

The long-term role of the Forestry Commission England Public Forest Estate: consultation.

South West regional consultation event.

The aim of the event was to stimulate discussion on the issues raised by the consultation, allow people to hear the views of others and to encourage people to submit a written response to the consultation.

Details

Date of meeting: 23 July 2009

Location: Taunton Rugby Club

Number attending: 90

Chair: Mike Moser, Chair, South West Regional Advisory Committee

Forestry Commission England National Committee attendee(s): None

Study Working Group attendee(s): Brian Mahony, Forestry Commission

Key points raised during whole meeting discussion

- Multi-purpose forestry is complex and requires a much longer-term perspective than most other types of natural resource management.
- Extreme shortage of cash over 5+ years.
- Basics for life - shelter, water, heat are needed and should be the underlying purpose.
- Opportunity to use the Estate to create connections between people and a working landscape.
- Production of timber is underlying - income and carbon. This requires commercial crops (i.e.: conifers) to generate income.
- We underestimate the therapeutic value of woodland.
- There is genuine conflict between objectives, which we should not try to ignore - increasing delivery of public benefits does require additional public funding.
- How do we respond to changing strategic priorities when making complex integrated decisions about woodland via, for example, Forest Design Plans?
- Moral obligation to be concerned with biodiversity translates into absolute obligation to restore ancient woodland to native woodland.

Public Forest Estate consultation

- To what extent should the Estate' commercial forests remain in public ownership or be returned to the private sector?

Reality check.

- Lots of suggestions to enhance what the Public Forest Estate does, how do we pay for this?
 - Public money for public benefit is OK, e.g.: compare to agriculture.
 - But most people likely to prioritise other things, e.g.: free public health service. This translates into the Estate having to pay for more things itself. Need to look firstly at what the estate provides in the form of shelter, fuel etc.
 - But don't forget that natural environment improves health and reduces the cost on the health service.
 - Carbon offsetting schemes have potential.
 - Need to engage taxpayers with the Public Forest Estate and have greater presence in places where lots of people live. Implies green infrastructure therefore opportunity for payments from developers, e.g.: section 106 agreements.
 - Must have the right tree in the right place and landscape scale working – opportunity to improve the return from tree planting as well as increasing biodiversity benefits.

If we have the resources to do only one of the activities, which should it be?

- Education, e.g.: about climate change.
- Need a land bank of timber in conifers.
- Climate change adaptation for people and wildlife.

Comment from Chair

- High quality participation from a high a quality set of stakeholders and a gratifyingly high turnout.
- Some interesting discussion and differences of opinion about the role of the private sector in long-term management of Public Forest Estate.
- Better communication of the current range of benefits and potential is key.

Note taker: Dominic Driver, Senior Projects Officer

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To find out more go to www.forestry.gov.uk/england-estatestudy or contact:

Public Forest Estate consultation

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