

From: Forestry Regulation Task Force
To: Rt. Hon James Paice MP, Minister of State for Agriculture and Food, Defra,

Woodland Partnership Concept Note

'Working Woodlands'

Summary

We set out in this note a structure that is focussed on achieving more and better woodlands for England, by re-focussing the work of some staff within the Forest Services Directorate in the Forestry Commission and by making better links between government departments to enable the private sector to deliver many of the opportunities that actively managed woodlands offer. We do this under the umbrella of 'Working Woodlands', recognising that delivery is best done at the local level with a clear direction set nationally.

1. National 'Working Woodlands' Advisory Board (Strategy and Targets)
2. Woodland Advisory Committees (Enabling)
3. Local Initiatives and Partnerships (Delivery)

Preamble

We read with interest the interim findings of the Independent Panel on Forestry and are encouraged by their acknowledgement of two things in particular. The importance of the economics underpinning woodland management and the opportunities for growth and economic recovery, together with an understanding that the net cost to the nation of the public forest estate appears very modest.

In developing this concept further we have been constrained by the uncertainty surrounding the deliberations of the Panel, in particular their views on the role of FC England (FCE) and on the future direction of forest policy. However we hope that the structure we outline is capable of being modified, if necessary, in due course.

We believe that there is a need to focus more on technical forestry, in particular silviculture, and the extensive scientific expertise underpinning this, in order to ensure our woodland resource is capable of delivering multiple benefits sustainably. This is not something new. We are reminded that the first known European use of *sustainability* (German: *Nachhaltigkeit*) occurred in 1712 in the book *Sylvicultura Oeconomica* by the German forester and scientist Hans Carl von Carlowitz.

Forests can deliver an unparalleled range and depth of benefits but in many cases these are not being harnessed. Our woodlands also face significant challenges ahead: notably from climate change and the threats from pests

and diseases. However there are also exciting developments ahead that need to be grasped, including opportunities created by low-carbon initiatives, new markets for wood and novel forms of funding through CSR projects. We believe there is a need for more ambitious and strategic objectives if we are to manage our existing woodlands more effectively and create new ones.

Introduction

This concept note should be read in conjunction with the FRTF Report, *Challenging Assumptions, Changing Perceptions*, and more specifically with reference to the recommendations on the way in which Forestry Commission England operates with respect to the existing managed resource. We make clear in our report of the need to 'do things differently' if the woodland resource is to be more effectively managed in a resource constrained future. We acknowledge that it will take time to put in place a number of the recommendations but we urge FCE to take a pragmatic approach and to develop simple and streamlined solutions. **We emphasise again that the real threat to woodlands, and all the benefits they offer, comes, in the main, from benign neglect.**

The 'Working Woodlands' structure is resourced through the implementation of the following specific recommendations:

1. Earned Recognition. Allowing FCE staff to concentrate their efforts and skills on under-managed woodlands and to engage more effectively with their owners.
2. Long Term Management Plans. If well-designed these simple plans will form the basis for a more 'hands-off' approach to regulation and will allow FCE staff more time to focus on other priorities.
3. Re-focus activity. We believe that staff resources can be freed up to engage more effectively with a wider audience and that there are real opportunities to use the skills and experience of the private sector to achieve more and better managed woodlands. There are excellent examples of local and regional partnerships and initiatives that are really making a difference on the ground, but are often hampered by the short-term nature of their funding.
4. Communication. There is an urgent need to communicate more effectively and to a wider audience the benefits that come from woodland management and to make better use of 'new media'.

We believe it is important that 'Working Woodlands' is led by the Forestry Commission and informed by the technical skills and knowledge of foresters, working closely when necessary with other professionals. However we wish to see far more involvement by the private sector as FCE moves towards a more enabling role in the future.

Finally we wish to build upon all the good work that is currently taking place across the sector and we acknowledge that FCE has been very successful at developing some excellent partnerships at national, regional and local levels and we hope these can be built upon on in future.

Extent and Mission

To promote more and better woodland management as the tool to achieve the range of benefits woodlands provide to society.

To promote and communicate to the wider public the elements of a woodland culture and raise awareness of the benefits well-managed woodlands provide to society.

To work with a range of government departments, the private sector, local authorities, NGO's and charities to develop new approaches and strategies to access novel funding streams and build capacity to help secure and achieve woodland management and expansion at the landscape level in England.

Structure

We envisage that 'Working Woodlands' is structured around a model that aims to get the sector to collaborate in new and innovative ways towards common goals, driven by clearly defined and measurable outputs.

We believe that the following measurable outputs, and there are others, are key to managing the woodland resource more effectively:

1. Area of woodland in management agreements
2. Area of new woodland created
3. Improvement in the condition of SSSI's
4. Jobs created and safeguarded

We suggest a structure that is capable of working at the national level, is flexible enough to support local and regional initiatives and is sufficiently well staffed to enable real change on the ground.

National Working Woodlands Advisory Board (Strategy and Targets)

Top level advisory group directing overall vision, including those outside the sector but with a track record of bringing in novel funding. This will encourage different parts of government to engage with the sector and it will also help enable 'green funding' and the FCE regulatory function will give credibility and security to new funding models.

Membership: Board level representatives from Defra, DECC, BiS, Treasury, DCLG, key figures from the sector, FC Chair, external advisors with track record of novel funding. This should be kept small (max 12) and meet 1 or 2 times per year and feed into FC national committees.

The Board should be supported by 1 or 2 senior FCE staff, together with staff seconded (possibly fractional or for short periods of activity linked to targets) from, for example, Natural England, the private sector, NGO's etc.

The strategic aims, driven by clear and demonstrable targets, should then focus on clear work-streams delivered through tenders sought for novel approaches and collaborations from the private sector. We suggest that the following work-streams are the key to delivering better and more woodland management but these are open to further discussion and refinement.

1. Communication
2. Enabling woodland management and creation
3. Skills training

Woodland Advisory Committees (Enabling)

We believe that for reasons of efficiency and effectiveness the RAC's should mirror the newly formed FCE Areas and have a much greater role in monitoring targets and supporting the strategic aims and objectives of the National Board.

We therefore propose that they are renamed as **Woodland Advisory Committees** with each supported by a minimum of 1 full time technical forester. We also suggest that they are given the freedom to bring in additional expertise and consider appointing Deputy Chairs to support the Chairs to help deliver to more clearly defined targets. They would have a clear remit to:

1. Reflect the nature of their areas, regions and local circumstances.
2. Take a greater role in advocacy.
3. Monitor targets against the strategic direction set by the 'Working Woodlands Board'.
4. Engage more directly with partnerships and initiatives, making use of regional work-streams and helping to deliver the strategic vision.
5. Set up where required regional or sub-regional groupings to deliver specific outputs.
6. Work across a range of specialisms and geographic areas from local to national depending upon initiatives, work-streams and targets.

We would also support the secondment of staff from other agencies to support the WAC's, most probably driven by specific targets and outcomes.

We are attracted to the use of a number of pilot projects, possibly with a county based focus, to help test approaches and gather intelligence on costs and deliverables that can then be 'scaled-up' for national delivery. For example we make a recommendation on a survey of unmanaged woodlands. The pilot could initially focus on one or two counties to gather the evidence and cost-base for a national survey later.

Local Initiatives and National/Regional Partnerships. (Delivery)

It is in the nature of local initiatives that many tend to be short-lived while others stay the course. We think this is healthy and reflects the entrepreneurial spirit found in the sector. We would want this celebrated and believe much of the delivery in future will continue to be achieved by local initiatives.

We are aware that many such initiatives spend considerable amounts of time and energy just looking for the next tranche of funding. We believe that a more strategic approach supported by better resourced WAC's should help maintain continuity of funding for those that deliver to targets.

Local initiatives maintain the flavour and skills base of the localities and can build upon, for example, the Localism Bill and initiatives such as CIC's to achieve a difference on the ground, concentrating resources on woodland management.

In some cases delivery might be more effective at the national level and here we see opportunities for organizations and partnerships to tender to deliver work-streams and achieve specific targets. One such idea is the possibility of some form of advisory service to support woodland owners.

We also believe more effective use can be made of the expertise in Forest Enterprise and we are drawn to many examples from the USA and Canada where regional and local co-operatives and advisory services work well. The concept of model forests and 'centres of excellence' should be explored to help in advocating active management.

Costs

In the short time available to us it has not been possible to give detailed costs for this model. We believe that the structures and staffing suggested above can be set up within existing funds, with limited additional support from Defra and Government for the National Board.

However funds will have to be made available to achieve many of the desired outputs, including all the non-markets benefits, on the 80% of the woodland resource in private hands. Based upon figures for the public forest estate, and taking into account the economies of scale enjoyed by the larger forest plantations, we estimate that substantial funds will be needed to secure the woodland infrastructure necessary to deliver all the potential benefits to the nation. We note however that such an investment is likely to be modest, and longer lasting, in comparison with other national scale infrastructure projects.

Recommendation. We suggest that as part of the work of the Independent Panel, an estimate is made of the potential contribution that bringing, say, 250,000 hectares of unmanaged woodland into management would make in terms of job creation, apprenticeships, training, wood supply and harvesting. We were struck by this comment: "imagine if the heating in all rural primary schools were fed by renewable energy from local wood: what an effect that would have on local woodlands!"

Timescales

Now-late 2012

Embed FRTF recommendations in FCE processes

Pilot ER and LTMP approaches

Await Panel report and if necessary modify structure in response

2012-13

Set up national level strategy board

Re-focus FS to support 'Working Woodlands'

Cost delivery and outputs for agreed work-streams

Tender for agreed work-streams and initiate pilots in key counties

Explore and access new funding streams from the private sector, CSR, infrastructure improvements and job creation etc.

2013-2020

National scale delivery to meet aspirations and achieve a lasting legacy in, for example:

A: Meeting key indicators in the Biodiversity Strategy 2020

B: The creation of real wealth through job creation, employment and skills

C: Low carbon initiatives and downstream processing

The Forestry Regulation Task Force

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