

REPORT OF THE 4th MEETING OF THE ENGLAND FORESTRY FORUM HELD AT NOBEL HOUSE, LONDON, WEDNESDAY, 10 JANUARY 2001

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

Present:	Mr Ian Cox	Association of National Parks Authorities
	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
	Dr Alun Gee	Environment Agency
	Mr Chris Stratton	Forestry Commission Regional Advisory Committee (East England)
	Mrs Rachel Thomas	Forestry Commission Regional Advisory Committee (South and West England)
	Prof Carys Swanwick	Forestry Commission Regional Advisory Committee (Yorkshire and the Humber)
	Mr Roger Hay	Forestry Contracting Association
	Mr Peter Wilson	Forest Industries Development Group
	Mr Simon Verdon	Institute of Chartered Foresters
	Mr Humphrey Temperley	Local Government Association
	Mr Simon Evans	National Forest Company
	Mr Russell Rowley	Small Woods Association
	Mr Andrew Clark	National Farmers Union
	Ms Nerys Jones	National Urban Forestry Unit
	Mr Ray Kessler	North West Regional Development Agency
	Mr David Pollard	Planning Officers Society
	Mr Ian Woodhurst	Ramblers Association
	Mr John Waldon	Royal Society for The Protection of Birds
	Mr Chris Stapleton	Royal Town Planning Institute
	Mr John Jackson	Royal Forestry Society of England, Wales and Northern Ireland
	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
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



Mr Andrew Perrins
Mr Peter Hooley

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
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Introduction

2. In welcoming members to the meeting, Mr Morley thanked Working Group Leaders for their reports and said that he had been impressed by the work and consideration put in by each of the groups. The main business of the meeting was to receive and discuss the final reports from the eight ad-hoc working groups.

Report of the Third Meeting of the Forum Held on 13 July 2000

3. Mr Morley invited members to note the report of the Forum Meeting held on 13 July 2000.

Forestry Forum Working Group Final Reports

4. Mr Morley invited each of the working group leaders to introduce their reports, focussing particularly on the recommendations.

Working Group 1 - Business Advice, Training and Support (Paper 1/01)

5. Mr Hay introduced the Working Group's report noting that the Small Business Service (SBS) had been represented at the Group's final meeting. He drew attention to the Group's recommendations noting, in particular, that there was a tendency to treat forestry as a growing industry rather than a sustainable one. The Group had recommended that training in the forest and woodland industry needed a push in order to give businesses the support and advice that they required.
6. Referring to the creation of links with the farming sector, Mr Temperley said it would be sensible to recommend that advice from FWAG should be a requirement. Mr Hay agreed that there should be links with the farming sector at regional level. However, it was not appropriate to recommend this, as it would require a change in the way that SBS operated.
7. Referring to recommendation 2 of the report, Mr Kessler commented that Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) were now in the position of only being able to influence actions.
8. Mrs Thomas commented that although the report noted that many of the available training schemes were related to the unemployed, the issue was not one of unemployment but one of a shortage of skills. She stressed the importance of mentoring and apprenticeship schemes. Mr Hay said the recommendation that SBS be encouraged to include the micro forestry, woodland and woodcraft businesses within their role should facilitate the distribution of information, which was the main need on many training issues.

Working Group 2 - Land Regeneration (Paper 2/01)

9. Introducing the Working Group's report, Mr Stapleton drew particular attention to the fact that the Group considered developing an agenda to guide work over the next 3-5 years was unrealistic, and so had developed an outline agenda for the next 5-10 years. Also there was

considerable potential for a more collaborative approach between the Environment Agency and forestry practitioners in respect of planting on contaminated land.

10. Referring to the role of the Environment Agency (Paper 9/00), Mr Gee said that local authorities also had a role to play and, where this was the case, the Agency would be happy to provide advice. With regard to reclaiming brownfield sites to forestry, Dr Kirby drew attention to the fact that some brownfield sites are important habitats for wildlife. Mr Pollard commented that it was anomalous that English Nature was a statutory consultee on planning applications whereas the Forestry Commission was not. A balance was therefore difficult to achieve and it needed to be recognised that there were alternatives for land restoration. Mr Stratton said that trees planted on derelict land and along transport corridors could act as effective carbon filters. Mrs Thomas commented that land regeneration was not just about brownfield sites, but can also be about the regeneration of marginal agricultural land. Mr Kessler said that it was important to influence local authority Development Plans.

Working Group 3 - Regional Issues (Paper 3/01)

11. Introducing the Group's report and its recommendations, Mrs Thomas highlighted the fast rate of change at the regional level and the measures that the Forestry Commission (FC) had taken to enable it to engage with the process by realigning its conservancy boundaries and increasing the number of Regional Advisory Committees (RACs) from 3 to 8. She drew attention to the FC's limited resources.
12. Mr James observed that RACs were an important link between the National Strategy and implementation at the regional level. However, it had yet to be seen how this would work in practice and he invited comments from Forum Members.
13. In response to a question from Mr Rutherford as to how forestry might engage in the regional process, Mrs Thomas said that the FC's Conservancies would be the main vehicle, but the group had recommended the establishment of regional fora to reflect the national forum and provide additional focus for the Forestry Strategy. Mr Lloyd endorsed the setting up of regional fora as crucial to regional ownership. Dr Allison said that national bodies had found it complex dealing with regional groupings. There was a need to focus on actions and structure and she was not sure that the regional boundaries coalesced in relation to woodland. She said there was a need to prioritise at the National level first and urged the retention of a National view initially.
14. Mr Stratton suggested that the new RACs should consider the need for regional fora as a first step. Mr Hill-Tout commented that wider fora were seen as being the more useful vehicle for taking the Forestry Strategy forward and saw the need to engage forestry with existing fora. Mrs Thomas referred to paragraph 24 of the Group's report.

Working Group 4 - Land Use Planning (Paper 4/01)

15. Introducing the Group's report, Mr Evans noted the main recommendation was that a new Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) on Trees, Woods and Forestry should be produced. This had support from many practitioners. He added that the Group would be willing to prepare an initial draft.
16. Mr Temperley supported the preparation of a new PPG, noting that *Circular 36/78 – Trees and Forestry* was outdated. Sir Henry Aubrey-Fletcher supported the recommendation in principle but suggested that incorporating forestry into existing PPGs as they were reviewed might

achieve the same end. Mr Stratton observed that the key issue was to raise awareness of the

benefits that trees and woodland can bring to society, for example through planning gain. Mr Pollard also supported a new PPG but had reservations about moving to advice, rather than regulation, until forestry issues had been more radically addressed in the planning system.

17. Mr Bowman said that if decision were taken to produce a new PPG, he would be interested in taking up the Group's offer to produce a first draft. However, he encouraged people to look first at, and let him have comments on, *PPG 17 – Sport and Recreation*, which deals with green issues, and was shortly to go out to consultation. Mr Evans said that it would be appropriate to include forestry in all relevant PPGs. Mr Morley said that decisions about planning guidance were primarily a matter for DETR colleagues and he would respond after consulting with them.

Working Group 5 - Protection of Ancient Woodland (Paper 5/01)

18. Introducing the Group's report, Dr Allison (in the absence of Mr Townsend, Working Group Leader) reviewed the main recommendations, many of which she said were specific and could be implemented immediately.
19. In relation to the issue of overgrazing by sheep in upland ancient woodland, Mr Morley advised Forum Members that there are mechanisms within the grants regime to deal with this issue and FC and MAFF officials had met with a view to producing guidance for field staff. Dr Kirby advised that the issue was also being addressed under the Native Woodland Habitat Action Programme. Mr Brun suggested that alternative, more modern, practices for managing ancient woodland needed to be considered.

Working Group 6 - Community Forestry (Paper 6/01)

20. Introducing the Group's report, Ms Jones (in the absence of Mr Vaughan, Working Group Leader) reviewed the Group's recommendations observing that if community forestry was to expand it had to be facilitated. She noted that what is commonly referred to as community forestry in the UK was regarded as urban forestry by the rest of the world. Also that community forestry was relevant to a wide range of agendas and should not be seen as a separate entity.
21. Mr Stewart raised the issue of wildlife interests and assumed these would be encompassed. He urged Forum Members to take away the principles of community forestry to embed in their own initiatives. Mrs Thomas welcomed the paper but said that by accepting it the interests of, and integration with, rural development forestry should also be recognised.
22. Mr James noted that community forestry was a relatively young concept in England and there were many local initiatives that could be developed, if there was a national champion. Ms Jones commented that this was already being addressed, for example by the National Urban Forestry Unit, but the needs of each initiative would need to be considered individually. Ms Jones added that the Working Group was keen to help take the recommendations forward.

Working Group 7 - Landscape and Change (Paper 7/01)

23. Introducing the report Mr Rutherford reviewed the approach taken by the Group and said that it had focussed on the very practical role of landscape as a tool for negotiating change and for implementing the Forestry Strategy. The Group proposed the preparation of a landscape

strategy for England's trees and woodlands. Landscape Character Assessments were seen as an important tool for policy makers and for educating the public and woodland managers.

24. Mr Lloyd said that Countryside Character Maps were relevant and could help to informing decisions. Mrs Thomas commended the work put into Countryside Character Maps but added that it should be appreciated that character changes. Sir Henry Aubrey-Fletcher observed that many local planning authorities have landscape strategies but they needed to be consulted on much more widely.

Working Group 8 – Funding (Paper 8/01)

25. Introducing the Group's report, Mr Wilson (in the absence of Mr Wilkinson, Working Group Leader) reviewed the Group's recommendations. The key issue was that whilst there was a wide range of funding potentially available, the means of accessing it were not widely understood.
26. Mr Rutherford suggested that Regional Programming Groups could become involved in linking the England Rural Development Programme to fulfil the needs of the Forestry Strategy. Mrs Thomas said that a funding unit could have an important role in co-ordinating European funding. Ms Jones commented that funding was a complex issue and was doubtful that a Government Funding Unit was the best way forward. Mr Temperley said that small woodland owners needed a reliable independent source of advice. He was unsure as to whether a Government unit was the appropriate vehicle for this advice and said there was a need to think more strategically how forestry is funded in the UK and how the markets worked. Sir Henry Aubrey-Fletcher advocated the use of a website as a source of information and advice.

Concluding Discussion

27. Mr Morley thanked Working Group members for their work in carrying out their studies and producing a wide range of recommendations to help with the implementation of the Strategy. He would be considering the recommendations, in liaison with ministerial colleagues, and would be arranging for a formal response from the Government to be prepared for discussion at the next Forum meeting.

Proposed Working Group on Integration of Woodland Policy (Paper 9/01)

28. Mr Stewart introduced his paper and reviewed the aims and objectives of this proposed working group. A small dynamic and inclusive group had been identified, which included individuals who would contribute new ideas. Mrs Thomas suggested an additional objective: *To identify how forestry can contribute to Rural Development*. The Forum agreed to the formation of the new Group, which would produce a draft report in the spring, with a presentation to the next meeting of the Forum and complete its work by autumn 2001.
29. Mr Morley invited Members to write to the Secretariat with details of any other issues that would be suitable for consideration by new working groups. These would be considered at the next meeting of the Forum.



Forestry Industry and the England Forestry Strategy (Paper 10/01)

30. Introducing his paper, Mr Wilson said there was an opportunity for forestry to deliver multiple benefits to society. Marketing was a strong story for the industry and should be at the heart of developing and delivering the Forestry Strategy. The weakness was that there were many people in the front line who felt the Strategy was not for them and they needed to be more involved with it. He was encouraged by what was happening in Scotland to support the industry, but acknowledged this would be less easy to achieve in England. There was a need for cross-border links to be maintained with Wales and Scotland.
31. Mr Stewart made the point that in the south-east solutions were being developed to utilise timber from broadleaved woodland. As an additional recommendation, Mr Rowley suggested the promotion of a 'percentage for wood scheme' whereby businesses contributed towards marketing timber on a level other than their normal business. Mrs Thomas endorsed the vertical integration of the forestry industry, but said there also was a need to also consider lateral integration.

A Summary of Actions Planned or Underway to Implement the England Forestry Strategy -Progress Report (Paper 11/01)

32. Forum members noted the Progress Report, which had been updated since the previous meeting with material received from several Forum members. Mr Pritchard thanked those who had contributed and encouraged others to do likewise. Mr Morley commented that it was planned to publish a progress report on implementation of the Strategy and the Secretariat would be writing round to seek contributions in due course.

Any Other Business

33. Ms Jones commented that the previous papers from the agencies on their role in delivering the Strategy had been very helpful and asked if similar papers could be prepared by MAFF and DETR.
34. Mr Waldon suggested that a paper should be prepared on the Woodland Grant Scheme Discretionary New Planting Grants scoring system.

Date of Next Meeting

35. The next meeting of the Forum will be held in London on 3 July 2001 at 2.00pm.