

Restoration of open habitats from woods and forests:

Process for
developing policy.

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Restoration of open habitats from woods and forests: process for developing policy.

What is this about?

This document sets out the process that Forestry Commission England (FCE, “we, us, our”) will follow to develop policy on restoration of open habitats from woods and forests in England.

What has happened already?

The Government has made the following commitments of relevance to this policy process:

- England biodiversity strategy¹:
 - Woodlands and forestry work programme 2006 – 2010, Anticipated outcome 2010: 5. A significant contribution to the restoration and re-creation targets for open ground priority habitats through removal of trees from appropriate sites”
 - Key deliverables to achieve anticipated outcome: “Development and implementation of a policy on ‘Restoration of Open Habitats from Forestry’, through joined up delivery measures, and a restoration strategy for the public forest estate”
- A Strategy for England’s Trees, Woods and Forests (ETWF): Land and Natural Environment: Policies: “...our policy for creating, expanding and maintaining the network of sustainably managed trees, woods and forests will be to: ... “Develop a clear rationale to guide removal of inappropriate plantations and woodland where other key [Biodiversity Action Plan] habitats (e.g. lowland heathland and bog) can be restored and where the benefits of doing so outweigh the environmental and social costs”²

In the past few years together with the help of many stakeholders we have held workshops, listened to opinions and expert judgement and gathered a lot of information. There are a number of principles on which there appears to be agreement or which are pre-defined by relevant overarching Government policy or strategy:

- **Conservation of biodiversity is the key driver of the policy:** Government commitments to restoration of open habitats in England arise from the England Biodiversity Strategy. This aims to halt, and if possible reverse declines in priority habitats and species, with living things and their habitats as part of healthy, functioning ecosystems.
- **Desired outcomes will relate to biodiversity, landscape and historic environment:** Biodiversity will provide many of the desired outcomes of the policy but Government

¹ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) (2006) Working with the grain of nature – taking it forward: Volume I. Full report on progress under the England Biodiversity Strategy 2006, <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/biodiversity/biostrat/index.htm>

² DEFRA (2007) A Strategy for England’s Trees, Woods and Forests, <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/rddteam/forestry.htm>.

agendas for landscape (including people's enjoyment of landscape and involvement in their local landscape) and historic environment are also significant.

- **Impacts on other woodland and forestry objectives will be considered:** the policy must take account of the impact of open habitat restoration on the ability of woods and forests to contribute to other relevant Government aims as set out in ETWF:
 - to secure trees and woodlands for future generations;
 - to ensure resilience to climate change;
 - to protect and enhance natural resources;
 - to increase the contribution that trees, woods and forests make to our quality of life; and
 - to improve the competitiveness of woodland businesses and products.
- **Long-term viability of woodland and open habitats is important:** The management regime to maintain the open habitat must be feasible in the long-term. This should include the net-cost of managing the open habitat and any associated woodland and the woodland that remains elsewhere.
- **Several types of open habitat are important but lowland heath is the testing issue:** The open habitats of relevance are lowland meadows, upland hay meadows, lowland calcareous grassland, lowland dry acid grassland, upland heathland (moor), lowland raised bog, blanket bog, and lowland heathland. Of these it is restoration of lowland heath that is the most significant issue because of its extent, biodiversity value, value of timber grown on some former heath, proximity to populations and discrepancy between hectares of extant and potential habitat, much of which is on publicly owned land. Lowland heath is therefore the testing ground for this policy but the policy must work for all relevant open habitats in England.

What are we planning to do now?

The work done to date will be fed into a cycle for making “policy that happens” (Annex 1). The output will be a web-published and paper document. During the process we will ensure good corporate governance including the involvement of key stakeholders (Annex 2) and communicate each step openly through a web-site³, regular contact with stakeholders and participation in internal and external forums.

The policy will be Government policy for England's woods and forests. Each section below describes the step that we must achieve, the mechanism we will use to achieve that step and the timescale. FCE will lead the process. We will seek Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and Natural England support for each step and work to keep non-Governmental stakeholders constructively engaged. Annex 3 provides a summary.

³ We will construct web pages at www.forestry.gov.uk/england-openhabitats.

1. Fit progress to date into a policy cycle.

The knowledge gathered and current constructive stakeholder engagement provides much context which enables us to define the problem, desired outcomes (including possible outcome indicators), other issues for consideration; and set out the policy options.

FCE will produce a paper setting these out and share it with other stakeholders. We aim to complete this in July 2008.

2. Work out implications for delivery mechanisms and summarise evidence.

We need to understand the implications of each policy option for the delivery mechanisms available to Government:

- Policy, advocacy, and partnerships.
- Publicly owned land.
- Funding.
- Regulations.
- Research.

We will invite relevant Government leads for the delivery mechanisms to express the implications of each option for the delivery mechanism and the likely impact on the desired outcomes and other issues. To assist in this process we will produce a pen picture of a number of sites to illustrate the possible implications of the options.

A strategy for land managed by Forestry Commission England (the "FC estate") is one element of delivery. This will be developed once policy is established (see step 7, "Set up delivery mechanisms"). The policy may have implications for other types of publicly owned land and representative organisations will be included in the process.

At this stage we will also collate the evidence that we will use to inform appraisal of policy options. Although some of the evidence remains uncertain we believe we can gather enough information to make a rationale judgement at a graininess that reflects the precision of the delivery tools at our disposal. Therefore, we will avoid a detailed debate about the science. We will draft statements that summarise our opinion on the evidence and share these with other experts for input before finalising.

We aim to complete these actions in August 2008.

3. Plan evaluation.

Early evaluation planning so we understand how success will be defined helps to ensure realistic appraisal of options and eventual effective delivery. Two types of evaluation will be employed: evaluation of the impact of the policy in terms of desired outcomes and evaluation of the process by which the policy is delivered.

Impact evaluation: We will define a set of indicators of progress towards desired outcomes and methodologies for measuring these indicators. These indicators will be based on those identified in our corporate plan. If possible at this stage we will also produce a baseline measurement,

including measuring any baseline trend. We may return to these indicators to construct targets, if the eventual policy so demands.

Process evaluation: We will set up other mechanisms by which we will evaluate the process by which the policy is delivered employing criteria such as change in organisational reputation, stakeholder engagement, staff understanding, and transaction costs.

Planning for impact evaluation fits in best at this stage. See step 4 for the proposed mechanism. We will begin to plan for process evaluation at this stage but most process evaluation planning will happen once we know the preferred policy option.

4. Appraise options.

We will appraise the policy options both by working out the cumulative likely impact on the desired outcomes and the other issues. The most favourable option will be the one that is likely to deliver the greatest net public benefit and that has the most realistic chance of being delivered, including affordability. We will use economic appraisal techniques where we can establish enough evidence. Where appropriate, we will make use of established mechanisms for appraisal and/or evaluation, e.g.: DEFRA's approach to valuation of ecosystem services.⁴

The mechanism we will employ for steps 3 and 4 will involve a workshop of stakeholders chaired by RSPB and facilitated by us proposed for September 2008. We will present progress to date and use a range of tools to generate full involvement. We will produce a workshop report which uses the information generated to draw conclusions about the implications of the policy options.

5. Consult.

We will run a formal public consultation on the proposed policy options and the appraisal. We will produce a report on the consultation and share with stakeholders any changes arising from the responses. We aim to launch the consultation in October 2008 to run for three months.

6. Make a decision.

Dependent on the consultation responses an options paper will be submitted to Ministers by FCE showing the options and their implications. Ministers will be invited to decide on the favoured option. We aim to submit the paper to Ministers in February 2009.

7. Produce policy document.

Subject to Ministerial decision, FCE will commission and manage production of a document setting out the policy. The draft will be shared with stakeholders. We aim to complete this in March 2009 but the timescale is dependent on the response from Ministers.

⁴ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/natres/eco-value.htm>.

8. Set up delivery mechanisms.

The policy decision will allow relevant leads to evolve delivery mechanisms and secure or redeploy resources to deliver the policy. One of the tasks is to publish a restoration strategy for the FC estate. The strategy will follow the policy.

9. Launch policy.

We propose a launch of the policy and strategy for the FC estate at an outdoor event showcasing practical action.

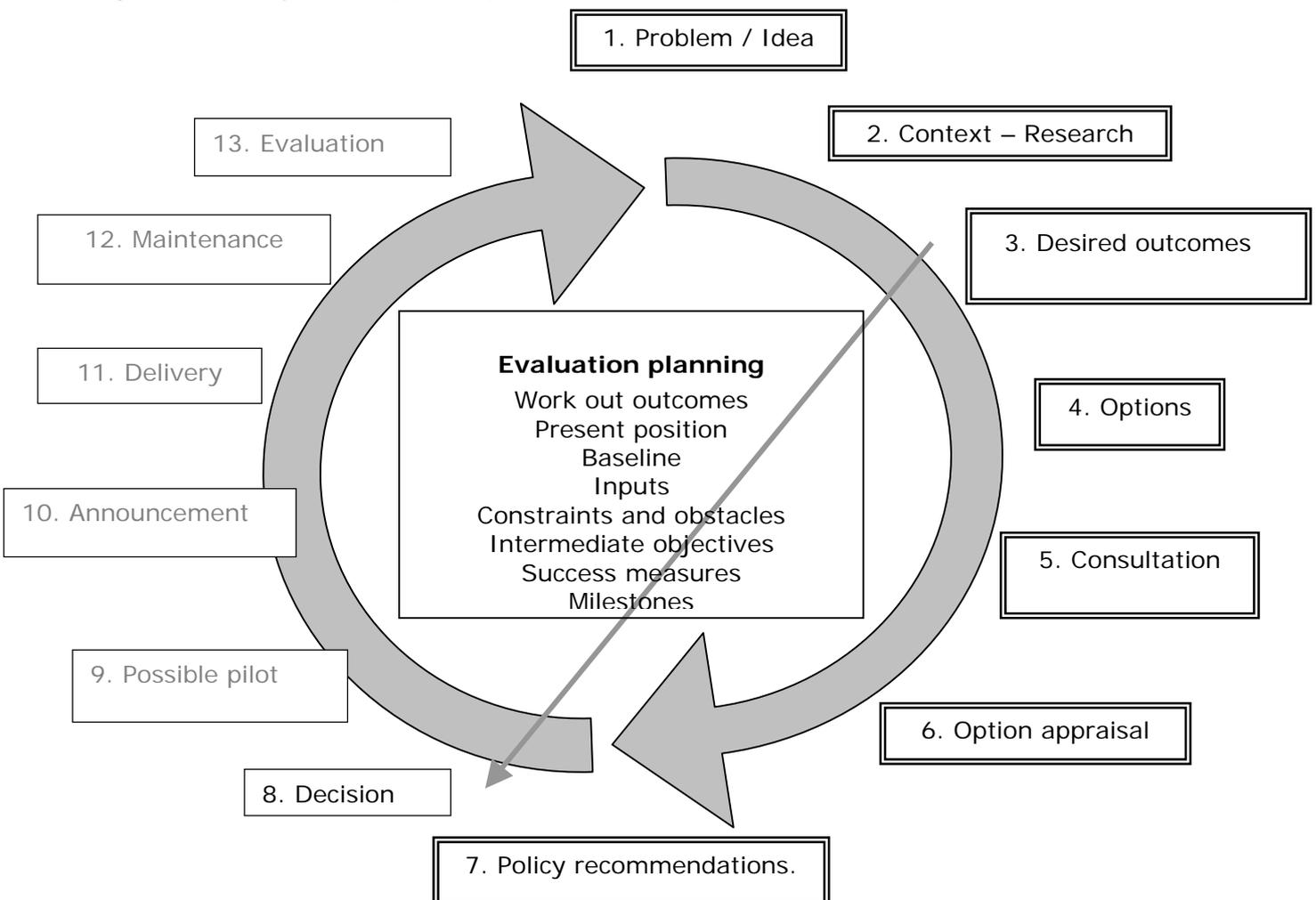
ANNEX 1: Making policy that happens.

Policy is “the process by which governments translate their political vision into programmes and actions to deliver “outcomes” – desired changes in the real world” (Modernising Government White Paper March 1999).

A policy development process is being followed (Fig. 1).

Programme and/or policy leads will tend to lead on steps 1 to 8 and facilitate “Evaluation Planning”. However, all parts of the organisation must be involved. Turbulence is allowed, i.e.: we may have to go back and jump forward as we learn lessons and react to changes. We should not aim for central control but to develop frameworks to enable confident and informed local decision making. There should be enough communication to generate approximate alignment, trust and allow effective monitoring and evaluation.

Figure 1: Policy development process.



Annex 2: Project governance and key stakeholder organisations.

Project governance

A simple governance process is proposed with the Forestry Commission England Executive Board acting as *de facto* project board.

Project sponsor.

Forestry Commission England (FCE)

Project management.

Programme Group, FCE.

Other stakeholders.

These are the organisations from which we will seek input via a variety of methods. Input from others is welcome and the list may change as the process is followed.

Key stakeholder organisations outside Government.

RSPB -to chair the stakeholder workshop.
British Trust for Ornithology
Plantlife
Herpetological Conservation Trust
Bat Conservation Trust
Butterfly Conservation Trust
Wildlife Trusts
National Trust
Woodland Trust
Country Land and Business Association
English Forest Industries Partnership
Confederation of Forest Industries
UK Forest Products Association
Association of Local Government Ecologists
Institute of Chartered Foresters
England Woodland Biodiversity Group
Central Council of Physical Recreation

Key stakeholder organisations within Government / Government agencies.

FCE – especially senior managers, Regional Directors and Forest Management Directors.
Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs.
Natural England – especially relevant specialist advisors
Forest Research
Forestry Commission (Great Britain)
English Heritage
Defence Estates (Ministry of Defence)
Environment Agency

ANNEX 3: Summary of policy development process.

Step	Mechanism	Output	Timescale
1. Fit progress to date into a policy cycle.	Forestry Commission England (FCE) to use work to date to produce a paper to define the problem, desired outcomes including indicators of outcomes and other issues for consideration, and set out policy options.	Paper	June 2008. FCE Executive Board (EEB) 18 June 2008.
2. Work out implications for delivery mechanisms and collate evidence.	Leads for each delivery mechanism to work out implications. FCE to set out summary of evidence.	Papers collated by FCE.	August 2008
3. Plan evaluation.	Stakeholder workshop.	Workshop report by FCE.	September 2008 (provisional date 26 September)
4. Appraise options.			
5. Consult	Formal public consultation.	Consultation report.	October 2008 to January 2009. EEB 21 October 2008.
6. Make a decision.	Options paper to be submitted to Ministers by FCE.	Submission to Ministers.	February 2009. EEB and FCE National Committee – dates to be confirmed.
7. Produce policy document	FCE to draft. Timescale dependent on publication of ETWF Delivery Plan and Ministerial response.	Published document	March 2009 EEB – date to be confirmed.
8. Set up delivery mechanisms.	Depends on policy decision but will include a plan for the FC estate.	Depends on policy decision	Depends on policy decision.
9. Launch policy	Launch at an outdoor event: both the policy and the strategy for the FC estate.	Launch event.	Depends on policy decision.