

# APPLICANTS' FOCUS GROUP MEETING

## National Motorcycle Museum, Birmingham

### 15th May 2013

#### 1. Welcome, Introduction & Apologies ([Agenda](#))

Present: Andrew Smith (FC), Richard Britton (FC), Mike Render (FC), Kevin May (FC), Joe Watts (FC), Julian Ohlsen (UPM & South West AFG), Tim Shardlow (ICF), Gary Battell (Small woods Association), John Lockhart (RICS), John Blessington (LGA), Chris Mcgloin (Community Forests), Steve Hunt (FC), Neville Elstone (ICF), Richard Sochacki, Nick Phillips (RSPB & W&CL), Nigel Hobday (FC), Simon Macgeean (Wildlife and Countryside Link), Emma Friend (Defra), Bradley Bates (Defra), .

Apologies: Caroline Harrison (Confor), Gesa Reiss (EWTP), Jane Brandon (RPA), Claire Robinson (NFU), Mike Seville (CLA) and Andrew Woods (RFS)

Andrew welcomed all to the meeting, especially our new members. He outlined some changes to the Forest Services (FS) Structure. Main change to affect the AFG would be Joe Watts (taking over as team leader from Poppy Saunders) who in future would chair meetings. A member of the FS board will attend each future meeting.

#### 2. Terms of Reference ([Paper](#))

Recognised that these were now outdated. A number of changes to the names of those attending so seemed a sensible opportunity to update. Revised draft document was presented to members. Key changes:

- FC Regions no longer exist. More local delivery.
- List of policy statements no longer relevant – now non-specific
- Emphasis change – now shaping operational practice, rather than shaping policy. It was acknowledged that a place remains for the AFG to feed into policy changes as stakeholder influence was key Defra requirement.
- List of delegates – some issues identified by members.

**Action 1**                      **AFG members**

**Action 2**                      **Steve**

New members to be aware that our minutes do not attribute comments to individuals – allows for frank and open discussion.

In light of current work looking at a combined grant scheme should Natural England (NE) and possibly Environment Agency (EA) be included in future meetings? Agreed that NE

input would be sensible, but that EA input should await outcome of the current Triennial Review.

**Action 3**                      **Joe**

### 3. New Actions from this meeting

AP	Action
1	<b>AFG members</b> to identify any textual errors in revised Terms of Reference to Steve by 6 <sup>th</sup> June.
2	<b>Steve</b> to make any changes to the Terms of Reference and circulate with the minutes of the meeting, then arrange to be put on the web site.
3	<b>Joe</b> to seek input to future meetings from NE and suggest suitable nominee.
4	<b>AFG members</b> to contact Kevin May directly in the event that there are delays to the processing of applications going forward.
5	<b>Steve</b> to forward revised felling licence application forms and guidance to AFG members as soon as they are available.
6	<b>AFG members</b> to provide feedback on the proposed grant structure to Mike Render by 7 <sup>th</sup> June.
7	<b>Mike</b> to circulate a model grant calculator for further testing and feedback.
8	<b>Kevin</b> to send out management planning templates and Excel inventory form to AFG members in order to assist with informed feedback. A briefing paper outlining where we are, especially with regards mapping, will be sent with the template documents for background information.
9	<b>AFG Members</b> to provide details of cases where land registration is holding up the processing of grant applications to Steve. These can then be followed up with RPA.
10	<b>Steve</b> to confirm whether maps need to be signed by FC in order to ensure full compliance with the new EU Timber regulations and to include in guidance notes.

### 4. Review of minutes and actions from previous meeting

No corrections sought to November 2012 minutes.

Follow up actions:

A 4. A meeting of the National Stakeholder forum was currently being scheduled by Defra colleagues. Date would be confirmed ASAP.

A 10. Joe confirmed that the wildfire practice guidance will soon be going to press.

A 13. Accepted that Chalara outbreak did on average result in approximately two week delay to processing times. This will be monitored when 2013 growing season gets underway. Extra resources had now been added to both the admin and field teams, the latter targeted mainly in the North where needs were greatest. Members confirmed that there still appeared to be inconsistencies across the country, which caused problems when managing the expectations of owners.

**Action 4**                      **AFG members**

## 5. Briefing Note ([Paper](#))

Andrew gave verbal update to table of financial data provided. Despite concerns about the impact of Chalara, demand remained high and we achieved an agreed overspend of £1.5 million. Budget for the 13/14 financial year was now mainly committed, apart from some headroom for Plant Health and Woodfuel Improvement Grants and planning grants. FC would shortly move funding allocations to 14/15. High degree of confidence that full budget for 14/15 will be available. Concerns were raised at the high level of cases (approximately 60%) that remained 'with applicant' – so not formally committed at this stage.

Support was identified by members for Forest Schools payments for which there was still a demand. These were previously 100% funded by exchequer money. Some use could be made of Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG access). Position was similar to public access (not EU co-financed). FC would consider possible availability through the new CAP funding process.

European Protected Species (EPS) training events had commenced with first internal event held near Hay on Wye. Events had been restricted to one of each (internal and external) event in each area. Locations would always be a compromise, but there was a commitment to hold further training if the demand is there. Revised guidance, checklists and support documentation are currently being drawn up.

Changes to FC felling licence application forms and guidance as a result of the introduction of the EU timber Regs. Members asked that guidance included worked examples, especially where mixtures of broadleaves and conifers were involved.

**Action 5**                      **Steve**

## 6. CAP: Grant product design ([Paper](#))

Mike highlighted the current position.

Key points to note:

- No financial commitments to date.
- Ministers have as yet to confirm that single grant approach is the way forward – assumption that this will be the selected route. The proposed 'New Environmental Land Management Scheme' (NELMS) will include elements of HLS and EWGS, but **no** duplications.
- EU has accepted that new programme will not now start until 1<sup>st</sup> January 2015 but will still end on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020.
- New Regulation will be approved (hopefully June 2013), but no agreement to date as to what will be included in the grant package. Work continues based on assumptions and likely that some elements will change before final approval is given.

- Key point is that all future grants will be underpinned by Management Plans.

Key elements for forestry support will be:

- Management Plans
- Woodland Creation comprising
  - Establishment costs
  - Protection costs and
  - 10-year maintenance payments (in lieu of FWP), but for essential work to secure establishment
- Woodland Regeneration
- Woodland access (not public)

Mike ran through what he saw as the potential key elements that would need to be agreed for each grant. Members discussed at length. Some of the key points agreed were (in no particular order):

- Management plans should be available across England (not targeted in any particular area / specific purpose).
- Need to agree a lower limit (1.0 hectare) or minimum payment (maybe £500) for applications to assist small woodland owners (currently 3 hectares and £1,000).
- Management plans now need not be mandatory for grant aid until January 2015 – agreed that we would work to the previous guidance, based on an earlier implementation date for the new RDPE of January 2014 to avoid confusion.
- Woodfuel WIG was beginning to achieve results – imperative that the new access WIG (although still based on actual costs) must be simpler and less onerous for applicants. Agreed that an evaluation of the current grant when it expires would be essential to inform new grant package.
- Protection costs should mirror the success of deer initiative work and must include grey squirrels. Should be based on professional companies providing a ‘proper’ service, rather than ad hoc amateur attempts.
- Fully supported funding of protection as a separate operation (whether this be fencing or pest control).
- General support for increasing value of management grant (MG) payments (suggestion of £100 per hectare – similar to current HLS), but agreed that there would be much higher expectation outcomes. Seen as simple to manage and apply for, but need to consider the financial implications re available grant funds.
- Overwhelming agreement that MG should not be linked to certification and that the current upper limit of 100 hectares should be reviewed.
- Consider wider priorities for MG funds rather than just priority habitats (carbon, timber production etc.).

- Accepted that Woodland Regeneration Grant (WRG) was only be available for improvements (can't fund like-for-like replacement) so would expect improvements in genetics, species choice, numbers of species, provenance etc. in order to achieve greater resilience in future.
- Grant aid for access would be limited to forestry benefit only. Still a demand for recreational access and asked that this be included going forward if possible. Could other funding be better used (Leader)?
- Woodland Creation Grant (WCG) should be prioritised so supporting water framework, linking landscapes etc. Aim to provide multifunctional woodland which was also robust in light of future challenges (climate etc.) Should it only be available where existing woodlands are already in management? Overwhelming desire to keep as simple as possible and general support for payments to be pro-rata –so paid for what you do e.g. stocking levels.
- General support for multi-annual payments to assist with establishment of new planting, rather than current FWP element (not due to be included in NELMS). Hopefully prevent schemes falling down due to lack of funds for essential works. Discussion whether these should be front end loaded.
- Further discussion centred around whether there should be higher rates for given priorities or lower standard rates with supplements.

**Action 6**                      **AFG Members**

**Action 7**                      **Mike**

## 7. Task Force update

Agricultural Task Force response already sent to Ministers. FC and Defra colleagues are currently agreeing wording of final Forestry related document.

Acknowledged some key successes:

- Forestry is hopefully to be removed from the scope of Gang Masters Licensing. The Government proposal for removal is currently out for consultation.
- Future CAP IT delivery system to cover **all** future payments. (Hopefully there would be a demonstration of the new system at the next meeting in November)
- Ramp up in the support for Plant Health issues
- An industry led initiative in relation to Health and Safety.
- Current status in relation to earned recognition. FC continuing to work with ICF and others and will learn from the experiences of other countries. Other progressions, such as Management Plans and revised grant admin processes, would all influence the outcome.

## 8. Management Planning

Kevin outlined the key drivers for changes to the management plan process. Members reviewed a simple flow process diagram outlining the changes. Mapping remained a key issue and FC was continuing to review alternative solutions.

Key challenges were to produce a UKFS compliant plan, that provided felling approval, met the requirements of the new EU Timber regulations and the Government's Timber Procurement policy (Category B), whilst also providing access to the current EWGS suite of payments (and subsequent agreed funding streams through NELMS), without the need for a further grant application.

General support for the spreadsheet approach for inventory, provided that this remained as the standard approach for all other uses of this information (allowing for easy manipulation of data).

Members discussed various elements of the proposals, including land registration, switch over date from current to new, revised template, would different format's be acceptable provided the necessary information was included?

FC looking to run a pilot of the new template in August/September. Discussion around best options, training event / online training, need for good worked examples by way of guidance.

Concern as to how management plans would fit in with the current (Farm Environmental Plans (FEPs) process, but future of these is not clear at present, so will need to be considered going forward.

AFG members were keen to be involved in reviewing templates and guidance before they were used in a pilot.

**Action 8**                      **Kevin**

Members suggested that CPH number be added to the front page and room for RLR parcel numbers in the inventory template as sensible additions.

Agreed that the use of shape files by FC was now much better. Guidance on the use of digital application maps was due to be released shortly.

**A web page has now been set up for invited persons (AFG members are included!)** please review both the template and plan of operations. You can leave any comments / thoughts / suggestions in relation to either document. No-one outside of the group will be able to see your comments and they will not be made public. There will be the opportunity for people to publicly comment in the future. Go to:

<http://dialogue.forestry.gov.uk/t1mrzynlep>

## 9. Grant Update

Kevin ran through the key elements of the grant transition to the new RDPE.

- Management Grant approvals was now extended to 15<sup>th</sup> may 2014

- WCG planting in order to trigger FWP element, the claim deadline has now been extended to the end of September 2015, but scheme approval must still be by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2013.
- We are still awaiting further information from Europe as to the position on grant business in 2014.
- Priorities for remaining budgets in 13/14 will be for applications in relation to WPG, WIG (Plant Health) and WRG (Plant Health)
- 2014/15 budget likely to be closed by December 2013

Feedback from members was supportive of transitional arrangements. Issues were still highlighted with regards customer and land registration. FC made clear that we must have examples rather than anecdotal evidence in order to take forward with RPA.

### **Action 9**                      **AFG Members**

#### **Plant Health WIG's**

AFG members were involved in the design of the WIG, which was now available, although initial take up has been slow. Additional grant support only applies to planting established using EWGS (post 2005). Flexibility within our grant rules had allowed a satisfactory solution to be introduced relatively easily – a point to note for all future grant solutions! For existing EWGS cases, details can be added by simple amendment. Older, expired schemes will be the subject of a new application. All applications via web based form, and handled centrally by the East & East Midlands Admin Hub. GB guidance is available on destruction of infected plant material (link available in Ops Note 31). National report will be issued shortly on most appropriate species for ash replacement.

## 10. Plant Health Update ([Paper](#))

Paper circulated with agenda.

#### **Chalara (Ash dieback)**

As outlined earlier, changes to FS structure had allowed FC to place a specialist Plant Health resource in each FS area. Surveying capacity in the field is being increased using a contractor resource. Country divided into 14 survey areas with five companies available in each area (25 in total). This is aimed at freeing up FC resource to allow them to concentrate on stakeholder engagement, quality control etc.

A new Tree Health and Bio-security Action Plan is due to be released (intended for launch at Chelsea Flower Show).

Currently awaiting news on further funding opportunities.

Reviewed current disease map. Wider environment infection had been confirmed in SW Wales this last week. Linked to a new planting site of 2007 or earlier. Infection has spread to neighbouring hedgerow trees. Some infection also identified in the North east, but its not clear at present if this is linked to infected planting stock or newly arrived across North sea.

### **Phytophthora ramorum**

Reviewed summary map of infections to date. Showed a levelling off in infections reported in England last year, with lower levels of infection on individual sites – probably due to early diagnosis. Outlying sites of infection were linked to known sites of rhododendron infection.

First flights for this year had taken place and initial results suggested an increase in the level of infection compared to the same time last year. Expected to some degree due to the favourable weather conditions (from disease perspective!).

Key driver for disease management in England remained at keeping the level of infection down, with the aim of preventing other tree species from being affected. Position will need to be reviewed with the industry during the coming year. Up until now owners had generally fulfilled the requirements of the Plant Health Notices, but not always in a timely manner. To date no legal actions had been necessary to ensure compliance.

Cumbria remains a particularly high risk area due to prevailing weather conditions and contiguity of larch and vaccinium on sites. There is a need for local dialogue to ensure best options are followed.

### **Phytophthora lateralis and austrocedrae**

Risk of hybridisation – but not a high priority at present (*lateralis*). Main impact of *austrocedrae* was on juniper management and improvement through HLS.

### **Cryphonectria parasitica (Sweet chestnut blight)**

Likely that an import ban on plant stock will be implemented before the next planting season, preventing import of material from nurseries where infection is in the wider environment. Number of imports is relatively low, although as a species *S. chestnut* is third highest broadleaved tree planting in mixtures (4% of total).

### **Anoplophora glabripennis (Asian Longhorn Beetle).**

Further winter survey had failed to identify any further evidence of sites). Hopeful that the outbreak had been found in time. New initiative - Open Air Laboratories (OpAL), currently aiming to target individuals and corporations and may target remaining slate importing companies, one of which was believed to have been responsible for the initial outbreak of the beetle.

### **Thaumetopoea processionea (Oak Processionary Moth).**

Several new outbreaks (Leeds and Sheffield) appear to be under control. Infestation at Pangbourne is shortly to be sprayed aerially, although this approach will be impracticable when considering current wider London infestations. European experience suggests that it will be impossible to eradicate outbreaks, but key threat is to existing woodland management ceasing due to health implications. With most wooded county - Surrey (with highest level of oak) adjacent – don't want to be in position that woodland management ceases.

### **Dothistroma (Red Band Needle Blight)**

Defra commissioned survey of Scot's pine in England to determine levels of infection. Corsican and Lodgepole pine tend to be concentrated on PFE land whereas SP is more prevalent on privately owned land.

**Acute Oak Decline.**

Not included in report details, but currently the subject of a new research project aimed at discovering the cause.

## 11. AOB

### Felling Licences

Question asked as to whether maps for licences need to be signed by FC to ensure compliance with new EUTR.

**Action 10**            **Steve**

### Bodenham Arboretum

It was noted that David Binnian, one of the founders of the Bodenham Arboretum had recently passed away. The arboretum was well worth a visit.

## 12. Date of Next Meeting

Wednesday, 13<sup>th</sup> November 2013, at the National Motorcycle Museum.