

**REPORT OF THE 5th MEETING OF THE ENGLAND FORESTRY FORUM
HELD AT NOBEL HOUSE, LONDON, MONDAY, 15 OCTOBER 2001**

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

Present:	Mr Ian Cox	Association of National Parks Authorities
	Ms Georgina Dobson	Council for the Protection of Rural England
	Sir Henry Aubrey-Fletcher	Country Land and Business Association
	Mr Richard Lloyd	Countryside Agency
	Mr Stephen Trow	English Heritage
	Dr Keith Kirby	English Nature
	Dr Alun Gee	Environment Agency
	Mr Chris Stratton	Forestry Commission Regional Advisory Committee (East England)
	Mrs Rachel Thomas	Former Forestry Commission Regional Advisory Committee (South and West England)
	Mr Roger Hay	Forestry Contracting Association
	Mr Matthew O'Brien	Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group
	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 Ian Woodhurst	Ramblers Association
	Mr John Waldon	Royal Society for The Protection of Birds
	Ms Judith Webb	Forest Industries Development Council
	Mr Chris Stapleton	Royal Town Planning Institute
	Mr Adrian Martin	Small Business Service
	Mr Edward Brun	Timber Growers Association
	Mr Alan Powell	United Kingdom Forest Products Association
	Dr Hilary Allison	Wildlife & Countryside Link Forestry Group
	Mr David Stewart	Wildlife Trusts
	Mr Mike Townsend	Woodland Trust
In attendance:	Mr John James	Forestry Commissioner
	Dr Victoria Edwards	Forestry Commissioner
	Mr Paul Hill-Tout	Forestry Commission
	Mr Mark Pritchard	Forestry Commission
	Mr Barry Sidaway	Forestry Commission
	Mr Geoff Hatfield	Forest Enterprise
	Ms Ann Dolphin	Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
	Mr Bradley Bates	Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
	Mr David Wilkes	Department for Transport Local Government and the Regions



Introduction

2. In welcoming members to the meeting, Mr Morley said the main business was to discuss the Government's response to the reports from the Forum's eight ad-hoc working groups. He apologised that delays in clearing the response with ministerial colleagues had meant that the response could not be sent out in advance of the meeting. However, members should feel free to send any written comments to the Forum Secretariat should there be any issues they feel should be addressed.

Report of the Fourth Meeting of the Forum Held on 10 January 2001

3. Mr Morley invited members to note the report of the Forum Meeting held on 10 January 2001. One correction had been advised by Mr Roger Hay. The second sentence of paragraph 5 should read:

"He drew attention to the Group's recommendations, noting in particular that training and other agencies were mainly interested in growing sectors of the economy rather than sustaining sectors such as forestry."

4. Mr Morley noted that at the last Forum meeting there was a request for MAFF and DETR to prepare papers on their roles in delivering the England Forestry Strategy. Since the meeting DEFRA has been established and so he proposed that a paper on the new department's forestry functions is prepared for the next Forum Meeting.

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

5. Mr Morley thanked the Working Groups again for their reports. As Forum members had not seen the Government's response in advance of the meeting he proposed to work through each section in turn. Relevant Departmental officials would introduce the key points following which, questions would be taken. He commented that the Government had accepted the majority of the Working Groups' recommendations.

Working Group 1 - Business Advice, Training and Support

6. In the absence of Mr Rhodes (DfES) Mr Pritchard reviewed the key points in the Government's response.
7. Mr Hay (Working Group Leader) was disappointed that the Small Business Service (SBS) would not be more involved with the forestry sector and said that people in the business sector would look to the SBS for advice. He also recognised that that Government funding for training looked for a recognised qualification at the end, but pointed out that the Working Group had not seen this as an adequate incentive. He suggested that this issue should be taken forward by the LANTRA National Training Organisation.



8. Mr Morley commented that SBS does not have an explicit role in forestry, but it was something that might be explored further with them. Mr Stewart noted that Paper 13/01 was light on training and invited members to let him have their suggestions. Mr Martin added that SBS were interested in all businesses receiving support and he would like to hear if there were instances of assistance not being provided.

Working Group 2 - Land Regeneration

9. In the Absence of Mr Stables (DETR) discussion on this item was deferred.

Working Group 3 - Regional Issues

10. Mr Hill-Tout reviewed the main points in the Government's response. Responding, the Working Group leader, Mrs Thomas, said she was generally pleased with the Government's conclusions but wished to flag up the following points:
- concern over the level of staff resources in Conservancies (recommendation 3.1);
 - the Countryside Agency and Regional Advisory Committees (RAC) could have a more explicit remit to "forestry proof" regional policies (recommendation 3.2);
 - concern that RACs would not conduct their business in public (a view supported by Mr Stratton). It was confirmed that this was a matter for the Forestry Commissioners to decide on (recommendation 3.3)
11. Mrs Thomas and Messrs Hay and Stratton considered that forestry needed its own fora in order to provide a strong regional forestry focus. Mr Hill-Tout explained that there was a need to think wider than the Forestry Commission and link with other agencies in order to further the forestry agenda. Conservators were already integrating with Government Offices to this end and were engaging with a number of fora regionally. He pointed out that the principles underlying recommendations 3.4 - 3.7 were accepted. However, there was no single model and so it was appropriate to avoid a prescriptive approach leaving each region to determine its needs according to its own circumstances, but within a consistent framework. The guidance to be prepared by the Forestry Commission would provide the basis for achieving this. Dr Kirby suggested that a paper should be presented at the next Forum meeting setting out what progress was being made in each region.

Working Group 4 - Land Use Planning

12. Mr Wilkes reviewed the main points in the Government's response, noting that the recommendation for a dedicated PPG on forestry had been rejected for the reasons set out in the response. He explained that Ministers were looking for more focussed PPGs and the forthcoming Planning Green Paper would consider the role and scope of national planning policy guidance in the context of broader proposals for modernising the planning system. He suggested the way forward was perhaps to look to good practice guidelines and a



revision of Circular 36/78. The Forestry Commission and DTLR would be looking further at this and would bring forward proposals to the Forum in due course.

13. Mr Evans (Working Group Leader) commented that it was important to have a clear message to put to developers, whom he argued, only really took significant account of PPGs. Other planning guidance tended to have less clout with developers. Mr Rowley said that the present arrangements were not working and was able to back up this assertion with examples of poor decisions. Mr Stapleton supported the need for clear guidance.

Working Group 5 - Protection of Ancient Woodland

14. Mr Hill-Tout introduced the main points in the Government's response, noting that the majority of the recommendations were fully supported or had received qualified acceptance. He said that it was crucial to measure the extent and nature of loss of Ancient Woodland to inform future policy development.
15. Mr Townsend (Working Group Leader), was generally pleased with the response, but disappointed by the rejection of a dedicated PPG covering trees and woodland, and the lack of willingness to review and strengthen the planning system generally.

Working Group 6 - Community Forestry

16. Mr Pritchard reviewed the main points in the Government's response, which accepted the Working Group's recommendations.
17. Mr Vaughan (Working Group Leader) welcomed the response but said there was a lot of work to be done by government and its agencies to promoting the community forestry message and was concerned about the resources available to support this. Ms Jones endorsed Mr Vaughan's comments, adding that the response was a cautious one, although many of the mechanisms to take the recommendations forward are in place. Mr Pritchard said that it was planned to develop ideas in partnership with the Working Group and other interested bodies. Mrs Thomas stressed the need for continued support for the national community forest programme and the need to extend the concept to other areas.

Working Group 7 - Landscape and Change

18. Mr Pritchard reviewed the main points in the Government's response, noting that it rejected a landscape strategy *per se*, but restated the importance of the Countryside Character Assessment approach informing implementation of the England Forestry Strategy. The response also noted the additional guidance to be promulgated by the Countryside Agency.
19. Mr Trow made the point that landscape is a significant issue and hoped this wouldn't be lost sight of. He welcomed the Forestry Commission's recent accord with Association of AONBs as well as the planned guidance and suggested that a timetable be made available for future Forum meetings.



Working Group 8 – Funding

20. Mr Hill-Tout reviewed the main points in the Government's response noting that the establishment of a funding unit was rejected as not an appropriate role of government.
21. Mr Brun commented that the working group had not suggested the setting up of a unit was a job for government, and thought sufficient expertise was already available within the forestry sector to form a unit to support funding. The unit would only be able to function effectively with support and information being made available by government and its agencies. Mr Hill-Tout commented that this was an aimed shared by government.

Concluding Remarks

22. Mr Morley recognised that because the Government's response had been tabled at the meeting the Forum had not had an opportunity to discuss it in depth. Mr Morley invited Forum members to write to the Secretariat with any more detailed observations and comments and the Secretariat would try to incorporate these into a note to be circulated to all members. In summing up, Mr Morley proposed a report on actions taken to implement the recommendations be included as a standing item on the agenda of future Forum meetings. This was endorsed by members. The Secretariat will prepare and update a paper for future meetings.

Integration of Woodland Policy Working Group (Paper 13/01)

23. Mr Stewart introduced his paper and thanked group members for their input. He recognised that the paper was light in a number of aspects and invited Forum members to send him detailed comments and suggestions for further consideration by the Working Group.
24. Mrs Thomas urged caution with the assumption made that the economic returns from forestry are generally markedly less than those from other land uses. She cited sporting and tourism as giving greater returns. She also commented that the big questions as to what is rural development, and how forestry's contribution can be evaluated, had yet to be addressed. Mr Vaughan commented that a key obstacle to successful integration was to bring forestry to the forefront of people's minds when considering land use options. Mr Lloyd said that lessons could be learned from Europe, especially in the context of the Rural Development Programme and referred to a current research study which he would provide Forum members with details of, via the Secretariat.

Proposed Working Group on Forestry and Biodiversity (Paper 14/01)

25. Mr Waldon introduced his paper noting that the main aims of the group were to progress recognition of the role of forestry in delivering the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, and to help provide clear guidance and advice to identify best practice relating to forestry which could effect habitats. He suggested an additional aim of investigating the role of woodland birds



which are recognised as a good indicator of the health of the environment. The Government now uses the Wild Bird Index as one of the headline Quality of Life indicators for sustainable development. Mr Hill-Tout commented that the Forestry Commission regarded this as an important area for investigation, and had recently formed a steering group of bird specialists to inform silvicultural practices and promote awareness of the contribution which sustainably managed woodlands can make towards the health of the wider bird population.

26. The Forum agreed to the formation of the Working Group, which would produce an interim report for the next Forum meeting. Mr Waldon invited members to contact him if they would be interested joining the group or contributing to its work.

Scenario Planning Workshop (Paper 15/01)

27. Mr Hill-Tout introduced this information paper on the recent Scenario Planning Workshop organised by the Forestry Commission and explained its purpose. Forum members were invited to write to the Secretariat with any comments or suggestions on the next steps (paragraph 7 of the paper).

2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (Paper 16/01)

28. Forum members noted the information paper, which summarises the arrangements for the handling of forestry issues as part of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in September 2002. Members were invited to send any comments or ideas to the contacts named in paragraph 8 of the paper.
29. Mr Morley said that the Prime Minister has taken a personal interest in this Summit and the role that forestry, recognised as one of the 5 headline sectors, can play in sustainable development. All Government departments were taking the issues very seriously. Dr Edwards was delighted that forestry had been recognised on the agenda for the Summit, but felt that it was being given too narrow a focus.

A Summary of Actions Planned or Underway to Implement the England Forestry Strategy - Progress Report (Paper 17/01)

30. Forum members noted the report, which had been updated since the previous meeting with material submitted from Forum members. Mr Pritchard thanked those who had contributed and encouraged others to do likewise. He advised members that all Forum papers are now available on the Commission's website at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/englandforestryforum>

Any Other Business

31. Mr Waldon mentioned his suggestion at the last meeting (paragraph 34 of the report) that a paper be prepared on the Woodland Grant Scheme Discretionary New Planting Grants scoring system. Mr Hill-Tout apologised for the oversight and undertook to prepare a paper for the next Forum meeting.



Date of Next Meeting

32. The next meeting of the Forum will be held in London on 19 March 2002 at 2.00pm

