

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

West Midlands stakeholder consultation event.

The aim of the event was to inform stakeholders of the issues raised by the consultation in the context of wider national and regional information centred on the PFE, stimulating discussion at the meeting and thus encouraging greater awareness and written contributions to the consultation.

Details

Date of meeting: 9th September 2009

Location: Hatherton Country House Hotel, Penkridge, Staffs

Number attending: 54

Chair: Graham Hunt Regional Advisory Committee Chair

Forestry Commission England National Committee attendee(s): None

Study Working Group attendee(s): Dominic Driver

Agenda

9.30am	Coffee
10.00am	Chairman's Welcome and Introduction
10.10am	Presentations :- D.Driver B. Heslegrave I. Hickman,
11-00am	Questions & Answers
11.10am	Group Work
12.45pm	Lunch
1.30pm	Summaries
2.00pm	Questions & Answers; Next Steps
2.30pm	Finish

Key points raised during discussions/feedback

- There were no lobby groups or other issues raised. Questions were all related to the consultation.
- All FC presenters emphasised the importance of attendees responding separately to the consultation and encouraging their contacts too via networking beyond the event

Public Forest Estate consultation

Morning Questions and Answers :

Simon Barker (National Trust): Is there evidence that if less timber is produced, less carbon is sequestered?

Dominic Driver: the carbon store is in the soil. There is strong evidence that if you convert productive woodland to less productive woodland or other land uses, the long-term carbon store is reduced – this reduction would be significant over the whole Public Forest Estate. The forecasts for timber production on the PFE are currently on a downward trend for other good reasons (to provide other benefits such as biodiversity or for public benefit) but carbon sequestration needs to be considered in the decision on the management of the land.

Ian Peake (Herefordshire College of Technology) What is the Conservative Party view on management of the PFE?

Dominic Driver: We can't speculate on this. This study on the PFE needs to be done in an open way to make sure that the recommendations that come out of it are robust enough to survive a potential change of government.

Judy Walker (Small Woods Association): Part of my job is fundraising. Natural England and the Environment Agency have regional fund-raising teams. Why doesn't the Forestry Commission do this?

Dominic Driver: the PFE costs £76m a year to run. It trades to offset running costs and generates funding from non-government resources eg Europe Union, Big Lottery and RDAs. Because of this, it only needs £15m a year from central Government, so the FC is good at fund-raising. Timber income is volatile, and the FC is under pressure to reduce funding from other public sources eg RDAs. So income from private sources is also sought.

Ian Hickman: in this region we would like a fundraising team, but can't free up the resources for it. There has been some success with commercial funding (eg new classroom sponsored by a local quarry), and also with a HLF-funded project (Grow With Wyre) and funding from Giant (mountain bike company) on Cannock Chase. However, this funding is often for new work / projects, which still leaves the general running costs to be met with money from elsewhere.

Geoff Nikolds (Environment Agency): What are the criteria used for selling / buying land on PFE?

Public Forest Estate consultation

Ian Hickman: the woodlands that are sold have less public benefit. The money gained from these sales are used to acquire land which may not necessarily be in the same region (it is a National Office decision), but will have more public benefit. Smaller blocks of woodland tend to be sold as these fetch a premium price.

Jenny Joy (Butterfly Conservation): How do the different uses of woodland sold / bought relate to running costs?

Ian Hickman: all new acquisitions are freehold and many woodlands are gifted to us. Most of those sold have low cost bases and those bought or gifted may have a higher cost base, as open spaces need more maintenance and staffing costs may be higher due to working with the local communities.

Justin Millward (Woodland Trust): How much pressure is there to deliver income from timber sales (this will reduce in future due to delivery of other public benefits)?

Ian Hickman: The FC has a production forecast so the amount of timber coming to the market is known. At the moment there is no drop in production, but it will be an issue in 25-30 years' time.

Afternoon Questions & Answers :

Jim Stabler – Shropshire Council: Is there a plan for the size of the PFE to remain the same in the future?

Dominic Driver: there is no plan for this – that is one reason this study is being carried out.

Simon Barker (National Trust): Could we have examples of 'catalysing landscape style working' (quote from document)

Dominic Driver: One example could be Ringwood Forest, Hants, an area of productive pine plantation on potential heathland, where the FC have opened up some wetter areas, thinned Corsican Pine heavily, and managed the heather. Other landowners on surrounding land are possibly not managing their land as well. The FC are making approaches to these other landowners to suggest work that could be carried out to improve the condition of SSSIs etc.

Ian Hickman: in this region, the same collaboration is taking place in the Wyre Forest.

Public Forest Estate consultation

Graham Hunt: Does the decision to buy / sell land take account of the public benefits that private woodland could provide?

Dominic Driver: The FC have looked at the benefits that the PFE provides and how much it would cost to provide them through private woodland grants etc. The result is around the same, but this has been strongly challenged. Some case studies are being looked into at present; some economics research is also being carried out to find out more about this subject.

Group Work

- Questions from the consultation were divided between three groups, with three tables for each group.
- A record of the points raised and consensus from each table is recorded on flip chart sheets.

Note taker: Bill Heslegrave

Date notes finalised: 21st September

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

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