

MINUTES OF THE 906<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF  
THE FORESTRY COMMISSIONERS  
BARNSDALE HALL HOTEL, NR OAKHAM  
19<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2014

Present

Harry Studholme (Chair), Ian Gambles, Hamish Macleod, Bob McIntosh, Keith Oates, Wilma Harper, Jean Lindsay

Also Attending

Fiona Alexander (Minutes)

**1. Introduction and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Amanda Bryan. Mr Gambles advised the meeting that he had been appointed as a Non-executive Director of the James Hutton Institute.

**2. Minutes of 20 March 2014**

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

**3. Matters Arising**

i) Forest Holidays

The meeting heard that the hearing for the Delamere planning application was due to be concluded shortly. The focus for further new sites was most likely to be in the south of England with those sites within easy reach of London tending to be more successful. The Internal Audit report on FC processes and procedures for working with Forest Holidays and Camping in the Forest is near completion.

ii) Appointments

Interviews for the role of Non-executive Forestry Commissioner for England were held on 7 May. Three appointable candidates will be interviewed by the Secretary of State on 16 July. [Note: these interviews were subsequently deferred following the appointment of a new Secretary of State]

iii) Woodland Policy Enabling Programme

Public Forest Estate - the meeting heard that there was no reference to the Public Forest Estate in the Queen's Speech and there is no intention to bring forward a draft bill before the next election. Work on FEE Plus is progressing well with discussions on refreshing the governance of FE and developing the eco-systems service model ongoing. The framework agreement between FC and FE is currently being restructured.

Forest Services – work continues on finalising the technical details for the new grants processing system. It has been agreed that FC staff will not transfer to Natural England. Work on reshaping Forest Services to refocus on appropriate targets for future working is being undertaken.

iv) Cross-Border Project

The meeting heard that the project is now in Phase 2 and the Project Board is looking at four potential scenarios to take forward. Criteria for evaluation are currently being developed and these will be put to the WPEP Board for sign-off.

The meeting recognised the valuable work of the Project and the related work on Shared Services and noted how the various outputs e.g. skills mapping, resource capacity, strategies will help the countries determine what shared services they want to continue to collaborate on.

#### **4. Communication with External Bodies**

The meeting agreed that communications with external partners are very important and there are opportunities to consider and discuss a wide range of issues such as timber sales, plant health, and grey squirrel control. The meeting agreed that current relationships with external partners are generally good, but always need work to maintain partnership.

#### **5. Natural Resources Wales**

The meeting was given an update on the relationship between the Forestry Commission and Natural Resources Wales (NRW). The FC has worked closely with NRW since April 2013 and in general the relationship is working well. There is agreement in place for new charging mechanisms with costs and savings made more visible. NRW has a transition plan for withdrawing from some FC services this financial year including finance and IT. The meeting felt that the Welsh Assembly inquiry into the establishment of NRW may provide some useful pointers for the FC going forward.

#### **6. Business Sustainability**

The meeting was given an update on the work undertaken so far to devolve business sustainability to the countries. Legislation on sustainability is different in England and Scotland and last year the decision was taken to devolve this function. A plan is in place to ensure that the transition process is managed effectively and that each country has trained staff able to take on the business sustainability work, including certification to ISO14001.

#### **7. Director Central Services Report**

The meeting considered the report noting:

- i) The successful inspection and interception of diseased wood packaging from Turkey;
- ii) Positive figures for carbon store and biomass;
- iii) Ministers approved the Forest Research Corporate Plan;

- v) In 2013/14 employee accident numbers fell from 21 to 11;
- vi) HMRC are carrying out a number of audits on FC processes looking at various issues including taxable benefits and VAT.

## **8. Director England Report**

The meeting considered the report noting:

- i) The Forest Research survey on boar shows a large increase in the number of feral wild boar in the Forest of Dean. Boar can do considerable damage to grass, farmland, recreational grounds etc and populations can expand rapidly. As a landowner, the FC will take appropriate action. The potential requirement for an increased ongoing cull will be discussed at a local forest forum in late June and with Ministers;
- ii) Following a summit on grey squirrel control at Dumfries House in May, key UK stakeholders in the sector are in the process of agreeing a new Squirrel Accord. Work is in hand to finalise a refreshed squirrel strategy for England, including control requirements within the Rural Development Plan for England;
- iii) The Woodland Creation statistics show that 3,300ha of new woodland was created in England last year. This year's figure is unlikely to reach the same level.

## **9. Director Scotland Report**

The meeting considered the report noting:

- i) The spread of *Phytophthora ramorum* appears reduced this year and may be due to a combination of a drier summer in 2013 and robust mitigation measures;
- ii) Considerable work is being done on looking at forestry and constitutional reform. Potential models for the management of the public forest estate have been suggested and FCS will engage with Ministers in September, following the Referendum;
- iii) The budget for forestry in the CAP reform has been maintained and work is underway to specify the details of grant-aid. The reform of CAP is currently an 'unknown' and may impact on the availability of land for forestry.

## **10. Any Other Business**

In reply to a query on the consultation to dissolve the Home Grown Timber Advisory Committee, the meeting heard that the FC is drafting a reply to the RSPB.

## **11. Date of Next Meeting**

24 and 25 September 2014 to incorporate a Tour in Scotland.