

**FORESTRY COMMISSION ENGLAND
SEVENTY SEVENTH MEETING OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE
FORESTRY COMMISSION, BRISTOL
25 NOVEMBER 2015 AT 13.00 hrs**

Minutes

Present:

Sir Harry Studholme (Chairman)
Mary Barkham
Ian Gambles
Richard Greenhous
Simon Hodgson
Steve Meeks
Keith Oates
Mark Pountain
Tom Surrey
Clive Tucker

Also present:

PK Khaira-Creswell (Secretary and England SIRO)
Richard Barker (Minute Secretary)

Jonathan Spencer Agenda Item 6

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. Shirley Trundle sent her apologies and Tom Surrey was attending in her place.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 16 SEPTEMBER 2015

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a true record.

3. MATTERS ARISING/UPDATES

CAP Reform

Richard Greenhous advised the Committee that Forest Services were pleased with the number and quality of woodland creation applications received. It remained a challenge to complete all the agreements, including woodland creation agreements, in time to enable planting in the current season.

It was expected that 42% of legacy payments would be made by the end of December and the remainder in January.

Work was ongoing on how processes could be improved for future years. A realistic improvement plan is needed, recognising the limitations and impacts of the current year's events.

Tom Surrey acknowledged the good start that had been made and confirmed that Ministers were placing great importance to the Manifesto commitment to plant 11 million trees. It was confirmed that, based on past experience, take up of woodland creation grants increases over the course of a new scheme and the target remains achievable.

Plant Health

Richard Greenhous had no new issues to report. It had been confirmed that full devolution of plant health services (to England) would require primary legislation so non-legislative options were being considered. The FC will continue to work with Defra and seek to strengthen further its very close working relationship on plant health.

Tom Surrey advised that local government had already been expressing concern about the cost of managing the safety of highway trees that became diseased. Some were considering felling as a single operation in order to save costs. It was noted that this would fall outside the requirement for a felling licence, but it was not an approach that the Forestry Commission would support.

Richard Greenhous confirmed that there was no particular reason he was aware of why Emerald ash borer had recently been in the news. It had not yet been found in the UK. Work continued on the control of the Oriental chestnut gall wasp.

Anecdotal evidence from South West England was emerging that *Phytophthora ramorum* may have been present in sweet chestnut, felled for safety reasons, before the disease was first identified. This may lead to the reassessment of disease transmission.

The Committee noted that Ben Jones, Tree Health Operations Manager, had won the Inspirational Line Manager of the Year award at the 2015 Civil Service Awards and added their congratulations.

4. FINANCE REPORT

Paper 25/15

Steve Meeks introduced Paper 25/15 and highlighted the key elements of the financial forecast. So far the pressures had been absorbed and it was anticipated that additional liabilities, within reason, arising from tax compliance could be covered, but this would leave very little flexibility for the remainder of the year.

It was noted that while the Chancellor was announcing the Spending Review outcome on the day of the meeting it would be some time before the detailed outcome for the Forestry Commission within the overall Defra settlement would be known.

In response to questions Richard Greenhous confirmed that the Forestry Innovation Fund announced by the Minister earlier in the month was expected to be resourced by Defra. Final arrangements were still under discussion.

5. HEALTH AND SAFETY

Presentation

Simon Hodgson reminded the Committee of the background to the setting up of the Forest Industry Safety Accord (FISA) and the poor industry wide safety record. In a complex and high risk industry FISA was raising safety awareness and encouraging

members to share experiences in order for others to learn from them, providing industry wide benefits.

The presentation covered Forestry Commission England Health and Safety statistics, particularly Forest Enterprise, including incidents involving members of the public on the Public Forest Estate.

Stress related absence had increased and this was causing some concern, although support mechanisms were in place. The other main area of increase was forest user cycling accidents, reflecting the popularity of cycling on the estate. Robust systems are in place to minimise the risks to users and help successfully defend the FC from injury claims.

Further activities have been undertaken in order to promote an improved culture of safety. A Safety Climate Tool had been run to set a baseline of current approaches and identify what was good and what was bad before an accident happened. The outcome had been taken forward by senior managers.

Richard Greenhous added that actively encouraging people to report near misses was helping management recognise dangers and enabling steps to be taken to address risks before an accident occurred. This same approach was being encouraged industry wide and the Health and Safety Executive remained keen to see improvements.

The Committee noted the content of the update and supported the actions being taken to further improve safety. The committee requested a more regular update.

Action: *Include regular (six monthly) updates in final 'forward look' listing.*

6. WOODLAND RESILIENCE

Paper 26/15

Richard Greenhous introduced the item. He explained that the issue of resilience applied equally to the public forest estate and woodland in other ownerships. The existence of the twin threats of climate change and pests/diseases was already accepted, but the real challenge was to deliver a practical response and appropriate changes in approaches to tree planting and woodland management.

Jonathan Spencer added that because of a lack of change of practice on the ground, despite wide recognition of the challenge, it was important for the Public Forest Estate to lead. The FC's nurseries were developing the techniques needed to grow new species and different species were being planted, for example when replacing pine that had been removed because of Dothistroma Needle Blight.

In planning for resilience possible changes to the future role for forests and the demand for forest products should be recognised. For instance the chemicals contained in timber including cellulose and lignin may become as important as round timber and biomass. Forests themselves would survive in some form without man's intervention, but intervention would be needed to optimise value to society and the wider ecosystem.

It was recognised that the resilience debate would still need to consider future timber requirements, silvicultural practicalities and real concerns about native species. The best output would be real change on the ground and not controversy so it was important to do as much as possible to enable widespread engagement in the process of developing resilience.

The Committee discussed various aspects of the issues that had been recognised including the need to acknowledge that like any insurance policy, which diversification essentially was, there would be a cost. This was a cost that land owners and managers had to find acceptable in order to securing their silvicultural future. This would need a shift in how people think about the future of forestry through the opening of minds to new ideas, not through direction.

The Committee supported the proposal to draft a Resilience Policy Position Paper, which was seen as being something that could break down the complexity of the issues and begin to shape a public debate as to what resilient woodland might look like. Some of these discussions may feed into the planned update of the UK Forestry Standard and the 25 year Environmental Strategy.

Action: *National Committee to engage in the developing Resilience Policy Position Paper - Include in 'Forward Look'.*

7. FORWARD LOOK

Paper 27/15

The Committee noted the proposal and recognising that some flexibility would be needed around timings such as around the future of Forest Research and the future of forestry regulation. Health and Safety, considered earlier in the meeting was scheduled for a six monthly update. The resilience policy position paper should also be scheduled for discussion whilst in its development phase and consideration of the 25 year Environmental Plan should be included at an appropriate time.

Action: *'Forward Look' to be updated taking into account Committee comments.*

8. FOREST HOLIDAYS/CAMPING IN THE FOREST

Paper 28/15

Simon Hodgson highlighted the progress that was being made by Forest Holidays to identify new sites with the strong support of the Forestry Commission. It was expected that EMGN4a, which had been delayed, would be ready for circulation to the Committee soon. Camping in the Forest was still looking at development, but was moving at a slower pace than Forest Holidays.

Action: *Revised draft of EMGN4a for the Committee's approval by correspondence (Outstanding).*

9. FWAC MEMBER APPOINTMENT

Paper 29/15

The Committee approved the appointment of Dr William Bullough to the East Midland FWAC through to November 2016.

Action: *William Bullough to be notified of appointment.*

10. AOB

The Committee were advised of the death of Mike Taylor whilst on holiday. Mike had been instrumental in the creation of the Forest Live concert programme, taking risks and breaking new ground for the Forestry Commission. The Committee recognised his contribution to the FC and expressed their condolences for his untimely death.

Future Meetings:

3 February – Bristol (after the FESB)

7 April – Bristol (after the FESB)