

**If responding on behalf of an organisation please give its name**

Friends of Thetford Forest

**Does the draft document 'Towards a New Public Forest Estate management body' adequately reflect the conclusions of the government 'Government Forestry & Woodlands Policy Statement'? - If so in what way?**

Yes, in the crucial aspects of the PFE as a public body answerable to Parliament and confirmed in perpetuity for the nation.

**What further development is needed for the Management organisation?**

Clarity about the Charter is lacking. The future of forestry functions is unclear, especially with regard to its being kept as a separate entity. There is also a lack of information as to how the new PFE and Forest Services will relate to each other.

FOTF believes that the core forestry functions and expertise should be kept together as a 'centre of excellence' upon which the whole of forestry, both public and private, could draw for advice, guidance etc on sustainable forestry.

**If not, what are your views on the proposed mission and objectives for the new organisation (see Annex A of the draft document)? - What are your views on the significant assets and disposals arrangements set out in the document?**

Very supportive. It is in line with FOTF view of the new PFE as a working landscape managed for its timber resource and for the benefit of wildlife, heritage and people.

**What are your views on how the new organisation could improve the financial sustainability of the Estate?**

FOTF has concerns over emphasis on 'financial sustainability' of the PFE if commercial enterprises take precedence over social and environmental values. Allowing this to happen would destroy the ethos of the PFE.

The Government must commit to long-term funding (10 years at least) on the basis of ecosystems services. It is because the PFE has evolved from being solely a timber producer to an organisation that also delivers for wildlife, heritage and people that it needs public/government funding to protect and enhance these benefits. The funding must be at a level that enhances, not negates.

**What are your views on the significant assets and disposals arrangements set out in the document? - Views on assets and disposals arrangements?**

There should be no assets and disposals without the agreement of the Guardians.

**It will be necessary to give the new body a new name because Forestry Commission is established in law as a cross-border body. Do you have any ideas on a suitable name? - Suitable new name or organisation?**

FOTF would much prefer to retain the name 'Forestry Commission' as it is part of the nation's landscape heritage and carries with it a world-wide recognition of excellence in forestry stewardship. Suggest 'Forestry Commission England' as best option. If not possible, then 'Forestry England' (for the new PFE) and 'Forest Services' to stay the same but both under the overall name of 'The Forestry Commission England'.

**What are your views on the arrangements proposed for the new organisation's accountability to Parliament? - Views on organisation's accountability to parliament?**

The new PFE must be answerable to Parliament and not to 'the Government or Ministers of the day.' This should be facilitated through the Guardians who must have real power and authority so that they truly represent and guard public ownership of the PFE. It is therefore the Guardians who should be accountable to Parliament for the PFE as set out in the Charter and they should challenge as well as oversee.

**What are your views on the proposed Board's remit, size and composition? - Views on Board's remit, size and composition?**

There is a lack of detail with regard to the Board's remit etc. It must be representative of the full range of interests across the PFE and not just the business and financial sectors.

**What are your views on the Guardians' remit, role, numbers and composition? - Views on Guardians' remit, role, numbers and composition?**

The Guardians must represent and guard the vision, mission and values of the PFE as embodied in the Charter and be invested with the power and authority to do so. In summary, the role of the Board of Guardians is to guide and protect the PFE so that it can fulfil its aims and objectives.

All Guardians must operate openly and in the public interest.

FOTF advocates 6 'community representatives', one from each Forest District. Each member to serve for a term of 3 years with a further three years following review.

Need to ensure that the Board of Guardians is a diverse and effective body (with avoidance of conflicts of interest).

Board of Guardians' members would be volunteers but would receive a daily expenses rate (similar to Heritage Lottery Fund Regional Committee Members).

There should be a facility for the Board of Directors' Chair to attend Guardians' meetings and vice versa. Both Boards should have a dedicated member who is the liaison between Directors and Guardians.

Following our own discussions and mindful of the possible 'job description' for Guardians, FOTF does not consider that the FWACs should provide the Guardians. We would not want Guardians to be recruited from FWACs as a direct route as the FWACs are not directly concerned with the PFE. The Guardians and FWACs should be entirely separate and we are not even sure that any one person should or could serve on both at the same time.

**What are the most important things to put in a public charter for the new organisation? - Most important things for public charter?**

that the nations' forests and woods are held in perpetuity and managed as a working landscape for the timber resource and for the benefit of wildlife, heritage and people.

**Do you have any general comments that you believe would be of assistance in creating the new organisation? - General comments on new organisation?**

Continue to listen to and consult with users of the PFE through the Forests Campaign Network. This is 'democracy in action' and a model for other organisations.

In addition, the PFE must work closely with and form local and regional partnerships with its communities. The PFE can develop links with other organisations where there are mutual benefits but not at the expense of its communities - nor absolve itself of its responsibilities to its communities. In fact, the PFE should be encouraged to forge closer links - these will be as diverse as the forests are. Local communities and the PFE must work together to find the best solutions. (Where no long-standing arrangements are already in place, 'Friends of' model might be followed).

**The forestry functions review concluded that the current arrangements 'complicate governance and obscure a clearer "line of sight" between forestry and woodland policy and delivery'. What do you think should be done to address this?**

Forest Services should be the sole body delivering forestry expertise and have a direct line to the Minister.

**What more do you think should be done to improve the efficiency with which government's forestry functions are delivered? - What can be done to improve efficiency?**

Forest Services should administer all grants and licences and all grant aid should come through it.

**Would you like to make any other comments about the conclusions of the review of forestry functions in England, including on any impacts of the creation of the Public Forest Estate management body? - Other comments?**

FOTF would like to see 'core forestry expertise' kept together as a single body - and occupying a central position in forestry in England by offering its expertise to the PFE and to private woodland owners alike. Furthermore, FOTF would like this body fully resourced to enable it to 'sell its expertise' in Europe and internationally. This body could retain the name 'The Forestry Commission' if the PFE cannot.

**Would you like to make any other comments at this early stage about how setting up the Public Forest Estate management body and advancing the conclusions of the review of forestry functions in England might affect: - Cross-boarder functions?**

At present, formal power sits with the FC Commissioners - but they represent GB - not England alone.

Cross-Border functions and issues : FC Scotland and FC England are already devolved to a certain extent. Could the Commissioners become two separate bodies : Commissioners England and Commissioners Scotland. Could the PFE then keep FC name and logo ?

DEFRA might provide 'back office functions' for IT; HR and finances for FC England or Scotland could retain these and sell them to FC England through a service level agreement. FC England would take lead on international representation and 'political forestry' on world stage, but with consultation with FC Scotland.

**Would you like to make any other comments at this early stage about how setting up the Public Forest Estate management body and advancing the conclusions of the review of forestry functions in England might affect: - Shared services?**

See above

**Would you like to make any other comments at this early stage about how setting up the Public Forest Estate management body and advancing the conclusions of the review of forestry functions in England might affect: - England's National Office**

No further comments.

**Would you like to make any other comments about any aspect of this work? - General comments?**

FOTF welcomes the current level of public consultation and hopes that it will continue at a national and local level.

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