

APPLICANTS' FOCUS GROUP MEETING

National Motorcycle Museum, Birmingham

17 November 2010

1 Welcome, Introduction & Apologies

Present: Steve Hunt (FC), Richard Sochacki (Confor), Poppy Saunders (FC), Craig Harrison (FC), Julian Ohlsen (UPM & South West AFG), Mike Render (FC), Tim Shardlow (ICF), John Morris (Small woods Association), John Lockhart (RICS), John Blessington (LGA), Caroline Harrison (Confor), Chris Mcgloin (Community Forests), Gordon Pfletcher (Wildlife and Countryside Link), Andrew Smith (FC), Mike Seville (CLA), Simon Prior (FC)

Apologies: Neville Elstone (ICF), Judith Webb (RFS), Kim Gunningham (Defra), and Andrea Graham (NFU)

Andrew Smith welcomed all, notably Gordon Pfletcher from the Woodland Trust, standing in for Simon Mageean. Andrew mentioned the difficult operating environment and hoped AFG members would help the FC deal with these challenges in a positive manner

2 Minutes and matters arising from previous meeting

Steve ran through the minutes and action points from the previous meeting

Actions from Previous Meeting

AP	Action
3	Members confirmed that there was further feedback to follow in relation to the current staffing situation in the SW due to Phyophthora
6	Confusion among members with regards the proposed meeting with RPA customer and Land registration. Names had been provided to RPA and assumption was that they would be organising the meeting. Action 1 Steve
10	Status unconfirmed prior to meeting. Simon has now confirmed. FC has been working with Defra to finalise guidance. This is now almost complete and once agreed FC will make minor changes to the guidance currently available on the web. A draft article has been written and this will be submitted to Forestry press shortly.

New Actions from this meeting

AP	Action
1	Steve to gather names together for liaison meeting with RPA customer / land registration. Then make arrangements with Eamon Doyle from RPA to ensure this takes place.
2	Members should continue to give feedback either to the Phytophthora Management Group, or to this forum, on any aspects of the disease management.
3	Andrew asked that all members provide evidence where they could of 100 – 200 hectare woodlands, where the cost of certification was seen as possibly discouraging owners from managing their woodland.
4	Steve and Craig to ensure the forest track guidance includes sections on grant aid and planning implications.
5	Andrew to send interim thinking regarding future FC roles to AFG members for them to review / comment on.
6	Craig will send out revised EWGS Term's and Conditions within the next month for AFG members to review and feedback on.
7	AFG members to provide feedback to Craig on redrafted leaflet "Funding for Farm Woodlands"
8	Craig to correct WPG rates in the "Funding for Farm Woodlands" booklet and add a small section on woodfuel.
10	AFG members are invited to comment on the issues and ideas raised in the WCG paper with Craig on a 1:1 basis
11	AFG members to feed thoughts back to Mike Render as soon as possible with regards Arm Length Body review paper.
12	Mike R / Andrew to set up base camp facility on the website in order for individuals to feedback on the ALB review
13	Depending on feedback on base camp, Andrew to decide whether the next AFG meeting should take place in February or May. Notify members as soon as a decision has been taken

Steve identified key points in briefing paper.

Phytophthora

Andrew updated everyone with regards membership and current work of the Phytophthora Management Group. This now included industry representatives. Key points:

- Research has identified an increased level of sporulation which coincided with needle drop in Larch.
- Early findings from this year's spore traps suggest a much lower level of sporulation this year compared to last year's results.
- Soon to be published guidance on Ancient and Native Woodlands will clarify the position with regards to restocking PAWS woodlands felled under Statutory Plant Health Notices (SPHN's)
- We are currently working up proposals for an enhanced restocking grant. These will be considered by the Management Group prior to agree a submission going to Ministers for approval.

- Current strategy was one of containment and eradication. This was being reviewed by a sub group of the Management Group.

Industry would need to lobby Ministers highlighting the importance of the enhanced restocking rate.

Concern was raised that the current measures to restrict larch appeared Draconian. Andrew confirmed that the Management Group had agonised over what measures they should take. The increased volume of larch timber on the market was now affecting timber prices nationally and this was being monitored by the group.

Processors were looking at self funding a bark management protocol. This will need to be agreed with the EU, which was likely to be difficult as EU currently does not recognise larch as a host species.

Action 2 All

Land Registration

Still causing problems for some owners. Improvement had been identified with the way RPA were now handling RLE1 registration forms. The majority of the form remains irrelevant to woodland owners and caused confusion when completing. RPA are reviewing the form at present.

Category B protocol

Briefing paper attempted to clarify the issue regarding qualifying area. Questioned as to why there was a 100 hectare maximum. Andrew confirmed that this was so the category B option was not seen to be competing with certification, and also that the demand was seen very much as the small wood owner. 100 hectare plus woods were not excluded from using the category B option, just that owners would be required to provide their own evidence of legality and sustainability.

At a recent Woodfuel sustainability meeting, the category B option was identified as a very good way forward for this market. Members identified the 100 – 200 hectare size woodlands as being the key area of concern as there was no perceived increase in timber value to help offset the cost of certification. There were now also other routes into the market place that did not require full certification.

Action 3 All

Forest track guidance

Members welcomed improved guidance for the private sector and asked that the guidance covers grant aid information and planning implications, as these areas caused the greatest confusion to owners and agents.

Action 4 Steve and Craig

3 Regulations Review (item 5 on agenda)

Poppy gave a quick verbal update as to the current situation with the review. Papers relating to Terms of Reference, timeframe and group members were currently with the Minister. The review proposed to cover the general legislation affecting the forest industry and also the burden associated with applying for a grant. Aspiration was to complete the report by the end of April, as timing was linked to other legislative

processes. Hoped an announcement would be forthcoming later in the week. Concerns were raised that the Forestry review would be in isolation from the agriculture review already underway. Poppy confirmed that she was in touch with the review chair for agriculture and that she would be attending their next meeting. We would ensure that the two reviews did not report in isolation, accepting that some owners would have a keen, direct interest in both. FC role was to provide secretariat function and to advise the group as necessary, but that it would be very much industry led. Identified that there was also a review of the TPO regulation currently underway. Updates would be placed on the FC website and AFG members would be kept informed of progress.

4 Emerging Policy Framework and Natural Environment White Paper

Defra faced with 30% cut which would filter down through to FC. Important to note that the current RDPE budget for FC has not been reduced for the remaining 3 years of the programme. Imperative that we allocate funds ASAP otherwise they will be at risk of claw back from Defra. Ministers are keen to maintain levels of new planting.

Simon presented Dominic Driver's policy paper, explaining the basis of the paper and the key Government priorities, which were aimed at making it the "Greenest Government ever".

England's Trees, Woods and Forests strategy document was no longer relevant, and Simon identified the key elements from the emerging strategic framework. Likely that our future role would be centred on policy, research, regulation and advice. There were a number of enabling frameworks being assessed at present.

Meeting was an opportunity to raise awareness of the Natural Environment White Paper, Simon confirmed that a major consultation phase had just finished. FC had sent a response. Key issues coming out of the paper affecting forestry were:

- Simplify regulations where appropriate,
- increase biodiversity,
- increase resilience (global warming) and bio-security,
- more dynamic approach to SSSI management,
- new income streams for ecosystem services,
- closer integration of environmental stewardship schemes,
- work more closely with owners,
- increase ancient woodland protection in planning policy,
- biodiversity offsets and development in woods,
- more harvesting of wood and timber

5 Spending Review 2010 and implications

The review would set our budget for the next four years. We were currently looking at what FC staff resource priorities should be in the future:

- Assumption that regulation and plant health were unavoidable

- localism / influencing – (next woodfuel East / locally appropriate solutions?),
- expertise – national influences – appropriate policies/regulations/implementation, technically appropriate field solutions – e.g. FC archaeologist
- grant aid delivery – can we maintain level of staff required to deliver £30 million per year?

Woodland Officers (WO's) were identified as the core service provider, but what role should they play. Key roles identified in:

- Engagement / advice with owners,
- bio-security,
- planning,
- incentives,
- regulation.

Key feedback from AFG members was:

- Need for local input as model of specialist teams did not work,
- WO's should not advise owners direct but facilitate contact with private sector (agents), WO's should administer / regulate
- FC needs to re-engage with owners and agents,
- current toolkit provided for agents doesn't work,
- work in woods is only viable if generates an income or at worst is cost neutral, FC must review how it funds work – East Midland Bird WIG seen as a good example, encouraging owners to work areas which otherwise would remain unmanaged,
- Carbon coding / landfill could possibly swing balance between work happening or not happening,
- reminder to all that owners formed the private sector not agents, and FC needs to facilitate engagement with them,
- agents role should steer away from planning and more to encouraging work on the ground. WO's were seen as too few in number and not necessarily best placed to offer advice direct to the private sector,
- accepted that current planning process was aimed at meeting new UKFS / certification, but this process now seen as far too complex,
- certification doesn't work – too much hassle for no reward. It was based on perceived risks, not actual risks,
- FC should seek to improve markets – better markets would lead to better managed woods,
- FC must ensure it doesn't remove itself from the community it serves,
- localism/ influencing an area where FC could withdraw, FC should prioritise national expertise and knowledge on areas where impact would be highest e.g flood prevention, carbon sequestration,

Andrew thanked everyone for their valuable feedback

Action 5 Andrew

6 Grants Update.

Craig ran through the key elements of his paper.

Terms and Conditions

Action 6 Craig

Interaction between HLS and EWGS

The FC-NE operating agreement already totals 20 pages and liaison with NE nationally and regionally continues. Accepted that we should work closer but funding issues will fundamentally change how this moves forward. "Funding for Farm Woodlands" booklet re-drafted. Members identified that the planning grant section wasn't up to date. Queried why woodfuel hadn't been included – this was due to final situation not yet being clear (identified as £10 million over 3 years but staff recruitment still to be sorted). Mike Render to confirm mechanism for delivery before Christmas.

Action 7 AFG

Action 8 Craig

Charter

The charter standards and booklet has not been updated since WGS. The FC view is that charter issues are relatively low priority at present and not raising major issues, but we are keen for feedback as new corporate targets will be agreed from April 2011. AFG feedback was that claim payment and application processing remain key.

Creation Grant

Craig's paper proposed a simple approach for the future, as people were likely to want to offer further guidance that would increase complexity. AFG key feedback was:

- Diverse views on whether scoring systems should be removed
- Pros and cons of removing the application deadline were identified
- Mixed views on whether the current minimum width of plantings (30 metres) should be reduced
- Mixed views whether woodland creation linked to planning requirements should be eligible for grant
- Agreed some relaxation of species appropriate to allow for climate change adaptation would be good

Action 10 AFG

7 Defra Arms Length Body review

Mike Render gave a background to the review process which is aimed at working more closely with key partner organisations. In our case these were identified as Natural England (NE), with whom we have had initial discussions and the Environment Agency (EA). In the case of the latter, our work would most likely be restricted to flood prevention.

Mike identified key elements of the paper.

Actual merger of bodies was not in play so work concentrates on how we can work more closely together, can we combine schemes (?) with subsequent savings of time, labour and money resources. Key area being reviewed involves the licensing / consenting processes. Some of the issues in play:

- Perception that farms being visited by numerous inspectors – can we link the inspection process?
- improving the delivery of funding – various opportunities were being identified,
- look at combined permitting centres, although FC function does not cross others due to wide variation in licensing requirements across organisations linked with need for expertise in delivery. Therefore limited opportunity.

Discussion raised several issues:

- Identify need to access the funding available through wider stewardship, but still access FC expertise
- work on heathland restoration or SSSI management, which then needs FC approval – (can work both ways though) need to reduce iterations
- integrate administration processes – examples – repeating application details (SBI and RLR registration – so why need for EWGS 1?) - introduction of MAGIC and LIS (GIS mapping processes by NE and FC respectively, but in isolation of each other)

Opportunity for AFG members to influence future direction.

Action 11 AFG

Action 12 Mike R/Andrew

8 AOB

Date of next meeting: Due in May but with current level of activity it may be more appropriate to meet in February. Need to meet will be based on feedback from base camp facility.

Action 13 Andrew