

Questions from our consultation

This form sets out the questions we ask in a consultation on restoring and expanding open habitats from woods and forests in England that we launched on 12 March 2009. The consultation ends on 5 June 2009. You can find the consultation at www.forestry.gov.uk/england-openhabitats-consultation or contact Dominic Driver, Forestry Commission for further information (contact details below).

Comments on any aspect of the consultation are welcome, but we are particularly interested in your responses to the questions below. This form is available at www.forestry.gov.uk/england-openhabitats-consultation.

Your name:	Judith Plumley
Your organisation (if any):	Christchurch Borough Council
Date:	1 st June 2009

No	Question.
The nature of the change	
1.	Does your aspiration for the scale of the policy fit within our calculated range of 5,600 to 30,000 ha of restoration or expansion of open habitats from woodland or forest over 10 to 15 years? This is 370 to 3,000 ha each year. What level of intervention would you prefer and how is this justified?
<p>Whilst fully supporting the sympathetic and sustainable expansion of open habitats this Council believes that it is not possible to place a figure on the scale of restoration in this simplistic way. It is impossible to visualise what 370-3000ha per year actually means in terms of landscape across England. This Council would advocate the lower level of restoration in the East Dorset Heathland complex, based on a desire to restore habitats to favourable condition. However, because the Dorset Heathland makes up a significant area of the Borough this could in fact result in a significant removal of woodland in a relatively small area and sites should therefore be managed according to local circumstances. It is also impossible to generalise in terms of percentage of woodland to be removed in any one area. In Christchurch, continued thinning over a long period has proved to be most acceptable in terms of public opinion.</p>	
Desired outcomes	
2.	Have we developed a reasonable list of desired outcomes of the policy? Do you wish to suggest any amendments?
<p>Yes, however, positive engagement of users should include improved understanding and awareness of general biodiversity issues and benefits of public policy designed to protect designated land and endangered species. Further, there is a need to improve public understanding of sensitive habitats, the impact of damaging activities as well as opportunities for volunteering, recreation, and other aspects such as the aesthetic appreciation of a local landscape.</p> <p>Issues of potential vulnerability of open landscapes to fire, vandalism and increased run-off also need to be addressed.</p>	

No	Question.
Measuring the success of the policy	
3.	Have we developed a reasonable set of indicators for evaluation? Do you wish to suggest any amendments to this indicator list?
<p>See above, there is a need for improved understanding of the value of open habitats so a measure of this is required.</p> <p>The indicator based on number of groups would be more meaningful if measuring number of volunteer hours.</p> <p>The financial viability indicator is a difficult one as costs will depend on many variables such as the ease of access to a site, the slope, cost and frequency of other management interventions, issues of fire damage/management of fire threat etc.</p> <p>Carbon balance could be measured using a system similar to the carbon footprint calculator and then showing it as a ratio against area restored.</p> <p>Survey and measure of amount of new woodland planted on non designated sites e.g on arable land to mitigate against loss/removal on designated land</p> <p>Survey and measure improvements in public understanding and attitudes</p>	
Policy proposals	
Elements present in the policy	
We will treat woodland and open habitats as potentially mutually beneficial	
4.	Do you agree that woodland and open habitats are potentially mutually beneficial? Is promotion of this idea helpful in gaining support for open habitat restoration and expansion from woodland?
Yes from both a wildlife and recreational perspective	
A presumption against removal of 'mature native woodland'	
5.	Do you agree with the principle that there should be a presumption against removal of ancient and 'mature native woodland'?
Yes- although open habitats are rarely found in this type of woodland because of the maturity and diversity of the woodland habitat. However, the principle of a presumption against removal of ancient and 'mature native woodland' will depend on where woodland is located and, therefore, it is accepted that there may be an argument for removal of woodland where it is vital to prevent defragmentation of priority open habitat	
6.	What do you think of our proposed outline definition of 'mature native woodland'?
it is not clear whether the definition requires all three bullet points to be fulfilled or whether one or more condition should be met.	
We will expect practitioners to help local users to participate in development of the initial proposals	
7.	Do you agree that local participation in decision making is helpful? What is your preferred option for how we should apply this element?

No	Question.
	Local participation in decision making is essential for this policy to work on the ground. Consultation is, however a specialised field and resource intensive. It would therefore be essential for the Forestry Commission to develop guidance and commit funding.
We will promote mechanisms for prioritising woodland removal at a regional level	
8.	Do you agree that prioritisation at a regional level is appropriate for this policy?
	Local people may expect prioritisation to be at a much smaller level than the FC regions. This is particularly important where agencies are being encouraged to reduce travel to recreational sites and to divert intensive recreation away from more sensitive sites. It is therefore essential that suitably robust alternative recreational sites are provided locally. A mosaic of different habitats is desirable even at the most local level (Countywide?)
We will apply a framework for evaluation to projects	
9.	Do you agree with this framework for evaluation? What is your preferred option for how we should apply this element?
	Agree but resource intensive therefore would support option 4 for application of the proposal
10.	How much and what kind of support do you think we should give to practitioners to help them evaluate their projects using this framework?
	Clear guidance, resources, funding for consultants required. Amount and type depends on local circumstances, skills and funding available
To avoid net deforestation in England we will try not to go over a threshold rate of woodland removal due to restoring and expanding open habitats.	
11.	Do you agree with the principle of an England scale threshold rate of woodland removal? What is your preferred mechanism by which such a threshold could be applied to policy?
	Disagree with an England-wide threshold rate for woodland removal. Open habitat restoration opportunities are not found across the whole country and therefore local impacts could be disproportionate. Agree with the principle of a threshold rate but needs to be applied much more locally. Whilst the prospect of compensatory planting is the most desirable it could be difficult to achieve at anything less than County level.
12.	Do you consider that the proposed threshold is about right, too high or too low?
	Don't know. Needs to be informed by continual monitoring policy
Key variables	

No	Question.
What is the balance between achieving biodiversity objectives and the need to reduce green house gas emissions?	
13.	Is there a way, in the short term, we can better estimate the contribution to biodiversity objectives from different levels of restoration or expansion of open habitats?
Not aware of any methodology	
14.	Do you agree that management practices to minimise carbon emissions during restoration or expansion of open habitats should be adopted? Do you agree with the outline practices presented? How could we best ensure that such practices are adopted?
Yes. Yes, broadly although circumstances may vary locally. Stump removal may be a requirement for health and safety reasons, some species will respond to coppicing and regenerate. Such practices could be encouraged via funding of projects which comply. Clear guidance and monitoring will help ensure best practices are adopted.	
15.	Do you agree that it is appropriate to include impact on long-term average carbon store <i>and</i> loss of potential to substitute timber for higher carbon materials and fuel in the calculations on carbon balance?
Yes	
16.	Where do you think the appropriate balance lies between achieving biodiversity objectives and the need to reduce carbon emissions? What processes might help to make this judgement?
Climate change could impact upon open habitat in the long run, it is therefore important to fully understand the potential impacts involved through robust monitoring. There are also issues around the potential to increase run-off and quality of life issues which need to be considered such as the opportunity to enjoy recreation and healthy lifestyles as well as the passive enjoyment of landscapes for their own sake.	
Should we be managing open habitats to keep them in 'favourable condition' or should we adopt a more dynamic approach to land management?	
17.	Outside SSSIs, do you agree that a more dynamic attitude to land management could deliver equivalent or greater gains for open habitats and species than one where success for all sites is based on assessments of condition as applied to SSSIs?
The Council believes that wherever possible a more dynamic approach is preferable both within and outside SSSIs. However, it is understood that on isolated or particularly threatened designated land there may be the need to move quickly to favourable condition.	
18.	If so, how might such an approach be developed? Is there scope for modifying the conservation objectives on some SSSIs to incorporate a similar approach? If not, do you consider that the endpoint for all restoration proposals should be judged against favourable condition as defined for SSSI habitats?
The Council would support a cumulative approach to restoration (particularly on more	

No	Question.
	public/urban sites) where woodland is not clear felled but gradual thinning over a number of years enhances the wider biodiversity.
What level of woodland removal due to restoring or expanding open habitats could avoid a significant negative impact on the timber industry?	
19.	Can you provide any information on the likely links between any reduction in timber production and economic activity in the timber sector?
No	
Different approaches to applying policy	
20.	Which of the three approaches by which we make decisions about woodland removal is your preferred option? Can you see any alternative types of approach based either on a combination of these approaches or on new ideas?
All options appear valid. Of the three options proposed, the third (appropriate scale and pace) is the most desirable. However, as previously stated there is a need to view what is appropriate at a local level (not regional) and with the need for support in funding for land-owners to maintain non-viable units.	
The role of compensatory planting	
21.	What is the appropriate role of compensatory planting in this policy?
Where possible there should be a presumption of compensatory planting and / or natural regeneration close enough to the area removed to allow for appropriate recreation and to reduce the possible damage to the more vulnerable open habitats. A mix of type of compensatory planting may be most acceptable to local people although in terms of biodiversity native woodland would be more desirable.	
Factors to consider when deciding which policy is likely to work best	
22.	Have we developed a reasonable set of questions for informing the decision on which policy is best? Do you wish to suggest any changes to the list of questions?
Local engagement should not only be in decision making but also in future management and improved understanding of the value of habitats.	
Implications for delivery mechanisms	
23.	Have we missed any major implications for delivery mechanisms? Would any be particularly welcome or unwelcome to you?
There is no mention of land owned by Local Authorities and the implications for them. The requirement for compensatory planting would impact upon them as insufficient land may be available. The requirement for e.g. grazing unit size plots would have a similar impact. Local authorities also have close contact with the local community and additional pressures in terms of government funding which may make some of the criteria for funding particularly important for them.	
Other comments	

No	Question.
We welcome your input on any other aspect of this consultation.	

Please include the "information about you" form with your response.¹

Please send your completed forms to:

[Dominic Driver](#)

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By 17.00hrs, Friday 5 June 2009.

¹ See www.forestry.gov.uk/england-openhabitats-consultation for a copy.