

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:	A R Turner
Your organisation (if any):	East Dorset District Council
Date:	4/05/09

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?
East Dorset District Council has a concern over the maintenance and restoration of heathland habitat, as this is of particular importance in the district. It supports the removal of forestry plantations to allow the restoration of heathlands on a significant scale in a way that ensures their continued, sustainable future management, and where this can be done without detriment to the landscape setting and amenities of its towns and villages. The Council recommends a net increase in varied mixed woodland nationally and wishes to emphasise that sufficient compensatory mixed woodland planting of indigenous species should be undertaken to maintain a balance of native habitats in its area overall.	
Desired outcomes	
2.	Have we developed a reasonable list of desired outcomes of the policy? Do you wish to suggest any amendments?
no comment	
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?
no comment	
Policy proposals	

No	Question.
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?
Restoration schemes should have regard to the role of woodland, of whatever composition, in landscape character. Such woodland may be valued locally for its screening and recreational roles. It is considered from local experience that schemes that take this contribution into account and include their retention, even in a reduced form, are more likely to gain local support than those that advocate large scale removal.	
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'?
Given the biodiversity value associated with mature native woodland there should be a firm commitment to its retention within schemes for open habitat restoration.	
6.	What do you think of our proposed outline definition of 'mature native woodland'?
no comment	
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?
Early engagement with the local community in restorations schemes should be a pre-requisite of any policy. On the basis of local experience in East Dorset, of the options indicated it is considered that 1 and 4 best address this issue.	
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?
It is considered that some recognition should be given in target setting to variations in woodland cover and habitat within a region perhaps taking prioritisation down to County level or the nearest equivalent FC grouping.	
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?
To be effective the application of the policy in areas beyond the FC estate or to practitioners other than those directly employed by FC requires a commonly applied method of evaluation as well as positive assistance and guidance. Options 1 and 4 would provide that approach.	

No	Question.
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?
no comment	
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?
no comment	
12.	Do you consider that the proposed threshold is about right, too high or too low?
no comment	
Key variables	
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?
no comment	
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 - it is a difficult subject area and the work needs to be developed.	
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 - otherwise there is a danger that the programme will not be carbon neutral	
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?
In theory there should be no conflict between the two objectives. A sustainability assessment of the programme coupled with sound local management practice and clearly set carbon objectives would all help.	
Should we be managing open habitats to keep them in 'favourable condition' or	

No	Question.
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?
Given the uncertainties surrounding climate change the mixed habitat approach would appear to offer a potentially more flexible response. Incorporating a woodland mix whether of native or other species would also address public concerns which have been expressed in East Dorset during heathland clearance where woodland plantations have served an important screening and recreational role for urban areas.	
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?
no comment	
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 comment	
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?
This Council consider that restoration needs to be carefully targeted and given the uncertainties surrounding climate change and the need to avoid deforestation it is considered that option 1 would appear to meet its concerns. However the higher level of control in option 3 would also appear to offer targeting but, whilst being less costly than option 1, runs the potential risk of deforestation and the need for compensatory planning	
The role of compensatory planting	
21.	What is the appropriate role of compensatory planting in this policy?
no comment	
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?
no comment	
Implications for delivery mechanisms	

No	Question.
23.	Have we missed any major implications for delivery mechanisms? Would any be particularly welcome or unwelcome to you?
no comment	
<p>Other comments</p> <p>We welcome your input on any other aspect of this consultation.</p>	
<p>Additional Comments: As a further general comment on the policy, in East Dorset areas of forest, woodland and heath often lie directly adjacent to large urban areas. This has resulted in considerable pressures on these areas from recreational needs and from malicious damage. Whilst the need to meet biodiversity targets is evident in the policy there is also a need to acknowledge the other roles played by these habitats and restoration schemes need to be targeted and be carefully zoned around populationcentres. Schemes of restoration should also seek to create corridors and links between habitats and where possible between adjacent schemes as well as other areas of open land.</p> <p>Restoration of open areas also needs to be targeted to the most suitable sites e.g. areas of forest with an established under storey of Heather present and the correct soil conditions.</p> <p>Recreation needs robust areas of land and pine plantations offer some of the most robust types of land available whilst heathland is a more delicate habitat. There is a case that pine should be retained in areas that are well used for recreation and that heathland restoration should take place further from urban areas using the established pine, where available, as a buffer to absorb recreational needs.</p>	

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.