

REPORT OF THE 3RD MEETING OF THE ENGLAND FORESTRY FORUM HELD AT NOBEL HOUSE, LONDON, THURSDAY, 13 JULY 2000

1. The meeting was chaired by Mr Elliot Morley MP, Forestry Minister for England.

Present:

Dr Nick Atkinson	Association of National Park Authorities
Mr John Vaughan	Community Forests
Mr Alex Hunt	Council for British Archaeology
Mr Alastair Rutherford	Council for the Protection of Rural England
Sir Henry Aubrey-Fletcher	Country Landowners Association
Mr Richard Lloyd	Countryside Agency
Mr Stephen Trow	English Heritage
Dr Keith Kirby	English Nature
Mr Emyr Poole	English Partnerships
Dr Alun Gee	Environment Agency
Mr Chris Stratton	Forestry Commission Regional Advisory Committee (Midlands & East England)
Mrs Rachel Thomas	Forestry Commission Regional Advisory Committee (South and West England)
Mr Roger Hay	Forestry Contracting Association
Mr Humphrey Temperley	Local Government Association
Mr Simon Evans	National Forest Company
Mr Russell Rowley	National Small Woods Association
Mr David Russell	National Trust
Ms Nerys Jones	National Urban Forestry Unit
Mr Ray Kessler	North West Regional Development Agency
Ms Emily Richmond	Ramblers Association
Mr Chris Stapleton	Royal Town Planning Institute
Mr Edward Brun	Timber Growers Association
Mr Alan Powell	United Kingdom Forest Products Association
Mr David Stewart	Wildlife Trusts
Mr Mike Townsend	Woodland Trust

In attendance:

Mr John James	Forestry Commissioner
Mr Paul Hill-Tout	Forestry Commission
Mr Mark Pritchard	Forestry Commission
Mr Barry Sidaway	Forestry Commission
Mr Geoff Hatfield	Forest Enterprise
Mr Jim Bowman	Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
Mrs Ann Dolphin	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Introduction



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2. In welcoming members to the meeting, Mr Morley thanked Working Group Leaders for their reports. He said that 3 of the reports were the main subjects for discussion under agenda item 3 and would give members the opportunity to comment on future forestry policy.

Report of the Second Meeting of the Forum Held on 14 February 2000

3. Mr Morley invited members to note the report of the Forum Meeting held on 14 February 2000. Mr Waldon of the RSPB had asked that the report of the meeting be amended to note that it was agreed that additional Working Groups of the Forum could be set up if there was a need. Mr Morley noted that there was one matter arising that would not be covered by the agenda. This related to paragraph 19 of the report and his invitation to Mr Wilson, Director of the Forestry Industry Development Council, to prepare a paper on their work. Mr Wilson will prepare a paper for discussion at the next Forum meeting.

Working Group 1 – Business Advice, Training and Support Draft Report (Paper 14/00)

4. Mr Hay introduced the Group's report, commenting that the main issue identified was the small size of most forestry businesses. Consequently, the Group recommended that the Small Business Service should be encouraged to include micro forestry businesses in their work. A further difficulty was that many farmers and foresters believed they did not recognise the need for training and the Group considered that the advisory approach developed in northwest England could be applied more widely. Finally, financial support mechanisms for training varied across England and there was a need for a more consistent approach to providing support.
5. Mr Morley said that he didn't see any difficulty in principle with the recommendations and suggested that the group needed to consider how the recommendations should be taken forward. He agreed that the forestry industry should play a leading role as set proposed in paragraph 11(c) of the report and suggested that the Marches Woodland Business Club Network was a good example of the benefits of a co-ordinated approach. On the issue of business advice, Mr Morley suggested there may be scope within the Government's Action Plan for Farming and this should be considered further. Mr Lloyd said he understood the Action Plan could provide scope in the context of farm diversification activities.
6. Mr Powell raised the issue of funding for machine operator training given that forestry in England was diverse, requiring multi-machine skills and suggested there should be a more comprehensive approach to reduce the cost to individuals of obtaining multiple certificates. Mr Hay commented that although numbers were relatively low, a means of compensating operators needed to be found. Certification was required by the Health and Safety Executive and was an industry led initiative. Mr Morley said that it was not generally the case that there should be direct subsidy for this, but the situation would be looked into.
7. Mr Stewart commented that there was a potentially missed opportunity by not linking with LANTRA, the land-based industry training group. It was not easy to get advisers and to share practices, but the Forum was the place to bring this forward. Mrs Thomas saw a need for mentoring and felt that the Forestry Commission should play a leading role in with this. Mr Hay agreed and said that there are apprentice schemes in Scotland, which could also be developed in England, perhaps including the RDAs. Mr Stratton commented that there was a surplus of people in agriculture and that help with business planning and start-up finance would help encourage movement into new business areas such as forestry. Mr Vaughan added that there was a need to engage with schoolchildren to promote forestry as a career opportunity, through a national strategic framework. Mr Morley thanked Mr Hay for his report and noted that TREELINE, the forestry industry training group, were currently in discussion with LANTRA.

Working Group 2 – Land Regeneration Draft Report (Paper 15/00)

8. Introducing the Group's report, Mr Stapleton highlighted issues identified since the last Forum meeting. The Group had recognised there was no single methodology available for assessing different sites and a more comprehensive approach was required. Mr Stapleton referred also to the effects that tree planting could have on releases of pollution from contaminated sites, and on water quality and quantity in catchment areas. Related to this, the question of long-term liability was a major concern. The Group had also highlighted the opportunities to improve the approach to public consultation, perhaps based on the approach being developed by the Forestry Commission, and suggested that this issue was also relevant to the work of the Forum's Planning Working Group.
9. Mr Morley said that the issue of liabilities arising from contaminated land had been considered in the past by DETR and wondered whether this was something that should be addressed by the Forestry Commission. Mr Hatfield said that the issues were complicated and Forest Enterprise considered them on a site by site basis. Mr Pritchard noted that the Commission has sought legal advice on the issues and whilst there was no universal solution there were some specific points that had to be considered on each site. He would ask the Commission's lawyers to prepare a paper reviewing these.
10. Mr Morley noted the Agenda for Action set out in Annex A of the paper and suggested that the Group consider how these should be implemented. He added that land regeneration was a good opportunity for forestry and it was appropriate to consider the best use for brownfield sites.

Working Group 4 – Town and Country Planning (Paper 16/00)

11. Introducing the Group's report, Mr Evans said that he had been impressed by the energy and commitment of Group members and the good feedback received. He drew attention to the Group's main recommendation for a new Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) to replace the earlier Circular on Trees and Forestry. The Group also recommended the production of a new Best Practice Guidance note to promote forestry to a wide audience so as to broaden awareness of the England Forestry Strategy. He said that the Group had identified the need for clear messages to be put across and now sought guidance from the Forum on the way forward.
12. Mr Morley said that he agreed with the Group's general recommendation for recognising forestry within the planning system. DETR was the lead Department for this. Mr Morley added that forestry should be promoted across government and thought that PPGs might be too narrow a mechanism to achieve this. Mr Bowman commented that DETR planning officials and Ministers were unlikely to consider forestry a suitable subject for a dedicated PPG. There was however scope to ensure that forestry was covered in existing PPGs, when they were revised. He did however agree that there was a need to promote forestry to the planning sector.

13. Mr Evans said that the Group had received a strong message was that any guidance on forestry needed to carry weight and that planners and developers were more likely to follow national policy guidance. Mr Stratton and Mrs Thomas supported the need to highlight forestry as an enabling land use and advocated that the Forum should push the case for forestry. Mr Rowley supported the recommendation for a new PPG citing recent work by Lucy Nichol at Oxford Brookes University. Dr Atkinson and Ms Richmond also supported the recommendation for a new PPG. Ms Richmond added that with so many Government papers a single source document was the best mechanism. Concluding the discussion, Mr Morley thanked Mr Evans for his report adding that there was clear support within the Forum for a new PPG.

Concluding Discussion

14. Mr Morley thanked the Group Leaders for their draft reports and invited Forum Members to send further written comments to each of the Working Group Leaders by the end of August. The three Groups would then consider these and finalise their reports by the end of October before submitting them to the Forum Secretariat. The Secretariat would issue guidance on the structure and layout of reports by the end of August.

Working Group 3 - Regional Issues (Oral Report)

15. Mrs Thomas reported that the Working Group would be meeting on 27 July to look in detail at the regional agenda and opportunities for promoting forestry regionally.

Working Group 5 – Protection of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (Oral Report)

16. Mr Townsend reported that a meeting was to take place the following week to agree the Group's draft report for circulation to Forum members for comment.

Working Group 6 – Community Forestry (Paper 17/00)

17. Introducing the Group's progress report, Mr Vaughan said that the Group would welcome views from Forum Members on how widely to draw its remit (paragraph 4 of the report). He also drew Members attention to the outcome of the seminar organised by NUFU in Birmingham in April (paragraph 5 of the report) and said that copies of the output from the seminar report could be made available to Forum members.

Working Group 7 – Landscape (Oral Report)

18. Mr Rutherford reported that the Working Group was planning to use the landscape issues paper prepared as part of the UK Forest Accord process as the starting point for developing its promotional package of advice.

Working Group 8 – Funding (Paper 18/00)

20. In Mr Wilkinson's absence, the Progress Report was noted.

Concluding Discussion

21. Mr Morley thanked the Group Leaders for their progress reports. He proposed that these five Groups should circulate their draft reports to the Forum (via the Secretariat) by the end of September and for members to send written comments to Group Leaders by the end of October. The reports should then be finalised, using the guidance to be issued by the Secretariat at the end of August, and submitted to the Secretariat by the end of November.

The High Weald Management Initiative (Paper 19/00)

22. Introducing his paper, Mr Stewart highlighted two key issues. First the High Weald comprised a large, under-utilised resource of high nature conservation and landscape value. With changes that farming industry was experiencing there was an opportunity to integrate forestry with other activities. Second, there were real shortages of manual labour and issues of degradation through lack of woodland management. Mr Stewart welcomed comments from the Forum on the four issues highlighted in paragraphs 9 to 12.
23. Mr Evans suggested that woodcraft sales would benefit by linking the product to the identity and place of production. Mr Russell commented that the National Trust was currently working with local people near Brighton to develop coppicing skills. He noted that Anglia WoodNet had also gained experience of adding value to products, and the Soil Association was looking at the potential for organic forestry, the products of which might have considerable popular appeal. He added that high value products were not the only answer and suggested looking at a much wider range. Mr Vaughan commented that people working at the micro scale needed multi-skills, and advocated apprenticeships to assist with the shortage of skilled labour. He suggested that encouraging people into the environment would help them make the connection between management and the product. The local image and getting the sustainability message onto products would also help. Mr Hay suggested that there was a need for more broadly based training to produce people equipped with a wide range of skills. Mr Lloyd commented that the purpose of the High Weald and other similar initiatives was to try out new ideas.
24. Mrs Thomas commented that the four questions posed in the paper were very important and suggested that the Forestry Commission might organise a seminar to consider them in detail. Mr Hill-Tout agreed to consider this. Closing the discussion, Mr Morley said that the paper had raised some very relevant issues and looked forward to developing solutions through the Forum.

Current Countryside Agency Activity in Support of the England Forestry Strategy (Paper 20/00)

25. Introducing the paper, Mr Lloyd commented that this was the first overview of forestry produced by the Agency following the merger last year of the Countryside and Rural Development Commissions. The Agency's goal is to encourage sustainable development through influencing policy and practice, backed up by research and demonstration. Mr Lloyd noted that with the exception of support for Community Forests, the Agency did not have an active programme principally targeted at forestry and woodlands.



26. Mrs Thomas was interested by the comment contained in the last bullet point of paragraph 11 in the paper ".....to redress what we perceive as the limited current comment, analysis and innovative thinking on forestry policy." She felt this was over critical as there was a lot of innovate thinking around. Mr Morley thanked Mr Lloyd for a comprehensive report.

How is English Nature Helping to Deliver the England Forestry Strategy? (Paper 21/00)

27. Introducing this paper, Dr Kirby drew attention to the key issues set out in paragraphs 5, 7 and 13 of his paper. He said that one of the strengths of the England Forestry Strategy was role it had in helping to encourage the delivery of Biodiversity Action Plans. In conclusion, Dr Kirby drew attention to the short-term measures of success set out on the last page of the paper.
28. Referring to paragraph 13 of the paper, Mr Townsend commented that it was appropriate to highlight the threat to loss of ancient woodland. He urged that the resources of English Nature and others should be increased to assist threatened sites, and that local planning authorities should be issued with stronger guidance. Mr Brun was disappointed that that the paper contained nothing on grey squirrels and Dr Kirby acknowledged the omission. Mr Morley thanked Dr Kirby for his report and said that it was good to see how the principles of the Strategy were being taken forward by the various agencies.

Capital Modernisation Fund – Paper 22/00

29. Forum Members noted this information paper. Mrs Thomas congratulated the Forestry Commission on securing the funding.

A Summary of Actions Planned or Underway to Implement the England Forestry Strategy

Progress Report – Paper 23/00

30. Forum members the Progress Report, which had been updated since the previous meeting with material received from several Forum members.

Any Other Business

31. Mr Townsend drew attention to an Early Day Motion (No 879 - Value of Trees in Towns and Cities) which had been tabled in the House of Commons. Mr Morley said that Early Day Motions were an important way of highlighting important issues in Parliament.

Date of Next Meeting

32. The next meeting of the Forum will be held in London on Wednesday 10 January 2001 at 2.00pm.