of the sector to deliver.
- Opportunity to use Risk Management techniques on the whole programme although more need for scenario planning.
- For Forest Enterprise to fill gaps in private sector delivery, we need more of a strategic view.
- How will national targets become regionally split? Simon replied where specific national target is published, then this provides a lever for SRDP regional priority setting.

8. Deforestation policy

Simon introduced Forestry Commission Scotland's policy paper on deforestation in Scotland. He commented that it was important for FCS to clarify their policy on deforestation. He highlighted growing issues of landscape design, habitats, windfarms and inaccessible forests.

Tim Hall remarked that it was a good paper but would like to see stronger language used on ancient woodland sites, "generally not approved" is not good enough.

Simon Rennie mentioned that the paper doesn't capture temporary greening and sacrificial planting.

Martin Craig asked what is the grant aid for compensatory planting. Simon answered that we are not expecting to pay grant aid when this is associated with development and planting is part of planning consent. However, when part of wider proposal, e.g. inaccessible forest – some discretion will be shown. Note that under SRDP grant aid will be offered on a competitive basis.

Mike Wood said RSPB generally welcome the paper and will comment in detail. He commented that with the landscape guidelines under review now is a good time to provide guidance in this area. He asked about equivalence in compensatory planting and Simon commented that area equivalence is the obvious solution but not necessarily enough. Better would be to establish a basis for equivalence of contribution to climate change and delivery of public benefits.

Martin Craig asked where does this fit with planning. Simon replied that there were two mechanisms. One was the felling licence (but this doesn't apply where there is planning consent). The other is the National Planning Framework and planning guidance where we are seeking to embed two principles: a presumption against forest removal and a presumption for compensatory planting.

Jon Hollingdale referred to Annex B, the graph on fire – was muirburn taken into account. Internal restructuring can be significant - why was that not taken into account. Simon - would want to promote appropriate woodland redesign, in some cases a reduction or a redistribution. The key is to maintain conditions conducive to woodland regeneration. If significant size then we would treat as deforestation.

9. Next steps

In summing up Simon sought the views of the Forum that the next meeting should be a public meeting. This was agreed. He suggested some issues for discussion at the next meeting:

- finalise the next implementation plan;
- consultation on national strategic plans;
- climate change action plan – how the sector should respond.
- repositioning of the national forest estate.

He also asked:

- what type of audience do we want: forestry sector or beyond? who are the public?
- And whether it would be possible to debate two parallel themes.

It was agreed that a meeting focusing on climate change and the national forest estate should be held, probably in March.

Most members felt that it had been a very useful meeting – the group workshop system had worked well in generating constructive participation.

Simon thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 3.45pm