

The long-term role of the Forestry Commission England Public Forest Estate: consultation.

North East consultation event.

The aim of the event was to stimulate discussion on the issues raised by the consultation, allow people to hear the views of others and to encourage people to submit a written response to the consultation.

Details

Date of meeting: 10 July 2009

Location: Hexham

Number attending: 55 plus Forestry Commission staff

Chair: Denise Caudle, Chair North East England Regional Advisory Committee

Forestry Commission England National Committee attendee(s): William Worsley

Study Working Group attendee(s):

Key points raised during whole meeting discussion

- The study needs to take account of the wider context of the Public Forest Estate, including the role and delivery function of the non-governmental organisations, the charitable and private sector
- Forestry Commission needs to find ways to make sure the wider environmental and social benefits (non-market benefits) of the Public Forest Estate are taken into account. Financial credit needs to be given for these and if it isn't the wrong decisions will be taken.
- The multiplier effect of the Public Forest Estate – creating jobs, supporting businesses and adding value to local economies, often based on activities that aren't considered to be related to forestry, also needs to be taken into account and in many areas this probably the most important output from the Public Forest Estate.
- There was a feeling that the Public Forest Estate should be recognised for its climate change mitigation role in storing and locking up carbon, but this was thought to be difficult at present as there was no current government policy that would allow this to be valued or taken into account.
- The meeting largely recognised the reality that the Public Forest Estate would need to continue to be largely self funded and in some areas must generate a surplus

Public Forest Estate consultation

- In general people seemed to support the concept of 'sweating the asset' and were supportive of considering options for minerals extraction and renewable energy projects subject to planning processes. There was also a feeling that Forestry Commission should work particularly closely with local communities where such proposals were likely.
- In the North East the timber producing role of the Public Forest Estate was particularly important to the region and the current character and balance of the Public Forest Estate in the region was strongly supported. No desire to convert Kielder to upland heath or native broad-leave, or reposition to elsewhere in the region or country.
- Recognised that there was a need for more woodlands around towns and that additions to the Public Forest Estate would be a good way of delivering this in the region.
- General point about respecting the long term nature of forestry management, the need to build in flexibility to meet future objectives and to avoid knee jerk reactions to short term policy or political priorities.

Comment from Chair

- The North East Region differs from the rest of England given the very significant role of timber production and the timber processing sector and it was important that this wasn't lost or diluted when decisions were being taken at a national level. This was acknowledged as a potential source of tension between regional and national priorities for the future role of the estate.

Note taker: Colin Grayson / Brendan Callaghan

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To find out more go to www.forestry.gov.uk/england-estatestudy or contact:

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