

## PROPOSALS FOR JOINT WORKING BETWEEN THE ENGLAND FORESTRY FORUM AND THE RURAL AFFAIRS FORUM

### Purpose

1. To outline the joint working arrangements between the England Forestry Forum (EFF) and the Rural Affairs Forum (RAF), including the proposal for a joint sub-group on the role of woodlands in rural economies and communities.

### Background

2. The RAF was established in 2002 to provide Ministers with 'regular and direct contact with the main rural groups so they know what is going on and what countryside people think'. Early in its development it was agreed that the RAF would not attempt to duplicate the role of existing fora, rather it would seek to establish robust links to exchange information on areas of common interest. Additional information on the RAF is at Annex 1.

3. Both Forums (EFF and RAF) have common objectives to share and exchange proposals for implementing the Government's policies for rural England, and monitor and review progress on implementing them. Elliot Morley is Vice Chair of the RAF and in addition the two Forums share many common members such as the Association of National Park Authorities, Council for the Protection of Rural England, National Farmers Union and the Country Land and Business Association.

4. The RAF has established a series of national sub-groups to focus on the key challenges facing rural England. One of the suggested topics for the sub-groups was the role of woodlands in rural economies and communities. As this topic cuts across the role of the England Forestry Forum (EFF), it was felt that it was worth exploring as an area for joint working.

5. The proposal to establish formal links with the RAF was considered at the EFF's workshop in July 2002. The workshop strongly supported establishing formal links with the RAF including the suggestion of a joint sub-group on the role of woodlands in rural England. The workshop groups put forward a range of suggestions on how the two forums could work together and on potential topic areas for the sub-group.

### Joint Working Arrangements

6. It is planned that the two Forums will work together by:

- sharing papers of common interest;
- raising issues for consideration by the other Forum through questions, papers or presentations; and
- establishment of joint working groups to address specific areas of common interest.



7. It is also planned that the Forums will keep each other informed by:

- sharing the deliberations and key workings of the Forums through the submission of a one page briefing note at the other Forum's meeting; and
- ensuring both Forums' members are aware of how to access information through forum websites.

8. It will be the responsibility of each Forum's Secretariat to work together to co-ordinate preparation and presentation of briefing notes and shared papers. In general Defra will be responsible for raising issues for consideration from the EFF to the RAF meetings. The Forestry Commission will have parallel responsibilities for raising key issues at the EFF meetings.

### **Joint Sub-group on the Role of Woodlands in Rural England**

9. The EFF workshop concluded that the most constructive focus for the sub-group would be to review existing good practice where woodlands contribute to the sustainable development of rural areas. This should be done by:

- identifying good practice - 'what is the lesson and who needs to learn it';
- identifying the barriers to effective dissemination and 'mainstreaming' of good practice; and
- putting forward solutions on how these barriers could be overcome.

10. Some suggested areas to explore were:

- area initiatives on integrated rural development (South West Forest, National Forest, Forest of Dean, Cumbria Forest Futures);
- the lessons from the UKWAS certification process which could be applied to agriculture;
- the role of wood fuel in community/rural development;
- community forestry and its wider application;
- forestry as a trigger in whole farm diversification; and
- the role of forestry in helping to address rural housing issues.

11. It was proposed that the work of the 'Integration Working Group' should be fed into the sub-group as background briefing material.

12. Members of the sub-group should be drawn from the organisations represented on the two forums, or nominated by the forums' members because of their relevant expertise. It is suggested that the sub-group should have no more than twelve core members, including the chair. In addition to the twelve core members, one Forestry Commission and one Defra officer would be nominated to support the sub-group through the provision of information.



13. Defra has had expressions of interest for membership of the subgroup from:

- CLA
- Environment Agency
- Churches Together in England
- Yorkshire and Humber Regional RAF representative
- Association of National Park Authorities
- British Association for Shooting and Conservation
- John Harris (Chair of Cumbria Woodlands and North England Region, Forestry and Timber Association).

### **Recommendations**

14. The EFF is asked to:

- note the role of the Rural Affairs Forum;
- agree the proposed arrangements for joint working;
- endorse the proposals for a joint sub-group with the RAF;
- comment on the suggested focus for the sub-group; and
- consider what expertise will be required for the group to effectively operate.

**Forestry Commission  
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## RURAL AFFAIRS FORUM

1. Rural Affairs Forum implements the Government's commitment in the Rural White Paper '*Our Countryside: the future*' to establish a national sounding board so that Ministers could 'have regular and direct contact with the main rural groups so they know what is going on and what countryside people think'.
2. The role of the Forum is to:
  - Identify issues of concern to rural people and businesses and offer ideas and suggestions
  - Give views on new proposals affecting rural areas
  - Give views on further policy development needed to implement the Rural White Paper and its objectives
  - Review service delivery to rural areas
  - Review implementation of the Rural White Paper and key rural policies
  - Follow up the work the Rural Task Force and its Final Report
3. The Forum will consider a number of key topics and reports each year including:
  - The Countryside Agency's State of the Countryside Report
  - Review of the Rural Service Standard
  - Report on the Rural Proofing of Government Policies
  - Progress Report on implementation of the Rural White Paper
4. The Forum is chaired by Alun Michael MP and the Vice-Chair is Elliot Morley MP. The Rural Advocate, Ewen Cameron will attend its meetings.
5. It has around 36 core members covering countryside, environment and recreation, rural economy and employment, rural communities and services, central government bodies, regional forums and sectors, and local government. There is an overlap with EFF membership including the ANPA, CPRE, NFU, and CLA. The Forestry Commission also has an official seat at the Forum

### Development of the Forum

6. The outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease in February 2001 delayed the establishment of the Forum, but the Rural Task Force provided a practical example of how it could work.
7. The Forum has agreed to meet four times a year, and has had three meetings so far.
8. Eight regional RAFs have been established and all have met at least once. At a national level a series of sub-groups are being established to focus on key issues in more detail. The sub-groups should not duplicate the role of other fora, so where



other for already exist the Rural Affairs Forum is establishing working links with them including:

- Rural Children and Young People Forum
- National Countryside Access Forum
- England Forestry Forum
- Rural Health Forum
- England Rural Development Programme Consultation Group

9. In addition a series of specific sub-groups are being established on:

- Tourism
- Developing Social Capital
- Business and rural enterprise
- Rural/urban interdependence
- Improving the rural evidence base