

**REPORT OF THE 9th MEETING OF THE ENGLAND FORESTRY FORUM
HELD AT LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION, LONDON, TUESDAY, 28 OCTOBER 2003**

1. The meeting was chaired by Mr Paul Hill-Tout, Forestry Commission Director, England.

Present:	Ms Judith Webb	Country Land and Business Association and Forestry and Timber Association
	Mr Rob Green	Countryside Agency
	Dr Keith Kirby	English Nature
	Mr Peter Wilson	Forest Industries Development Council
	Professor Martin Whitby	Forestry Commission Regional Advisory Committee (North East England)
	Mr Martin Glynn	Forestry Contracting Association
	Mr John Vaughan	Community Forests
	Mr Humphrey Temperley	Local Government Association
	Mr Simon Evans	National Forest Company
	Mr Russell Rowley	Small Woods Association
	Ms Nerys Jones	National Urban Forestry Unit
	Mr Rob Rees	Planning Officers Society
	Dr Mike Clarke	Royal Society for The Protection of Birds
	Mr Tim Leavers	United Kingdom Forest Products Association
	Dr Hilary Allison	Wildlife & Countryside Link Forestry Group and Woodland Trust
In attendance:	Dr Victoria Edwards	Forestry Commissioner
	Mr Mark Pritchard	Forestry Commission
	Dr Simon Pryor	Forestry Commission
	Mr Richard Barker	Forestry Commission
	Mr John Tewson	Forest Enterprise
	Mr Alan Taylor	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Introduction

2. In welcoming members to the meeting, Mr Hill-Tout explained that the Minister, Ben Bradshaw MP, had been urgently called away on urgent business and that he would chair the meeting instead. Mr Hill-Tout said that the main business of the meeting was to consider the Government's response to the final report of the Biodiversity Working Group.

Report of the Seventh Meeting of the Forum Held on 22 October 2002

3. Mr Hill-Tout invited members to note the report of the Forum Meeting held on 1 April 2003.



Matters Arising

Forestry Reviews

4. Mr Hill-Tout responded to an enquiry from Mr Wilson about the progress of the SR2002 Forestry Review and the Rural Delivery Review by explaining that an Economic Analysis of Forestry Policy by CJC Consulting had been published on the Defra web-site and that the results of the review had been passed to Lord Haskins to inform the Rural Delivery Review. The report of Rural Delivery Review was expected to be published shortly and it was expected that this would be accompanied by a headline Government response.

Forestry Commission's use of Woodfuel

5. The potential to use woodfuel in Commission buildings was being considered on a case by case basis as existing heating systems came to the end of their useful lives. New developments, for example at Bedgbury, Dalby and Wyre would have woodfuel heating considered at the design stage. The community scheme at Kielder Village included heating for Forestry Commission property.

Joint working with the Rural Affairs Forum

6. The formation of a joint sub-group had been unexpectedly delayed, however, it was expected to be finalised soon.

End user engagement

7. Mr Temperley asked about the lack of engagement with end users and Mr Hill-Tout noted that this would be picked up later in the meeting with Forum Paper 8/03, (Industry Group)

The Government Response to the Final Report of the Forestry and Biodiversity Working Group (Paper 06/03)

8. Mr Hill-Tout thanked Dr Clarke (working group leader) for the final report which had been slightly revised after the last Forum meeting to reflect the discussion at that meeting. He also introduced Dr Pryor who co-ordinated the Government's response to the recommendations.
9. Dr Clarke welcomed the response that had broadly accepted most of the recommendations, although he was disappointed with the lack of clear links to outputs and measures for monitoring progress. The Report's recommendations had provided an opportunity to seek a shared agreement across Defra on the wider biodiversity interests of woodland management. Mr Hill-Tout explained that the response was a starting point and made reference to the example set by the response to the Regional Issues working group which had resulted in a major policy decision to go ahead with the preparation of Regional Forestry Frameworks in all regions.



Landscape Scale Conservation

10. In response to questions on landscape scale conservation Mr Pritchard said that a briefing note on CAP reform would be sent to members with the minutes. Mr Hill-Tout accepted that there should be close links between Agri-Environment Schemes and WGS and that the results of the consultations on these schemes should be drawn together. He also noted that there were new ideas for small woodlands on farms in the Agri-Environment Scheme proposals.
11. There was some concern over the lack of acceptance of the recommendation that Regional Forestry Frameworks should be proofed against the England Biodiversity Strategy. It was also noted that any review of the England Forestry Strategy would have to be in the context of the Government's response to the Rural Delivery Review.
12. It was suggested that there may be future opportunities to connect individual sites to wider landscape scale change. Dr Pryor pointed out that it was difficult to quantify the benefits of landscape scale change, however, Mr Hill-Tout suggested that the Public Benefit Recording System, which Forum members had seen in the morning technical session, may be developed for wider application. Public benefit was the current focus for judging activity by the Forestry Commission.

Restoration of Priority Open-ground Habitats

13. Looking at the Restoration of Open-ground Habitats Dr Clarke emphasised the need for Regional Forestry Frameworks to look at woodland through the new agenda of social and biodiversity benefits, rather than from the economic drivers that created them. Dr Pryor responded by saying that the restoration of non-woodland habitats was a major issue for the Regional Forestry Frameworks. Dr Kirby cautioned against labelling restoration as a forestry issue as it was a subject for the whole of the agricultural sector, although forestry was leading the field in restoring some habitats.
14. Mr Temperley noted that none of the Defra's PSA targets had been referred to in the response and he was concerned that the connections were not being made. Mr Hill-Tout reassured the Forum that there was joined up working to meet the land management targets. An example was the Woodland Bird Group being linked to the Farmland Birds Public Service Agreement target.

Role of Woodland in Water Catchments

15. In regard to Woodland in Water Catchments Mr Temperley was very concerned with the statement: "there is currently inadequate evidence to substantiate a major role for woodland in flood attenuation" when for example in Japan where forestry was valued at 70 billion yen, 13 billion of this was derived from its benefit to the water cycle. He added that there was plenty of emerging evidence saying that woodland can have a considerable positive effect on the condition of soil, and a serious positive impact on run-off and diffuse pollution. Dr Pryor shared the view that woodland had a role to play and pointed out that as knowledge improved then the Government's position would be reviewed. Dr Kirby added that more evidence was likely to be available in a relatively short time.



16. Mr Hill-Tout closed the discussion on this section of the response by explaining that the protection of key natural resources, including soil and water in their widest context was becoming increasingly important. He was keen to build on the existing work being done by Defra, the Environment Agency and English Nature in order to help gain a deeper understanding of the issues.

Short Rotation Coppice

17. Ms Webb was concerned that communication, both internally and externally, was not always done well and that information on developing issues like Short Rotation Coppice failed to get out to those who needed to know.
18. Dr Clarke noted that some steps towards implementing the accepted recommendations had already been made but he had been looking for greater clarity in the response. This was in order to see the achievements made and the Government's commitments to following through. Mr Temperley agreed that the lack of targets in the response was not helpful. Dr Pryor acknowledged their concerns and added that for internal use a list of commitments had been agreed. Mr Hill-Tout closed the discussion by advising the Forum that the accepted recommendations would be added to the existing standing progress report.

Regional Forestry Frameworks Progress (Paper 07/03)

19. Mr Hill-Tout introduced the paper, which was an update on the progress report that had been presented to the last meeting. All regions were scheduled to complete the process of preparing Frameworks by the end of 2005. In response to a question about the consultation process Mr Hill-Tout explained that it was up to the regional steering groups to decide how to consult, although a full public consultation, as had been carried out in the East of England, was being encouraged by the Commission.
20. It was suggested that the South West appeared to be lagging behind other regions. However, this was because of local circumstances rather than a lack of will. Mr Glynn asked how the English Woodland Grant Scheme was going to reflect the priorities identified in the Regional Forestry Frameworks and Mr Hill-Tout explained that the new England Woodland Grant Scheme has been designed with maximum flexibility in order to give a high degree of discretion to the regions. The English Woodland Grant Scheme was scheduled to be implemented in 2005 although all the regions may not be in a position to fully exploit the regional flexibility immediately.
21. In regard to funding questions, it was noted that there could not be any assumptions that there would be increased resources and that existing commitment had always to be taken into account. The importance, at this stage, was to get a grant scheme that could provide a framework for ongoing developments. Development of the English Woodland Grant Scheme was taking place in a rapidly changing environment where the regional agenda and regional devolution were moving forward as a Government priority.



Industry Group (Paper 08/03)

22. Mr Wilson introduced the paper and said that the aim of the partnership was to help develop the competitiveness of the industry sector in order to underpin the objectives in the England Forestry Strategy. He drew the Forum's attention to the draft terms of reference and advised that the Secretariat was likely to be established in the CLA offices in London. Potential areas for action had been identified and these were noted in the paper.
23. Mr Temperley was concerned that the bottom of the supply chain was not engaged in the partnership, for example builders' merchants and volume house builders. Mr Wilson explained that at the current stage of development the plan was to keep the group small. Once the direction had been established it would be time to consider appropriate expansion, as had been done with the Scottish industry cluster. Mr Hill-Tout noted that everyone was pulling in the same direction and that the partnership was being established against a different background to that in Scotland. The industry in England was more fragmented and had less membership of trade bodies. In addition, unlike Scotland, timber production volumes were not set to rise significantly.
24. In the context of developing the industries competitiveness Ms Webb drew the Forum's attention to the outcomes of the Defra Learning and Skills Workshop that had been held in 24 October. It had looked at the advice and skills needs for sustaining forestry businesses. A report of the outcomes would be sent out with the Forum minutes.

Progress Reports (Paper 09/03 and 10/03)

25. Mr Hill-Tout thanked members of the Forum for their contributions and urged them to continue supplying updates.
26. In response to a question on Best Practice Guidance, in relation to land use planning, Mr Pritchard said that the draft Planning Policy Statement 7 (Sustainable Development in Rural Areas) had been published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for public consultation and this contained a short paragraph on forestry. Best Practice guidance had been delayed pending the publication of the final version of the Statement.
27. When questioned on fencing and the grazing of upland woodland Dr Pryor reported that the issues were yet to be resolved. In regard to grazing it was also noted that an evaluation of the achievements of the Deer Initiative was being undertaken and that Defra were working on a national deer strategy.
28. Dr Allison expresses concern with the plans for buffering woodland in Defra's Entry Level Scheme. She suggested that this not an adequate solution for the protection and expanding of ancient woodland. Ms Webb also expressed concern at the term buffer and suggested that 'intermediate habitat' was a much better description of what was trying to be achieved.



Any Other Business

29. Mr Hill-Tout noted that there were currently no working groups active and he would welcome suggestions for any new working groups. He also reminded members that the public consultation on the English Woodland Grant Scheme was open and that the closing date for responses was 14 January 2005

Date of Next Meeting

30. It is planned to hold the next meeting of the Forum in London in the Spring