

Agenda Item 8

COMMISSIONERS  
MEETING

Memo No 15/14

25 September 2014

**DIRECTOR ENGLAND REPORT****Plant Health***Phytophthora ramorum (Pr)*

To date 18 survey flights have been undertaken: 13 in England, 3 in Wales and 2 in Northern Ireland. 52,109 Ha of both privately and publicly managed larch has been surveyed and flight observations remain encouraging. Limited *Pr* symptoms have been observed, and generally these are in the vicinity of previously confirmed infection or in association with rhododendron.

Oak Processionary Moth (OPM)

The OPM survey/control season ended in early August with moth emergence. This year has proved challenging, with weather conditions conducive to OPM development. In Pangbourne no nests have been found but male moths have been caught in pheromone traps. Our own surveys show that in London, OPM has spread beyond its extent last year. Nests have been found in all directions out from previous extent, and the pheromone trap programme is detecting male moths even further out. This summer has seen public health impacts, with 37 children at one school in Richmond reporting OPM symptoms of skin irritation and rashes. A single infested tree was found on the Olympic Park and the tree destroyed; surveys suggest no other trees in the vicinity of the Olympic Park were infested.

*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus (ex Chalara fraxinea)*

Surveying and reporting remains a priority operation in line with the recommendations in the Plant Health and Tree Health strategies published earlier this year. For the second consecutive year FC England trained contractors have investigated ash sites out to a radius of 30km from known sites containing infected sporulating ash; further wider environment outbreaks associated with many of these sites were found, notably in Lancashire, Northumberland, Surrey and Hampshire.

Given these findings Ministers have agreed that reporting should move to hectare mapping for all disease spread findings. Similarly Ministers have agreed to move away from 'announcing' findings in each new county.

Early in the year there was much concern expressed about the apparent health of ash trees, much of this from the public. However this was put down to the heavy seeding many trees were experiencing and most trees now show a full foliar recovery.

## **Senior Forest Enterprise England Appointments**

Mike Seddon, Paddy Harrop and David Hodson have now joined the FEE senior team in their roles as Director of Operations, Head of Marketing and Head of Finance and Business Support respectively.

Interviews took place for new Forest Management Directors for both the South and North Districts on 8<sup>th</sup> September. It has now been announced that James Simpson, previously of FC Scotland, has been appointed to the North District role (to take over from Graham Gill when he retires), and Bruce Rothnie, current South West Area Director, will take on the South District role.

## **Public Forest Estate Visitor Numbers**

Investment by FC England and business partners in upgrading facilities, the Gruffalo campaign, and good weather have all contributed to a busy summer with increased visitor numbers and a positive impact on income at Forest Centres. Car parking income is up 12.6% to the end of period 5, compared with the same period in 2013-14.

## **Defra One Business**

The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) launches on 1st October and joins up the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA) with the Inspectorates from Fera (Bee Inspectorate, Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate, Plant Variety & Seeds Group and the GM Inspectorate). The aim is for the new Agency to bring together expertise, share best practice and resource, and increase resilience for the future.

Formerly known as 'Future corporate services' workstream, the new Network Corporate Services directorate will also launch on 1st October. Led by Dave Webster, this directorate aims to deliver corporate services in a more streamlined way, releasing cash by reducing duplication. Initial work areas include procurement, estates and ICT. The workstream's focus is currently on "Tranche 1" organisations within the Defra network; FC England will form part of 'Tranche 2', so we are initiating discussions on the implications for change from April 2016.

## **Wild Boar**

The autumn feral wild boar cull in the Forest of Dean has now started. Opponents of the cull, some shifting their attention from badgers to boar, have begun hostile actions including online harassment and filming of wildlife rangers, and a trap set to attack an FC vehicle (using a rock tied to a branch at windscreen/head height). The police are actively involved and being very supportive. The cull will continue and is strongly supported in the local community. Ministers are informed about the cull and have endorsed our approach.

## **Deer Control Consultation**

An informal consultation has been running to ascertain the views of key stakeholders on how FC England might evolve its approach to helping landowners reduce the impact of deer on woods and forests. A range of options are being assessed as to how best to help landowners collaborate to control deer through identifying what only Government can do whilst still being affordable and achieving best value for money. As at 9<sup>th</sup> September 62 responses had been received; the consultation closes on 15<sup>th</sup> September.

## **Disputed Case - Wallshield**

In August 2013 the Forestry Commission received an English Woodland Grant Scheme application to plant a 77 hectare conifer woodland at Wallshield near Haltwhistle in the Northumberland National Park and Hadrian's Wall World Heritage area. Forest Services' opinion was that consent was not required under the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations, and are minded to approve grant support for a reduced scheme of just over 47 hectares, which includes over 11 hectares of broadleaves and open space.

However, the Northumberland National Park Authority have sustained an objection to the scheme on the grounds of historic environment, access, landscape and natural environment. This sustained objection has triggered the 'disputed case' process as set out in the 1984 Ministerial Direction. A sub-committee of the Region's Forestry and Woodlands Advisory Committee carried out a site visit and considered the case, hearing from both the applicant and the National Park Authority, on 8 September.

If, as a result of the meeting, a compromise is not agreed and the Objection withdrawn the case will be considered by the National Committee at its meeting on 1 October in accordance with the established process. A 'disputed case' is an unusual event, the last time we had one in England was in 2008.

## **Roots to Prosperity – Sector Growth Plan**

FC England has been working with the sector to help develop a growth plan for the North of England. The Roots to Prosperity partnership has been led by the UK Forest Products Association and Confor, with support from Forestry Commission England and the Local Authorities (Northumberland, Durham, North Yorkshire and Cumbria). The main focus of the work has been to help raise the profile of the sector and to identify specific opportunities for growth.

The Action Plan was formally launched on the 4<sup>th</sup> August at the Egger UK processing plant by Guy Opperman MP. The launch event included presentations from Local Enterprise Partnerships, Confor and UKFPA, along with the opportunity to tour the wood processing plant. The action plan identifies a series of steps that could create over 1,000 new jobs and generate an additional £54m in Gross Value Added, at an investment cost of £28m.

## **A11 Mitigation**

The project partners (Highways Agency, FC England, DEFRA, Natural England and RSPB) and their technical advisors continue to work on the details of the proposal to secure the necessary compensatory habitat required to mitigate the A11 dualing. The option to convert Public Forest Estate leasehold land (at Elveden) was approved by the DEFRA Secretary of State in July, subject to conclusion of detailed provisions, in a Settlement Agreement.

The Highways Agency are close to agreeing Heads of Terms with the Elveden Estate over management of the mitigation land. The proposed Public Forest Estate (leasehold) area due to be surrendered is up to 225 Ha. On surrender the FC will receive compensation for the loss of production/early felling and capital to secure replacement land and the cost of replanting to ensure no net loss of the Public Forest Estate. The Highways Agency are working with lawyers on the planning consent/appropriate assessment requirements for the mitigation land including the requirement for a forestry Environmental Impact Assessment for the felling of the standing crop on the leasehold area.

The project partners are meeting to agree the long-term management plan for the mitigation land, which will be managed by the Elveden Estate. A similar plan is being prepared for the 35 Ha of mitigation land already secured by the Highways Agency at Hockwold (Weeting Heath) that will be incorporated into the Public Forest Estate.

Defra and FC England Communications teams are working with the Highways Agency to update the communications plan for the project. Friends of Thetford Forest are aware and remain supportive of the principles outlined to date.

The A11 is to be formally opened later in 2014.

## **Royal Forestry Society Woodlands for Climate Change Competition**

East England district has won the inaugural Royal Forestry Society Woodlands for Climate Change Competition. The award was open to all woodlands throughout England where tree plantings, both new and restocking, are creating sites that are resilient to the predicted challenges of climate change and pests and diseases.

Following the outbreak of *Dothistroma* needle blight (DNB) in Thetford Forest, Forestry Commission staff at Santon Downham trialled underplanting of thinned stands of Corsican pine with ten shade tolerant conifer species. Judges were impressed by the way in which the outbreak of DNB had been faced up to at a vast scale, as well as the novel approaches taken to the restructuring of stands.

## **Apprenticeships**

In 2012 Board level approval was given to the creation of a new Forest Craftsperson Apprenticeship programme for England and resources were identified for 20 apprentice

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places and two dedicated apprentice trainers. 2,100 applications for 20 posts were received, illustrating the huge interest and demand for practical apprenticeships in forestry.

20 apprentices were employed and based in Forest Districts across the country (10 West, 2 East, 6 Central and 2 North England Districts), working alongside experienced FE England staff covering a wide variety of forest operations. 18 of the original 20 have remained with FE England for the duration of the programme (a retention rate that is higher than similar industry programmes).

Following on from the success of the first programme, resources have been agreed for a second programme to start in January 2015. Recruitment has now closed and FE England are currently assessing 800 applications for 12 apprentice posts across England.

In the wider sector, FC England are working in partnership with Lantra and the Arboricultural Association, to support a consortium of more than 20 forestry and arboricultural businesses in a bid to BIS to become an apprenticeship 'Trailblazer', and develop a new apprenticeship which meets employers' needs.

BIS have asked that the bid be resubmitted as a joint proposal that also includes the horticulture and landscaping sector. This will have an umbrella group of horticultural, landscape, arboricultural and forestry representatives, but will use sectoral sub-groups to produce the apprenticeship models that work best for individual sectors.

If the bid to BIS to be a Trailblazer is successful, it will see the businesses developing a new apprenticeship for forestry over the coming months. We should know by mid-September if we have been successful.