

**REPORT OF THE 6th MEETING OF THE ENGLAND FORESTRY FORUM
HELD AT NOBEL HOUSE, LONDON, TUESDAY, 19 MARCH 2002**

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

Present:	Mr Nick Atkinson	Association of National Parks Authorities
	Ms Georgina Dobson	Council for the Protection of Rural England
	Mr Andrew Shirley	Country Land and Business Association
	Mr Rob Green	Countryside Agency
	Mr James Marsden	English Nature
	Ms Bridget Bloom	Forestry Commission Regional Advisory Committee (South East England)
	Sir Harry Studholme	Forestry Commission Regional Advisory Committee (South West England)
	Mr Ken Buswell	Forestry Contracting Association
	Mr Humphrey Temperley	Local Government Association
	Mr Simon Evans	National Forest Company
	Mr David Russell	National Trust
	Ms Nerys Jones	National Urban Forestry Unit
	Mr David Hunter	North West Regional Development Agency
	Mr Jim Stewart	Planning Officers Society
	Ms Kate Conto	Ramblers Association
	Dr Mike Clarke	Royal Society for The Protection of Birds
	Mr Peter Wilson	Forest Industries Development Council
	Mr Chris Stapleton	Royal Town Planning Institute
	Mr Russell Rowley	Small Woods Association
	Mr Alan Powell	United Kingdom Forest Products Association
	Dr Hilary Allison	Wildlife & Countryside Link Forestry Group
In attendance:	Mr John James	Forestry Commissioner
	Dr Victoria Edwards	Forestry Commissioner
	Mr Paul Hill-Tout	Forestry Commission
	Mr Mark Pritchard	Forestry Commission
	Mr Richard Barker	Forestry Commission
	Mr Geoff Hatfield	Forest Enterprise
	Mr Andrew Perrins	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
	Mr Bradley Bates	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
	Mr Mike Seddon	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs



Introduction

2. In welcoming members to the meeting, Mr Morley said the main business was to consider the progress in the implementation of the Government's response to the reports from the Forum's eight ad-hoc working groups. There were two papers dealing with this; the first Progress Report and a paper with proposals for taking forward the recommendations of the Working Group on Regional Issues.

Report of the Fifth Meeting of the Forum Held on 15 October 2001

3. Mr Morley invited members to note the report of the Forum Meeting held on 15 October 2001.

Taking Forward the Government Response to the Forum Working Group Reports (Paper 12/01)

4. Mr Pritchard introduced the Progress Report, explaining that it only covered those recommendations that had been accepted by Government. The commentary would be expanded in successive Reports as the individual recommendations were addressed. The Report would also show when action was complete. As this was the first expression of progress Members were invited to suggest alternative formats for the report. Mr Pritchard then summarised each section of the Progress Report. Forum members made the following comments.
5. Business Advice Training and Support. There was concern that in different regions the Small Business Service (SBS) was not consistent in its approach to forestry. In some areas SBS did not appear to include forestry in its remit. Where forestry was covered there appeared to be a lack of depth of understanding of the forestry industry. It was agreed that the SBS should be invited to present a paper to a future Forum meeting to clarify their role in relation to forestry.
6. Land Regeneration. Mr Stapleton (Working Group Leader) said that, on recommendation 2.1, the Working Group had envisaged a website database with links to web based information. Mr Pritchard explained that the Forestry for Economic Regeneration section of the Forestry Commission's redesigned website would soon including such links. Mr Stapleton also pointed out that planting on despoiled mineral sites contributed to both rural development and regeneration. More contact with mineral planning authorities at an early stage would get them thinking about forestry as an after use at an early stage. Mr Hill-Tout noted that the Interdepartmental Group on Land Regeneration was actively examining this issue.
7. Regional Issues. This was covered in the next Forum paper.



8. Land Use Planning. Mr Pritchard reminded members of the Planning Green Paper which sought views on proposals for changes to the planning system, a number of which were relevant to the recommendations of the Working Group. Proposals for the recommended Best Practice Guidance would be brought to the next meeting of the Forum. Mr Evans noted the commitment in The England Forestry Strategy to revise Circular 36/78 on Trees and Forestry and Mr Pritchard confirmed that this would be addressed in the proposals for the best practice guidance. The Forum also discussed the intended revision of PPGs 7 and 9 and were keen to ensure that forestry and the objectives in the England Forestry Strategy were properly taken into account. Mr Pritchard commented that the Forestry Commission would be involved in the revision process.
9. Protection of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodlands. Dr Allison said that she was pleased to see work was being put in hand to monitor losses, but was still concerned that losses to development were not being addressed. Mr Marsden explained that English Nature was only able to monitor losses from SSSIs and he suggested that there was a role for planning authorities to monitor losses to development.
10. Community Forestry. Mr Pritchard explained that a detailed proposal to address the recommendations of the working group would be brought forward in the summer. Ms Jones noted that a central database of woodland initiatives had been created by NUFU and was available on their website. Mr Pritchard commented that the Government wanted to build on existing resources and not duplicate them.
11. Funding. Mr Wilson welcomed the support for the 'Wood. for Good' campaign but was concerned that, by being a generic campaign, it was not benefiting woodlands in England. Recommendation 8.3 focused on England at a regional and national level. He suggested that the Scottish Forest Industries Cluster could be a model for developing similar groups in England. Mr Rowley added that local initiatives were not benefiting from the industry promotion. Mr Hill-Tout explained that partnership was being explored at all levels to support the development and expansion of forest-based industry in England and that the Commission's Corporate Plan to be published in April included details of how this was being taken forward.
12. Summing up the discussion, Mr Morley suggested that there would be merit in holding an additional meeting of the Forum in the summer. This could be a workshop style meeting to allow more detailed discussion on taking forward some of the recommendations. Forum members agreed that this would be worthwhile.

Regional Issues (Paper 2/02)

13. Mr Hill-Tout introduced the paper noting that it was written from a Forestry Commission perspective. Creating regional expressions of the England Forestry Strategy and developing links with Government Offices would take time and require additional resources.



14. In response to a question on partnerships, Mr Hill-Tout explained that these currently ranged from a national level to a very local level. The Forestry Commission was now giving increased emphasis to a number of well chosen strategic partnerships in each region to capture key Strategy priorities and programmes regionally. These would include links to the regional chapters of the England Regional Development Programme (ERDP). There may also be opportunities for proving more regionally focussed grants though the Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme. These issues would be considered as part of the forthcoming mid-term review of ERDP.
15. In response to questions on the regional expressions of the Strategy Mr Morley said that Government was generally in favour of regional expressions of policy, such as the England Forestry Strategy. Mr Hill-Tout added that the guidance for preparing regional expressions of the Strategy would be a basic framework concentrating on issues that should be addressed and desired outcomes. This would allow flexibility to reflect the differing circumstances and priorities of each region.
16. Sir Harry Studholme and Ms Bloom expressed concern over the proposals to open Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) meetings to the public, especially when dealing with disputed cases. RAC members were selected for their integrity and they gave their time freely to the committees. If they were subject to unwelcome pressure then it may become difficult to recruit members of the calibre required and the balance would be lost. Ms Bloom also pointed out that the current RACs had only been established a short time and were still relatively inexperienced. Members of the Forum commented that being open to the public did not necessarily have to include public participation in meetings. For example the Environment Agency meetings were open to the public but not for participation. Mr Temperley added that local government had been concerned about opening council meetings to the public, but their fears had not been realised. Allowing the public into meetings could increase understanding of forestry and encourage more active support and participation.

Integration of Woodland Policy Working Group (Paper 3/02)

17. In Mr Stewart's absence, the paper was taken as read. Mr Morley invited Forum members to send any comments to Mr Stewart so that the Working Group could finalise its recommendations for the next meeting.

Forestry and Biodiversity Working Group

18. Mr Clarke (Working Group Leader) outlined the group's work to date. They had met in February and carried out a scoping exercise and clarified their role. They had found themselves closely linked to the Woodland and Forestry Workstream for the England Biodiversity Group. A paper on this was a later agenda item. The next meeting of the group was set for 18 April.



DEFRA Forestry Functions (Paper 4/02)

19. Mr Perrins (Head of DEFRA's Organics, Forestry and Industrial Crops Division) introduced the paper. He reminded the Forum that when the paper was originally requested by the Forum some aspects of forestry were included in the remit of both MAFF and DETR. The formation of DEFRA had resulted in the MAFF and DETR forestry functions being brought together in one department. The paper had been prepared as a reference document and was structured on the four programmes in the England Forestry Strategy.
20. In response to questions about DEFRA's relationship with the Forestry Commission Mr Perrins explained that the Commission's funding for its GB and England activities came direct from the Treasury and not through DEFRA. The Commission carried out most of the forestry programmes covered by the England Forestry Strategy but DEFRA also funded some activities direct, including the National Forest Company. The two departments worked together closely on issues such as International Policy, Climate Change, Farm Diversification and Renewable Energy.
21. Members of the Forum also asked for more information on DEFRA's structure. It was noted that this was on the DEFRA website at (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/orgchart.pdf>) Mr Morley commented that the DEFRA Prospectus would be published shortly and this would provide a strategic overview of DEFRA's work.
22. In response to questions on the ERDP Mr Morley advised the Forum that a review of support for woodland creation was currently under way and that a review of the agri-environment schemes would be taking place soon. He encouraged Forum members to participate in the consultation process. Mr Perrins undertook to provide information on the quantity of ERDP funding that had gone to forestry related projects.
23. Sir Harry Studholme said that he was encouraged by renewable energy aspects of DEFRA's work as it recognised existing woodland as a source of fuel. In response to his enquiry on how this would be taken forward Mr Morley said that a lot of work was being done in this area, especially with the Regional Development Agencies, to develop small scale local projects. Mr Perrins added that additional support would be available to build the markets and infrastructure for renewables.

The England Biodiversity Strategy: Woodland and Forestry Workstream (Paper 5/02)

24. The paper was noted and detailed comments should be sent to the Forestry Commission contact noted in paragraph 13 of the paper.

Woodland Grant Scheme Discretionary Scoring System (Paper 6/02)

25. This was an information paper prepared following a previous request from the Forum. It was suggested that an analysis of the results of the revised Discretionary Scoring System should be included in the review of woodland creation grants.



A Summary of Actions Planned or Underway to Implement the England Forestry Strategy – Progress Report(Paper 7/02)

26. This had been updated with the information provided by members of the Forum. Mr Pritchard reminded members that they should continue to send in items of national significance.

Any Other Business

27. Mr Morley referred to the Forestry Devolution Review which was examining the current administrative arrangements for delivering sustainable forestry policies in England, Scotland and Wales and the UK's international commitments, including options for further devolution of these arrangements. A consultation document on the Review was issued in February, with a closing date for responses of 17 April. (Copies of the consultation document are available on the Forestry Commission's website at www.forestry.gov.uk/fdr)

Date of Next Meeting

28. The next meeting of the Forum will be held in London on Tuesday 22 October 2002.

