

# **Harnessing the Energy of the Community**

## **Summary**

### **Pilot Stakeholder Engagement Framework**

#### **Baseline and proposed framework, actions and initiatives.**

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## **Abbreviations**

EEFD – East England Forest District

FC – Forestry Commission

FDP – Forest Design Plan

HEC – Harnessing the Energy of the Community

IPF – Independent Panel on Forestry

PFE – Public Forest Estate

## Definitions

**Stakeholder:** A person, group or organization that has interest or concern in an organisation. Stakeholders can affect or be affected by the organization's actions, objectives and policies.

**Stakeholder Engagement:** The process by which the Forestry Commission involves people who may be affected by the decisions it makes or who can influence the implementation of its decisions.

**Strategic Engagement:** An action to share knowledge, expertise and opinions with relevant stakeholders to influence decision making at a Forest District level.

**Accountability:** The Forestry Commission needs to be held accountable for the decisions it makes and the actions it takes according to established standards.

**Transparency:** An essential ingredient of accountability. If an organisation is transparent, people outside the organisation can understand how decisions are made and how they can influence those decisions.

## **1 Background to the Stakeholder Engagement Framework**

### **1.1 Harnessing the Energy of the Community**

Harnessing the Energy of the Community (HEC) is a response to the direction set by the Independent Panel on Forestry (IPF) on community engagement, transparency and accountability. It specifically aims to trial ways of supporting stakeholders to contribute to the Forest Enterprise England (FEE) strategic decision making process at a District level.

HEC was tasked with developing a pilot project to address the following aims so that lessons learned could further enhance stakeholder engagement across the Forestry Commission (FC):

- develop a broader perspective and understanding between the FC and stakeholders to increase transparency in what we do and clarify accountability;
- explore different means and depths of involvement with stakeholders to identify what does and doesn't work
- bring stakeholders alongside the FC to share in the responsibility for strategic decisions about the East England Forest District (EEFD) at a District level.

### **1.2 The Pilot Project: A Stakeholder Engagement Framework (SEF)**

After a consultation period a Stakeholder Engagement Framework (SEF) was developed in response to stakeholder feedback focusing on the aims of HEC. The framework is based on a set of principles established from quantitative data drawn out of an online stakeholder questionnaire in May 2014. Actions to address the framework principles were drawn out of more qualitative data from the questionnaire and a stakeholder workshop held in May 2014.

The SEF actions form the basis of the pilot and will be tested in the EEFD by applying them to three district initiatives as a way of project managing stakeholder engagement. It is hoped that the framework will allow project managers to deliver engagement, accountability and transparency in a consistent, co-ordinated and targeted way across the district but with the flexibility to respond to the districts diverse activity.

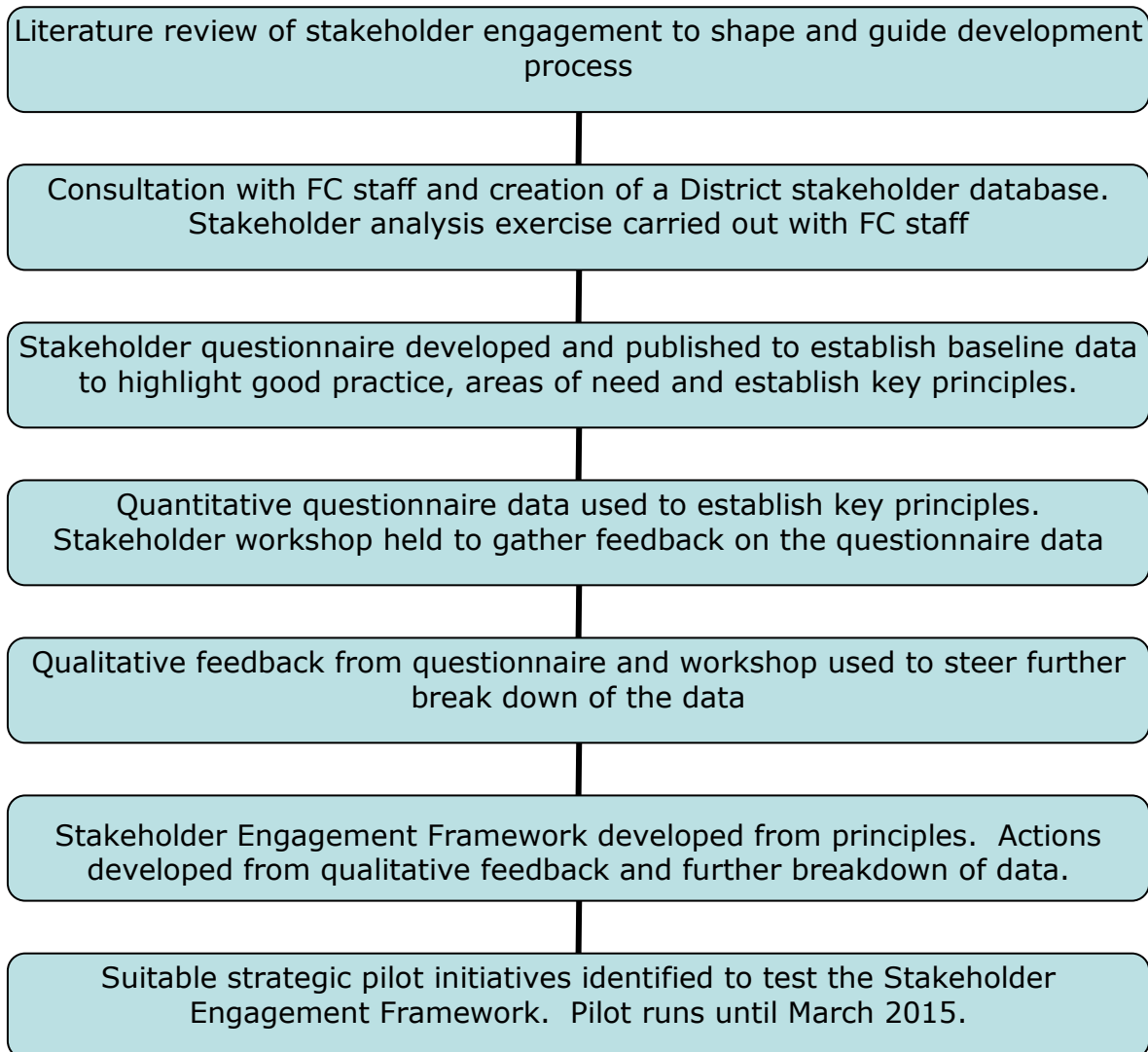
The pilot will run from August 2014 to March 2015 with opportunities for stakeholders to get involved via the three district initiatives. The pilot will be evaluated and the findings used to refine the SEF to be considered for roll out across other forest districts.

### **1.3 Thank you to the Forest Community**

At the heart of this project the Forestry Commission's commitment to the many communities and organisations that have a stake in the Public Forest Estate. It recognises the energy of those who campaigned for the PFE and the input from stakeholders who helped shape the options and recommendations that informed the Government response to the IPF report. Thank you for the support you have given to manage this amazing resource for people, wildlife, the local and rural economy, and for the future.

## 2 The development process

Below is an outline of the development process followed to shape the Stakeholder Engagement Framework and pilot project.



## **3 Consultation and Feedback**

### **3.1 Stakeholder Consultation**

The aim of stakeholder consultation was to understand the current level of satisfaction with stakeholder engagement, transparency and accountability within the FC in order to identify best practice and areas for improvement.

Over 200 individuals representing 121 organisations were sent an online questionnaire. 58% of participants represented organisations and 41% were individual responses. 22 people representing 20 organisations attended a workshop at which analysis of the questionnaire feedback was presented and responses explored in more detail. The list of respondents was compiled from data provided by FC staff in the EEFD and outreach guided through a follow up stakeholder analysis and recommendations from stakeholders.

### **3.2 How the data was analysed**

Forest Research played an important advisory and analytical role during the consultation and analysis of feedback to develop the framework and pilot project. The data from the questionnaire was assessed for statistical significance. Where statistical significance was noted it played a key role in identifying themes, which were shaped into overarching principles. Where data highlighted aspects for consideration but statistical significance could not be demonstrated, conclusions were referred to but with caution and tested through the pilot.

Qualitative additional feedback from the questionnaire and a workshop informed a broader understanding of the principles and provided a steer in shaping actions to address them.

### **3.3 Identifying correlations**

Analysis of the data tried to identify correlations in between stakeholders interests and levels of engagement with their responses. While there appeared to be no statistical significance between stakeholders responses and their interests some themes and actions were identified in relation to the level of engagement stakeholders felt they currently had.

#### **Levels of engagement were categorised as:**

- A)** Regularly consulted on strategic issues by the Forestry Commission and able to help the Forestry Commission achieve its goals.
- B)** Actively involved in developing Forestry Commission strategy or in delivering goals and projects.
- C)** Informed on Forestry Commission activity related to my/our area of interest and consulted on occasion.
- D)** Low level of involvement or interest in the Forestry Commission and make contact only when necessary.



SEF actions have been prioritised in response to the different levels of engagement indicated by stakeholders and how they have responded with regard to how well the FC are engaging and delivering on transparency and accountability.

### **3.4 Key Findings**

#### **Engagement:**

Stakeholders currently engaged at a high level (A and B) are more likely to feel they are able to influence decisions than stakeholders engaged at a lower level.

Engagement at a delivery or local level is currently more successful than at a strategic or District level.

Stakeholders currently engaged may not be truly representative of the true stakeholders.

Stakeholders are very enthusiastic about engagement with the FC and providing support in kind. Many stakeholders would like greater engagement.

#### **Transparency:**

Whilst many stakeholders know that the FC is directed by clear performance standards, identifying those standards and raising concerns if there is a perception of non-performance is considered not entirely clear.

#### **Accountability:**

Stakeholders engaged at a higher level appear to be more aware of the processes and procedures for making decisions within the FC though the difference was not statistically significant.

At a District level processes and procedures for engagement are not clear.

**For a more detailed breakdown of the data and how the principles and actions were shaped please refer to Appendix 1 and 2**

## **4 The Stakeholder Engagement Framework**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The principles and actions drawn out of stakeholder feedback have been brought together in the following framework. The actions are numbered in a table underneath and referred to in the framework against the related principle.

#### **4.1.1 District and Initiative Actions**

The framework breaks the actions down into District Actions and Initiative Actions. District Actions require the District to deliver them as they impact on the ability of individual projects and initiatives to deliver actions. For example, creating a District web page is a District action. Initiatives are reliant on this as they are required to promote their initiatives and engagement plans through this medium.

#### **4.1.2 Fix, Improve and Support**

Priorities for stakeholders at different levels of engagement were derived from the data breakdown. These were based on whether the responses at that level were generally positive, neutral or negative. These were then mapped against the principles and given the following terms:

- “Fix” where the response to the question was majority negative.
- “Improve” where the response to the question was majority neutral.
- “Support” where the response to the question was majority positive.

#### **4.1.3 Piloting and using the Framework**

It is proposed the Framework is used in the following ways with the 3 initiatives identified and described in section 3.5.1 and *Appendix 4* as a pilot:

- The District and Initiative actions reflect delivery against the principles. The actions should be delivered by the District (within the HEC pilot project timescale) and through Initiatives.
- Initiatives and the District should consider the principles when planning and delivering District developments and strategic initiatives.
- Initiatives and the District should take into account the relative balance between action for stakeholders at the different levels of engagement based on the need to Fix, Improve or Support.

## 4.2 The Framework

Principles		Actions	D Monitor	C Inform	B Involve	A Consult
<b>Stakeholder Outreach</b>						
1.	Increase outreach to stakeholders.	Overall Requirement	<b>Fix</b>			
		District Actions	1, 3, 7, 8			
		Initiative Actions	5, 7			
<b>Stakeholder Mobility</b>						
2.	Support stakeholder mobility to allow stakeholders to engage at an appropriate level.	Overall Requirement	<b>Support</b>			
		District Actions	2, 3			
		Initiative Actions	6			
<b>Engagement</b>						
3.	Provide opportunities for stakeholders to influence decision making.	Overall Requirement	<b>Improve</b>	<b>Support</b>		
		District Actions	1, 3	1, 3		
		Initiative Actions	5, 6	5, 6		
4.	Explore how stakeholder skills can be best utilised.	Overall Requirement	<b>Support</b>			
		District Actions	1			
		Initiative Actions	5			
<b>Accountability</b>						
5.	Publish and utilise the standards used for decision making.	Overall Requirement	<b>Support</b>			
		District Actions	2, 3			
		Initiative Actions	6			
6.	Provide information to demonstrate progress against standards.	Overall Requirement	<b>Improve</b>			
		District Actions	2, 3			
		Initiative Actions	6			
7.	Provide a clear channel(s) of communication between stakeholders and the FC.	Overall Requirement	<b>Fix</b>	<b>Support</b>		
		District Actions	2, 3, 4	2, 3, 4		
		Initiative Actions	6	6		
<b>Transparency</b>						
8.	Publish processes and procedures used in decision making.	Overall Requirement	<b>Improve</b>	<b>Support</b>		
		District Actions	2, 3	2, 3		
		Initiative Actions	6	6		
9.	Detail when and how stakeholders can become involved in decision making.	Overall Requirement	<b>Improve</b>	<b>Support</b>		
		District Actions	3	3		
		Initiative Actions	6	6		

Action Detail	
1	Initiatives are to be used as a way of “project managing” strategic issues being considered within the District. This allows stakeholders to engage with issues that are of interest to them. Initiative plans should be formed and include criteria that can be used to judge performance and progression.

## Harnessing the Energy of the Community: Pilot Stakeholder Engagement Framework

<b>2</b>	<p>Agree a key message to inform stakeholders or signpost them to gain a wider perspective of the FC in order to engage at different levels effectively.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the role of the FC,</li> <li>- standards the FC works to achieve,</li> <li>- performance information</li> </ul> <p>- feedback mechanisms or points of contact</p>
<b>3</b>	<p>Create a single place for all stakeholder engagement on a District web page. This then becomes the first port of call for any stakeholder to find out more on current strategic initiatives.</p>
<b>4</b>	<p>Provide a place for stakeholders to sign up to updates and information relating to the District. This then becomes the key stakeholder database. The database will provide updates and alerts, and may, in time, become more advanced.</p>
<b>5</b>	<p>For each Initiative, undertake a stakeholder analysis prior to commencing with the Initiative. Cross check that the stakeholders identified will be represented by those within the stakeholder database. If not, identify those additional stakeholders and seek to invite them onto the Initiative (and database). Wherever possible, utilise existing bodies, partnerships, groups, representative bodies etc to engage with a wider audience.</p>
<b>6</b>	<p>Prepare a Stakeholder Engagement Plan for each Initiative to go online. This should detail the stages of the Initiative (that are currently visible).</p> <p>At each stage engagement, transparency and accountability should be addressed through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identifying and promoting the levels of engagement proposed for stakeholders to sign up to their appropriate level (based around Monitor, Inform, Involve, and Consult). <i>(Possibly via webpage sign up and allowing other stakeholders to see who has already signed up).</i></li> <li>- Setting clear objectives, and focusing on outputs and outcomes.</li> <li>- Providing clear lines of communication for stakeholders to discuss and feedback on the project with the District.</li> </ul> <p>The scale of engagement should be proportional to the anticipated interest.</p> <p>The use of a stakeholder board is encouraged where considered appropriate.</p>
<b>7</b>	<p>Ensure staff leading Initiatives are trained in stakeholder engagement and are aware of the tools available to them.</p>
<b>8</b>	<p>Ensure appropriate resources are made available for engagement within strategic issues affecting the District.</p>

## **5 The Pilot Initiatives**

Below is a summary of the pilot initiatives that will be used to test the SEF actions. The initiatives have been chosen to represent the broad range of work that is carried out throughout the Forestry Commission. Additional initiatives which emerge during the course of the pilot will also be considered for inclusion in the pilot.

### **5.1 Thetford Forest Open Habitat Plan**

#### **5.1.1 Background to Thetford Forest**

Thetford Forest is situated in Breckland, East Anglia and is the largest man-made forest in lowland UK at 18,730ha. Thetford has a diverse range of open habitats, ranging from ungrazed linear rides to extensive calcareous and acidic grassland grazing units, open wetland and fen areas. 17,653ha (94%) of Thetford Forest is designated for its national and international conservation interests, which are mainly associated with open habitats. Within the forest, open habitats currently total 1,128ha (6.02%).

#### **5.1.2 Background to the Open Habitat Plan**

The Forestry Commission is required to manage at least 10% of the Public Forest Estate as open habitat to comply with the UK Woodland Assurance Standard. Open habitats currently total 1,128ha (6.02%) across the forest, with a further 653ha (3.5%) planned for future felling coupes. However FC recognises that open habitats created in large felling coupes will not fulfil the biodiversity potential of Thetford Forest even if it does meet with Forestry Standards.

In order to achieve its biodiversity potential, research and rationale for an Open Habitat Plan (OHP) for Thetford was carried out through a study when a commissioning partnership of stakeholders was formed and the Breckland Biodiversity Audit (BBA) was published in 2010. The BBA concluded that the most effective plan is to create 'Invertebrate Super Highways' that link key locations across the Brecks landscape as a whole, as well as potential 'stepping stones', 'islands' and 'buffers' of open habitat in the forest.

The open habitat network will be created primarily through a programme of widening the existing forest ride and track infrastructure. It will be incorporated into the twelve Forest Design Plans that cover Thetford Forest and delivered over a number of years, ideally through planned felling of trees at economic maturity, but some felling before economic maturity is possible, during the five year cycle of forest thinning. The open habitat network will be maintained by normal forest operations.

#### **5.1.3 The need for stakeholder consultation**

While there is a compelling case for the proposed method put forward by the research, it is a more complex process to raise awareness of the proposal, what it might look like and

agree where open habitat will be created. During the study there has been a significant amount of high level engagement with stakeholders but the planning and delivery will need engagement at a grassroots level with those who will be impacted by the changes. Lessons learned from this process will inform Open Habitat Planning around the district.

#### **5.1.4 Outcome**

The principal outcome of the Thetford Open Habitats Plan is to create 10% permanent open habitat within Thetford Forest to benefit identified priority species across the wider Breckland landscape. The plan will be developed through creation of an evidence base and stakeholder consultation, incorporated into twelve forest design plans and delivered through planned and opportunistic felling.

## **5.2 Operational Site Assessments and External Communication**

### **5.2.1 Background to Operational Site Assessments**

Operational Site Assessments (OSA) are used by operational teams within the District as a tool to ensure that best practice is instilled into operational activities on site. The OSA acts as a checklist, being passed between technical leads to ensure advice is provided on each operation, including communication with the public. Forest operations can range from felling and thinning trees to creating new trails or structures such as bridges or access.

### **5.2.2 The need for stakeholder consultation**

For a majority of operational activities, communication with the public is essential to promote safety. However, people use the forest in different ways and at different times and don't all have the same level of awareness about the wide range of work that the Forestry Commission carry out. This can make getting across the real and practical impact of forest operations challenging. With a limit on resources and time, consultation aims to help rationalize the approach taken to improve delivery of communication within the OSA process and seek resource efficiencies where possible.

### **5.2.3 Outcome**

The principal outcome for this initiative is an external Communication Plan for OSA and further recommendations for a review of the OSA process.

## **5.3 Forest Resilience**

### **5.3.1 Background**

The Forest Resilience Programme has its roots in the need to consider the FCE response to Dothistroma Needle Blight (DNB). However, the project has expanded beyond this narrow remit, in part due to the complexity of likely solutions, to include other issues, most notably the impact of climate change and the need to revisit the commitments made under the Special Protected Area (SPA).

### 5.3.2 Dothistroma Needle Blight

The current primary timber crop in the East England Forest District (mainly in East Anglia) is Corsican Pine (CP), with around 60% of Thetford planted under CP. Plantation silviculture often utilises monocultures, there are several reasons why this approach is taken. These include:

- Drought tolerance and relatively alkaline soil conditions providing limiting factors in species choice.
- Economies of scale, also research and resources can be targeted on a narrow range of species
- Providing a consistent, fast growing, reliable product to sawmill customers, particularly in light of their niche (fencing) market.
- The introduction of the SPA which legally requires the FCE to maintain the current forest management practices.

Dothistroma Needle Blight (DNB) *Dothistroma septosporum* was first recorded in (the then) East Anglia Forest District in 1999.

DNB affects pines by infecting needles. Needles on a CP normally last between three and four years before being shed by the tree. However, needles that are infected with DNB only last one season. This reduces the amount of needle available for photosynthesis (the conversion of sunlight to energy used by the tree for growth), and hence reduces the growth rate of trees. In some cases, DNB can result in tree mortality.

The prevalence of CP through East England has meant that DNB has, and will continue to have, a significant effect on the productivity and management of forests. In many other countries, stands of DNB infected trees have been subject to applications of fungicides. However, the aerial application of copper fungicides is not currently approved in the UK.

The FCE has therefore set up a project to deal with the issue of DNB on two fronts:

- How to manage the existing stands of CP to minimise the impact (on the trees and profitability/the economics)
- Selection of DNB resistant species and management practices on new planting sites.

Further information on DNB, including details of the FCE and Forest Research project on the topic can be found here:

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestresearch.nsf/ByUnique/INFD-6ZCKAE>

### 5.3.3 Special Protection Area (SPA)

Clearfell forestry peaked in 1980s and populations of specialist heathland birds such as nightjar and woodlark increased significantly in the 1990s due to the abundance of nesting habitat in the replanted areas. In order to protect this achievement, Thetford Forest was designated a SPA in 2000 with the statutory conservation objective: "to maintain the integrity of the site, subject to natural change".

The SPA and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) objectives include a commitment to “avoid the deterioration of the habitats of qualifying features...ensuring the integrity of the site is maintained and the site makes a full contribution to achieving the aims of the Birds Directive”. NE then set specific condition assessment criteria or numerical targets as convenient, measurable proxies for defining ‘favourable conditions and site integrity’.. These targets relate to the numbers of the three species present: nightjar, woodlark (forestry) and stone curlew (farmland) plus the amount of clearfell habitat.

Since 2000, the public forest estate has met the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) and has been certified as a sustainable forest; this means that clearfell operations have reduced from the previous high timber volumes in 1980s and 1990s. In addition, further pressure is being placed on the clearfell silvicultural system including:

- Legislation restricting the use of herbicides previously required for crop establishment in clear fell systems.
- Difficulty in establishing shade tolerant species in open conditions such as clearfells
- Introduced diseases, especially DNB.
- Adaption to a changing climate.

As a consequence, populations of the two bird species in the forest are declining with a significant likelihood that the SPA targets cannot be sustained.

The need for the review also ties in with current scientific thinking on ecosystem services. Specifically there is recognition of the wider environmental objectives encompassing more than target numbers for a limited number of species. This has particular relevance to Thetford Forest due to the SSSI designation for many rare endemic species associated with Breckland.

A new, long term strategy is therefore required to work with the ecological grain and to:

- Integrate a full range of environmental objectives.
- Meet the social and economic demands of a multifunctional site.
- Design and create a future forest that is resilient to tree disease and climate change. This is likely to mean a broader range of species and silvicultural systems. However the extent and position of the future open habitat network within the forest will also be critical to achieving a forest wide ecosystem

### **5.3.4 Climate Change**

The issue of our changing climate has been well publicised over the past decade. Forestry has been one of the hot topics being discussed in relation to climate change, in part as it may offer one of the ways to mitigate climate change through carbon sequestration, and also in part due to the impact of climate change on our woodlands and wildlife habitats.

East and South East England are at the forefront of the predicted changes as a result of climate change. The region is already relatively dry, but climate change is predicted to increase periods of drought, along with rising temperatures and more extreme weather events. This will have a significant impact on species choice, which will both open up new



areas of opportunity (for example, the use of species more susceptible to late frosts), as well as creating further limiting factors, such as drought tolerance.

### **5.3.5 The need for stakeholder engagement**

Given the scale and potential impact of the challenges being considered, it is recognised that delivering improved Forest Resilience depends on both successfully engaging with a broad range of stakeholders and partnering with many organisations to deliver solutions. One of the key phases is, therefore, Stakeholder Partnership underlining the fact that this activity is more about harnessing the commitment and resources of stakeholders towards the delivery of a common goal than it is about simply consulting and informing, important though these are.

### **5.3.6 Outcome**

The principal outcome of the Forest Resilience Programme is to:

*Develop forest management practices (solutions) that ensure the forest can remain sustainable for all three aspects of the triple bottom line (economic, social and environmental).*

'Solution' refers to a change or changes to current practices which will deliver against the criteria for acceptance. It encompasses small changes to operations through to wholesale change of species, planting regimes and operations.

The programme will last for several years, anticipated to be at least three (15/16, 16/17 and 17/18).

## 6 Appendix 1: Quantitative Data and Principles

Below is a review of the quantitative data gathered through the online questionnaire 'Influencing the Future of Forestry'. The questionnaire was a mixture of closed and open questions prompting additional feedback. The quantitative data was used to identify key themes to shape overarching principles. The additional feedback provides more detail to inform the design of actions to address the principles.

### 6.1 Areas of interest, skills and experience

The highest represented interest area of participants in the questionnaire was People (Forest Recreation, Volunteering, Community Woodland Management, Forest Centres, Learning, Woodland Access, Horse Riding) with Environment and Conservation (Forest Planning, Environment, Heritage, Conservation, Surveys) the next most represented. There was relatively low representation from business and timber related stakeholders. A large proportion of participants indicated that they were interested in more than one interest area.

Many respondents indicated an enthusiasm and willingness to get involved with District activities, and amongst the responses there are some generous offers of support.

#### 6.1.1 Key themes

- a) Outreach may not be securing a balanced representation of stakeholders across interest areas
- b) Stakeholders have indicated they are keen to be involved and support the FC with skills and expertise.

### 6.2 Engagement

The questionnaire showed a significant difference between the proportion of stakeholders who feel able to influence decision-making (lower proportion) and the proportion who feel able to contribute skills, knowledge and experience (higher proportion). This suggests that the District is perhaps more successful at facilitating engagement around delivery, as opposed to governance and decision-making at a strategic level. Additional feedback from stakeholders also supports this and refers to good relationships with FC staff at local level but an uncertainty of where to go or who to talk to at a District level.

#### 6.2.1 Key themes

- c) There is a gap between delivery level engagement (e.g. getting practically involved with initiatives and projects) and strategic District level engagement, which doesn't appear to be as successful.

### 6.3 Accountability

The questionnaire results show that whilst many stakeholders know that the FC is directed by clear performance standards, there are many who feel they do not have adequate

information to judge the FC's performance and, are uncertain of the procedures for notifying when performance standards are not being met.

### 6.3.1 Key themes

d) Accessibility of information about performance targets and standards could be improved.

e) Procedures for raising concerns over performance do not appear to be clear for stakeholders.

f) Contact details or ways of communicating at a District level do not appear to be easily found or understood by stakeholders

## 6.4 Transparency

The questionnaire results indicate opportunities for improvement in transparency, particularly in relation to decision-making procedures. While a large proportion of participants agreed that the FC was easy to approach for information, there was less certainty about how to engage with decision-making processes and procedures.

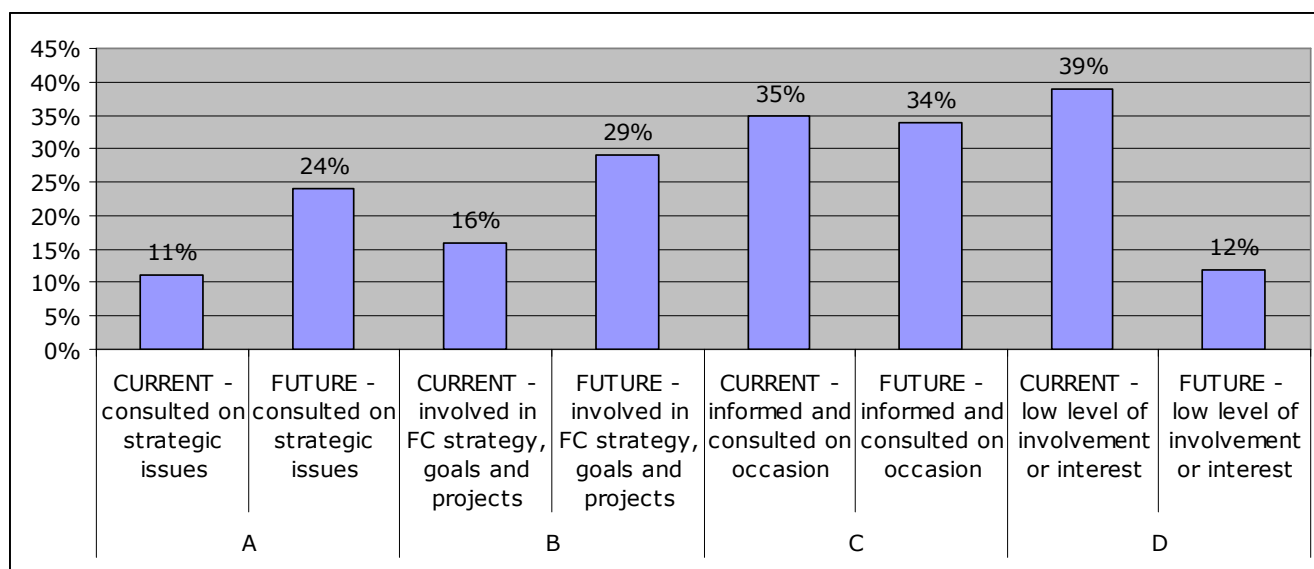
### 6.4.1 Key themes

g) Engagement processes and procedures at a District level are not clearly communicated and promoted to ensure stakeholders can engage with and influence strategic decisions.

## 6.5 Prioritising levels of engagement

The figure below compares the results of questions 7 (stakeholders' perceived current level of engagement) and 8 (stakeholders desired future level of engagement). The results indicate a general aspiration amongst stakeholders to be more engaged, both in relation to consultations on strategic issues, and involvement in developments at strategic and delivery levels.

### Current perceived level of engagement and preferred future level of engagement (n%=percent of respondents)



## Definitions

- A) Regularly consulted on strategic issues by the Forestry Commission and able to help the Forestry Commission achieve its goals
- B) Actively involved in developing Forestry Commission strategy or in delivering goals and projects
- C) Informed on Forestry Commission activity related to my/our area of interest and consulted on occasion
- D) Low level of involvement or interest in the Forestry Commission and make contact only when necessary

### 6.5.1 Key themes

h) A large proportion of stakeholders have indicated a desire to be engaged at a higher level and need to be empowered to take part at a level suitable to their interest.

## 6.6 Representation

Some stakeholders were happy to be represented by other organisations when appropriate and have nominated their preferred organisations along with forums and partnerships who represent a network of stakeholders.

## 6.7 Information sources

Stakeholders indicated that their preferred source of information on the FC were FC staff and the FC website.

### 6.7.1 Key themes

i) While FC staff are a preferred point of contact, many stakeholders are content to communicate or receive information through networks, representatives or the FC web page.

## 6.8 Principles for the Stakeholder Engagement Framework

The noted Key Themes from the questionnaire responses were used to develop 7 overarching principles to underpin the framework. Below are the Key Themes matched to the principles they influenced in the table below.

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Themes that have influenced it</b>
Improve outreach to stakeholders.	A, F, I
Support stakeholder mobility to allow stakeholders to engage at an appropriate level.	C, G, H
Provide opportunities for stakeholders to influence decision making.	C, F, G, H, I
Explore how stakeholder skills can be best utilised.	B
Publish and utilise the standards used for decision making.	D, E, G
Provide information to demonstrate progress against standards.	D, E, G
Provide a clear channel(s) of communication between stakeholders and the FC.	G, I

A) Outreach may not be securing a balanced representation of stakeholders with multiple interests

B) Stakeholders have indicated they are keen to be involved and support the FC with skills and expertise.

C) There is a gap between delivery level engagement (eg. Getting practically involved with initiatives) and strategic District level engagement which doesn't appear to be as successful.

D) Performance targets, standards do not appear to be easily found or have adequate information.

E) Procedures for raising concerns over performance do not appear to be clear for stakeholders.

F) Contact details or ways of communicating at a District level do not appear to be easily found by stakeholders

G) Engagement processes and procedures at a District level are not clearly communicated and promoted to ensure stakeholders can influence strategic decisions.

H) A large proportion of stakeholders would like a higher level of consultation or involvement and need to be empowered to take part at a level suitable to their interest.

I) While FC staff are a preferred point of contact, a large proportion of stakeholders are also content to communicate or receive information through networks, representatives or the FC web page.

## **7 Appendix 2: Qualitative Feedback and Actions**

The questionnaire data were analysed further to extract more detail along with the additional feedback and workshop discussions in order to provide a steer in developing specific actions related to each of the principles.

### **7.1 Workshop feedback**

The workshop provided an opportunity for face to face discussion and aimed to gauge participants' reactions to the questionnaire data and possible trends in stakeholder engagement based on interests or levels of engagement in order to help shape actions.

#### **7.1.1 Views on the questionnaire feedback**

Overall, participants felt that the questionnaire feedback was a fair reflection of their views, but felt that greater representation was required from stakeholders in the timber and business sector. There were also reports of some stakeholders not receiving the questionnaire in good time due to out of date contact details which may have resulted in a majority of respondents being stakeholders who are already engaged and in regular contact with the FC.

#### **7.1.2 Feedback on engaging stakeholders according to interest groups**

This exercise produced useful feedback on some of the issues around engagement, accountability and transparency and possible ways to engage. Key recommendations emerging from the discussions were:

- make use of existing networks and partnerships to improve outreach and communication
- improve transparency around processes, what is expected of people taking part in engagement and how consultation data are used
- communicate a broader picture of the FC
- practically enable stakeholders to engage at different levels.

#### **7.1.3 Feedback on engaging stakeholders according to levels of engagement**

Using the 3 pilot initiatives (Forest Resilience, OSA and External Communication and Thetford Open Habitat Plan described in section 5), workshop participants suggested methods of engagement to involve stakeholders at different levels for each initiative.

This exercise provided useful practical direction and actions to take around delivering engagement for the initiatives but didn't demonstrate any clear commonality in engagement methods for different levels of engagement. The different interests and roles of the participants together created a diverse range of options for each initiative at each level of engagement, which further emphasised the complexity around stakeholder engagement.

#### **7.1.4 Identified steer**

Develop a mechanism to manage and update stakeholder data.

Engage through existing networks and partnerships. This would help outreach, share information and improve engagement over a large District.

Develop a process to allow stakeholders to engage at different levels as appropriate and promote ways for local and District feedback to filter up and down (stakeholder mobility)

Ensure processes are transparent in order to clarify expectations around engagement and ensure feedback from participants is visible and considered.

Communicate a broader message about FC business to allow stakeholders to engage in an informed way

#### **7.2 Further break down of data**

Forest Research conducted additional analysis of the survey data to look for associations between the responses to the questions on Engagement, Transparency and Accountability and stakeholders' stated interests and current levels of engagement. No statistically significant differences could be found between the responses given by stakeholders from each of the stated interest groups, primarily because of the low numbers of stakeholders representing the business and timber interest areas. However, there were some correlations between stakeholders' stated current level of engagement and the responses to questions about Engagement, Transparency and Accountability.

In the questionnaire, levels of engagement were described as:

A: I/my organisation should be regularly consulted on strategic issues by the Forestry Commission (FC) and is able to help the FC achieve its goals.

B: I/my organisation should be actively involved in developing Forestry Commission strategy and in delivering goals and projects.

C: I/my organisation should be informed on Forestry Commission activity around areas of interest and consulted on occasion

D: I/my organisation needs only a low level of involvement or interest in the Forestry Commission and needs to make contact only when necessary.

### 7.2.1 Engagement

Question	Response
<p><b>Q3a "The Forestry Commission enables me/my organisation to influence and contribute to the decisions that affect us."</b></p>	<p>Overall 41% of all respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement, however a majority (64%) of stakeholders currently in a high level of engagement (A &amp; B) agreed they were able to influence/contribute to decisions. The majority of stakeholders at a lower level of engagement (C &amp; D) either gave a neutral response or disagreed with the statement. This indicates that a significant proportion feel they can influence decision-making from a higher level of engagement but demonstrates that efforts could be made to improve the ability of stakeholders at a lower level of engagement to influence/contribute to decisions.</p>
<p><b>3b) "I am/my organisation is able to contribute skills, knowledge and experience to Forestry Commission activities."</b></p>	<p>The majority of stakeholders at levels A, B and C agreed they were able to contribute skills, knowledge and experience to FC activities. This indicates that a significant proportion feel they can contribute skills, knowledge and experience from all levels of engagement.</p>
<p><b>Conclusion to Engagement</b></p> <p>Stakeholders currently being engaged at a high level (A and B) are more likely to feel that are able to influence decisions than stakeholders engaged at a lower level (C and D).</p>	

### 7.2.2 Accountability

Question	Response
<p><b>4a) "There are clear standards which the Forestry Commission must meet"</b></p>	<p>Overall 68% of all respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.</p> <p>The majority of stakeholders at all levels of engagement also agreed there were clear standards which the FC must meet.</p>
<p><b>4b) "I have enough information to judge whether the Forestry Commission are meeting these standards."</b></p>	<p>Overall opinion was fairly evenly split on this question. Whilst 31% either agreed or strongly agreed, 28% either disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 41% gave a neutral response. There were no statistically significant differences between the responses across engagement levels.</p>



<p><b>4c) "I don't know how to raise awareness of unsatisfactory performance by the Forestry Commission"</b></p>	<p>Overall there was no statistically significant difference between the proportion of respondents who agreed (44%), or disagreed (33%) with the statement.</p> <p>Stakeholders within lower current levels of engagement (C and D) were more likely to agree (51%) than stakeholders within higher levels of engagement (A and B) (24%). This suggests that there is room for improvement with stakeholders at a lower level of engagement.</p>
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**Accountability Conclusion**

The survey results show that whilst many stakeholders know that the FC is directed by clear performance standards, there are significant proportions who disagreed or gave a neutral response when questioned about having adequate information to judge the FC's performance. Stakeholders within lower levels of engagement were more likely to be uncertain of the procedures for notifying when performance standards are not being met.

**7.2.3 Transparency**

Question	Response
<p><b>5a) "The Forestry Commission is an open and easy organisation to approach for information"</b></p>	<p>Overall a significantly higher proportion of respondents (46%) agreed or strongly agreed, than disagreed or strongly disagreed (18%) with this statement.</p> <p>There were no statistically significant differences in responses between levels of engagement.</p>
<p><b>5b) "The Forestry Commission demonstrates clear processes and procedures in carrying out its work and in making decisions."</b></p>	<p>Whilst only 20% (n=31) either disagreed or strongly disagreed, the remaining proportion of stakeholders were split between a neutral (41%, n=62) and positive (39%, n=60) responses.</p> <p>Respondents in higher levels of engagement (A+B) were no more likely to agree with the statement than respondents in lower levels of engagement (C+D).</p>
<p><b>5c) "It is difficult to understand how decisions are made within the Forestry Commission regarding my area of interest"</b></p>	<p>Overall opinion was fairly evenly split between those agreeing (33%) and disagreeing (32%), with 35% responding neutrally.</p> <p>Respondents in higher levels of engagement (A+B) were no more likely to agree with the statement than respondents in lower levels of engagement (C+D).</p>
<p><b>Transparency Conclusion</b></p>	

There were no statistically significant differences in responses to transparency questions across levels of engagement. This means that any attempts to use the data to target improvements in relation to transparency should be approached with caution. However, the data does suggest that stakeholders in higher levels of engagement (A and B) are more aware of the processes and procedures to making decisions and how they are made than stakeholders in lower levels of engagement (C and D).

#### 7.2.4 Identified Steer

Ensure low level engagement stakeholders (C and D) have the mobility to influence decisions when needed.

Support the promotion of clear performance standards

Ensure all stakeholders have adequate information to judge the FC's performance.

Improve the ability of stakeholders within lower levels of engagement to be able to report when performance standards are not being met.

Improve the promotion of processes and procedures to making decisions to stakeholders with lower levels of engagement.

### 7.3 Actions for the Stakeholder Engagement Framework

The identified steers from the more qualitative data and over 100 additional feedback comments from questions 3, 4 and 5 in the questionnaire were used to develop 8 actions to deliver the framework's overarching principles.

No.	Actions
1	Initiatives are to be used as a way of "project managing" strategic issues being considered within the District. This allows stakeholders to engage with issues that are of interest to them. Initiative plans should be formed and include criteria that can be used to judge performance and progression.
2	Agree a key message to inform stakeholders or signpost them to gain a wider perspective of the FC in order to engage at different levels effectively. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the role of the FC,</li> <li>- standards the FC works to achieve,</li> <li>- performance information</li> </ul> - feedback mechanisms or points of contact
3	Create a single place for all stakeholder engagement on a District web site. This then becomes the first port of call for any stakeholder to find out more on current strategic initiatives

<p><b>4</b></p>	<p>Provide a place for stakeholders to sign up to updates and information relating to the District. This then becomes the key stakeholder database. The database will provide updates and alerts, and may, in time, become more advanced.</p>
<p><b>5</b></p>	<p>For each Initiative, undertake a stakeholder analysis prior to commencing with the Initiative. Cross check that the stakeholders identified will be represented by those within the stakeholder database. If not, identify those additional stakeholders and seek to invite them onto the Initiative (and database). Wherever possible, utilise existing bodies, partnerships, groups, representative bodies etc to engage with a wider audience.</p>
<p><b>6</b></p>	<p>Prepare a Stakeholder Engagement Plan for each Initiative to go online. This should detail the stages of the Initiative (that are currently visible).</p> <p>At each stage engagement, transparency and accountability should be addressed through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identifying and promoting the levels of engagement proposed for stakeholders to sign up to their appropriate level (based around Monitor, Inform, Involve, and Consult). <i>(Possibly via webpage sign up and allowing other stakeholders to see who has already signed up).</i></li> <li>- Setting clear objectives, and focusing on outputs and outcomes.</li> <li>- Providing clear lines of communication for stakeholders to discuss and feedback on the project with the District.</li> </ul> <p>The scale of engagement should be proportional to the anticipated interest.</p> <p>The use of a stakeholder board is encouraged where considered appropriate.</p>
<p><b>7</b></p>	<p>Ensure staff leading Initiatives are trained in stakeholder engagement and are aware of the tools available to them.</p>
<p><b>8</b></p>	<p>Ensure appropriate resources are made available for engagement within strategic issues affecting the District.</p>