

Review of Forestry Functions in England: Outputs from workshop 11th April 2013

Feedback on options.

Summary of evidence provided by the feedback:

- A majority were in favour of retaining a body focussed on forestry.
- Many saw opportunities to better integrate England and cross-border functions.
- Most favoured more integration but not merger with the other Defra network bodies.
- Many saw opportunities for efficiencies from shared "back office" functions.
- Some favoured a merger with Natural England.
- Some set out an alternative option (or approach) based on more radical integrated working based on a clearer strategy for environmental benefits.
- Breaking up the functions would make delivery of forestry policy weaker.

Feedback from groupwork.

Group A

Key points:

- Forestry arrangements not currently broken.
- Focus on key principles; retain forestry expertise and stakeholder confidence, esp. woodland owners.
- Option 2- opportunities to improve, also threats.
- Between options 1 and 2.

The group decided it wanted to focus its discussion largely on Options 1 and 2. In the case of Option 1 the following summary points of interest and concern were captured in addition to the SWOT bullet points:

- Insufficient clarity Forest Services /Forest Research /Forestry Commission (FC) etc.
- Growth not clearly expressed/sufficient e.g. health, social benefits – where are these?
- Networking role, incl. internal connectivity, is important activity. (Key Point – insufficient emphasis on wider role of trees/woods in growth agenda, social aspects – too timber focused.)
- Lack of dovetailing activity with Public Forest Estate. (Other key point agreed by group.)
- Need to constantly monitor/redefine what is meant by Sustainable Forest Management.
- Is Forestry Regulations Task Force and red tape reduction properly reflected?
- Strengthen market development for PIE.
- FC/FS needs to be champion/'go to' role.
- Have to bear in mind staff capacity against range of functions.

Option 1: Single Forestry Body

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Continuity	Vulnerability
Retained expertise	Perception of 2 forestry bodies (including Forest Enterprise (Public Forest Estate))
Can deliver government policies e.g. ecosystems growth	
Integrity maintaining internal networking	
Retain stakeholder confidence e.g. Private sector	
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
More local autonomy	Too isolationist – treats trees and woods as too separate in landscape
Absorb some EA/NE led forestry type policy loads	
Sharpen up boundaries/remit of organisation	
Stronger governance?	
More transparency	
Faster progress on de-regulation	
Can capture the merger of FS and Forest Research 'option'	

Option 2: Forestry Body and Natural England Consolidated

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Better integration of ecosystem services	Low profile of forestry voice
Bigger pool of expertise	
Broader reach of forestry services	
Learning from each other – sharing expertise	
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Integration of grants and advice services for landowners	Drop in performance during transition to new arrangements
Steer more rural development funding to trees and woods	Loss of stakeholder/private sector confidence
	Risk of dilution/loss of expertise
	Budget allocations for forestry
	Less transparent governance decisions
	Less EU Rural Development money

	for trees and woods
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Option 3: Forestry Functions and conservation functions merged/integrated with new remit

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Integrates habitat advice/policy	Reduced private sector confidence
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
	Loss of forestry focus/expertise
	New statute required
	Reduces links with Public Forest Estate etc
	Delays delivery of government policies around growth etc
	Disruptive and costly

Option 4: Forestry Functions in a Single Environmental Body

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
One stop shop	Not a very good shop
	Too generalist
	Change for the sake of it
	Reduction in Private sector confidence
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
	Lose Forestry focus
	New statute required
	Reduces ability to deliver Government forestry policies like Growth and Ecosystem services
	Delays delivery of Government policies around growth etc
	Reduced staff morale
	Lose long term confidence of dealing with FC
	Disruptive and costly

Group B

Key points

- Other options - option 1+ better joint working.
- What does the sector need? - partnership with bits of industry.
- Transition option - option 4 light, better integrated local delivery, not merger. Similar to option 2.
- FC "take over" NE, FC culture is stronger.
- Logic flow:
 - Stand alone body: lack of resources but a strong reputation underpinned by expertise.
 - Integration gives an opportunity to embed effective expertise.
 - Merger is disruptive and costly, no consensus on ways of working.
 - More about ways of working but it is the structure that brings in expertise and partnerships that is best.

General Comments

- A. Option 1 (+) – Efficiency & Joint Working & Synergy
- B. Forestry Single Body – In partnership – What delivery best for Industry = Partnership is key.
- C. Transition Option – Maintain expertise, Place based delivery. - Option 2 –but not a merger but a Formal Joint Venture - Better integrated at local delivery level
- D. Joint View: Merger of NE & FS not including EA – Option 3

Option 1: Single Forestry Body

- More about ways of working

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
FC Branding underpinned & reputation of staff	Lack of resources in small stand alone organisation
Potential to integrate land management – learn from FE	Lack of economies of scale
Industry expertise	Capacity of staff
Alignment and embedding good approach.	Responding to change
Environmental management integrated into forestry	
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Embed forestry expertise in other better resourced activities & landscape approach	Disruptive and costly to merge organisations
Industry experience	One culture domination
Long-term delivery approach that is removed from government	Potential loss of expertise
To respond to differing priorities whatever they may be	Domination of Environmental functions

Opportunity to change both state functions	Impacts on staff morale
	Statutory obligations – Focus on improved delivery

Other options no SWOT analysis carried out.

Group C

Key points:

- Other options: transfer in other functions to FC, keep Public Forest Estate in FC.
- Option 4 = completely new organisation that would arise from triennial review, few strengths lots of weaknesses.
- Option 2 and 3 come together because option 2 would lead inevitably to option 3.

General Comments

Clarity?

- Option 2 – Can it actually operate without legislative change? E.g. which trumps which – NERC or Forestry Act? Will it inevitably lead to option 3?
- Option 2 – Is it federal with distinct remits?
- Option 1 – Is there anything from NE & EA that should come to FC?
- Option 1 should be described in same clarity as other options – where does PFE sit?

Other Options?

- Elements of NE/EA work transferring to FC/FS.
- Retaining PFE within a FC framework.
- New remit/existing remit within option 4.

Option 1: Single Forestry Body

(Note – group spent no time considering this option)

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
	Stand alone FS is very small
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS

Option 2 & 3: Forestry Body and Natural England Consolidated & Forestry Functions and conservation functions merged/integrated with new remit

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Option 2 – easier, quicker	We are in the dark over TR

Larger resource for forestry sector (potentially) with NE	How would current Governance continue?
Option 3 could provide on entirely new remit and culture change	Will customers get forestry advice from a forestry specialist
Provides political get out to avoid merger of NE & EA	Would there be less emphasis on economic delivery e.g. Ecosystem services?
	Would it weaken link to Forest Research?
	Option 3 requires major legislation – very unlikely. More uncertainty
	Option 2 also leads to more uncertainty
	No evidence of cost saving
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Shared back office	Do various bits of legislation trump others?
Greater benefit of specialist advisers	Would the FC culture be subsumed by NE
Cement joint working that should already be happening	Forestry profile and expertise is diminished – can this be mitigated?
Landscape scale integration – no siloed working	Lots of FS would result in critical mass thus destroying a GB organisation
Mechanism to change culture of NE	
Option 2 could lead to option 3	

Option 3: Forestry Functions and conservation functions merged/integrated with new remit

- Please see above

Option 4: Forestry Functions in a Single Environmental Body

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Ability to concentrate on English issues	Systems are different
	FC currently across GB – which will be lost
	Presupposes that Scotland devolution will happen
	No transparency within our new organisation
	Cultural differences between organisations are huge – r.e. ALB joint working
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS

chance to do things better	Loss of focus on forestry – flood management etc is huge
Efficiencies – sharing of back office	Loss of woodland culture
Opportunity to build on new organisation	Failure to meet P.I.E objectives
	Costs
	Scale of EA v NE v FC

Group D

Key points:

- Lack of detail in the options descriptors is a problem.
- Do we trust that forestry won't lose identity? What are the international examples?
- Link back to Public Forest Estate.
- Option 4 light might work - more joined up without new organisation.
- Scale of current set up; don't forget GB scale forestry functions.

Option 1: Single Forestry Body

STRENGTHS		WEAKNESSES	
Clear focus		Critical mass	
Retention of expertise			
OPPORTUNITIES		THREATS	
Support		Dilution	

Option 2: Forestry Body and Natural England Consolidated

STRENGTHS		WEAKNESSES	
		Merging does not save money	
OPPORTUNITIES		THREATS	
		Loss of forestry identity – eventual disappearance	
		International commitments	

Option 3: Forestry Functions and conservation functions merged/integrated with new remit

- See general feedback comments

Option 4: Forestry Functions in a Single Environmental Body

- See general feedback comments

Group E

Key points:

- Natural synergies between a fair amount of NE's and FC's work, need a solution that complements both
- Somewhere between option 1 and 2 is preferred, to ensure that the Forestry voice is not lost and that expertise is not marginalised. Also, if a variation on these options is chosen, more emphasis needs to be placed on the body on working with/through others.
- There is some merit in an integrated land management approach across all 3 bodies (NE, EA and FC) but not agreement across the table on whether this is best achieved as one body or working together through either informal or more formalised means.
- Consensus that savings could probably be made, if that is the objective, by consolidating some services across the Defra network.

Group focussed on options 1 and 2 and didn't really discuss 3 and 4.

Option 1: Single Forestry Body

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Strong voice for forestry	No real growth agenda
Potential for: - - Growth - Value For Money	Needs to tackle priorities (Protect, Improve, Expand)
Expertise	Value For Money
One voice to deliver Forestry Policy	Less clout than in large body
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Has the potential to develop	No investment in Ecosystems services
Add in parts of NE & EA to enhance services	Too much focus on finance
More focus on working with/through others	

Option 2: Forestry Body and Natural England Consolidated

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Natural synergies between FS & NE	Individual culture of organisations not recognised
Potential for Growth/Value For Money	
Individual expertise	
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS

Synergies balanced	Customer relating from NE
Developed between option 1 & 2	One organisation's culture overrides the other
More focus on working with/through others	
Potential for a more integrated approach	

Option 3: Forestry Functions and conservation functions merged/integrated with new remit

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
More resilient	Would it enhance forestry delivery
	No forestry voice
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
	No forestry voice

Option 4: Forestry Functions in a Single Environmental Body

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
	No forestry voice
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
	No forestry voice

Group F

Key points:

- Option 1: further cuts = loss of expertise?
- Option 4: delivery and regulation in same body is a problem.
- Option 3 and 4 could retain forestry expertise in a separate department.

Option 1: Single Forestry Body

- Integrated land use strategy – Defra needs to set a strategy – need strategic objective
- People worry about loss of FC name
- Forestry policy needs to sit in land use strategy
- Also need to make sure under any option to have a strong forestry policy
- Team in Defra to lead – this will help deliver policy throughout

General Points

- Forestry 10% in England (=70% agriculture)

- Integrated land ownerships (90% ag/10% wood)
- Small Influence/size in wider environment

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Continuity	Probably below critical mass
Specialist Knowledge	Unable to deal with more cuts
Specialist Relationships	Silo thinking – maintained
Avoids dilution	Can't get to assist many landowners
Crisis Management – Continuity	Connecting with wider government policy (disagreement)
Can help	Ends up working with other land use and weak competitor
Locally available	Learning & development & bringing new in as fragmented
	Cross Government + weak as industry is tiny. Risks decouple delivery & public benefit that justifies it – might be amplified as single body.
	Isolated so decouples from own clients – i.e. RDP & AGR
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Could address some weaknesses within single body	See weaknesses
Encourages new partnership and funding	May lose through RDP if siloed
Economic	So small becomes irrelevant
	If Defra loses interest again

Option 2: Forestry Body and Natural England Consolidated

General Point on 2 & 3: Rural Development Programme delivery biggest delivery tool and these put them together

- Don't want constant limbo

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
More access to woodland & landowners	Seen as stop gap on way to option 3 and 4
More potential to deliver wider government agendas	Forestry still separate in RDPE
Would give some certainty quickly e.g moral and motivation	Friction between remits
	FC will get weaker and smaller
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS

More opportunity to develop new partnerships	Risk of losing commercial focus
If option 3 is aspiration option 2 could be a step to it (but better to do it and get done	Bring together who have had difficult leadership issues and bringing together so may compound inability at the top
	Longer uncertainty may lose good people

Option 3: Forestry Functions and conservation functions merged/integrated with new remit

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Forestry can access more RDPE	Integrating functions
Gives certainty	NE, EA and FC = Very different
Clear Governance	Need to work very hard to help maintain specialist skills
Ability to change NE objectives to help focus on business more	Forestry specialism might be swallowed
Get focus on forestry as current without being eroded	
Are cross-overs and helps remove silos – will help with pests and diseases, Forestry and Lawton, Climate change etc	
Similar skill sets & can access more skills more easily and utilise expertise and cross fertilisation	
Could still have department switch specialists & Can do sector specialists	
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Local engagement improved and utilised – for option 4	Risk of losing commercial focus

Option 4: Forestry Functions in a Single Environmental Body

- If triennial review decide on EA/NE merges FC will then have to go in and will need to have mechanism to give them a voice bigger than size

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Are cross overs & remove silos	Functions very different but could be dealt with in legislation
Could be focused & a department in Forestry etc	Need to make sure maintain specialist organisations
Might help move more market focus sand thinking into NE	Might lose specialist focus

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Do same with EA	Incorporating delivery
Operations was with PFE so remove function/regulation & operation	Internal conflicts
	Make sure reg. function separate from delivery so don't regulate yourself