

Restoration of open habitats from woods and forests in England: developing policy.

Workshop agenda item 9: Ranking the outcomes, developing criteria.

Analysis of feedback and proposed actions arising.

The workshop was designed to facilitate discussion in small groups. This appeared to work with high quality constructive input from stakeholders. Nevertheless, there are a number of issues over which there is currently no consensus. Our approach to resolving these issues does not rely on simply assessing the relative numbers of stakeholders who hold different opinions. Rather we are looking for a coherent argument backed up by evidence and expert opinion. While the relative number of experts who hold an opinion is a factor, the process is participatory rather than being simply based on numbers of respondents.

Ranking of outcomes according to importance for appraising¹ policy options.

- All groups ranked the following outcomes highly: financial viability, resilient ecological communities, and positive trends in populations of open habitat species (Fig. 1)
- All groups ranked the following outcomes as less important²: learning about landscape history, preservation of historic features, water quality and yield, air and noise pollution.
- Most groups ranked the following outcomes around the mid-point of importance: carbon balance, desired trends in woodland biodiversity are not compromised, access and recreation.
- There was a lack of consensus on the following outcomes with some groups ranking them as highly important others as unimportant: keeping to Government commitments on woodland cover, quality of life and landscape, commitments on native and /or ancient woodland, positive engagement by local and other users, and timber sector confidence.

Major patterns identified by groups.

- **Some outcomes delivered by codes of practice:** Three groups identified this as a category including the following outcomes: access and recreation, positive engagement by local and other users, quality of life and landscape, air and noise pollution, water quality

¹ Appraising means choosing between policy options on the basis of which is most likely to deliver the most desired outcome for the least cost.

² Not as less important in forestry policy as a whole, just less important for appraising policy options.

and yield, learning about landscape history, and preservation of historic features local decision.³

- **Some outcomes more about perceptions / politics than actual impact:** Two groups identified this as a category including the following outcomes: carbon balance, commitments on native and/or ancient woodland, keeping to Government commitments on woodland cover, and timber sector confidence.
- **Different levels of decision making:** Group 4 categorised the outcomes into levels at which decision making is required identifying national, code of good practice and local decision making levels. This was also discussed in plenary session.
- **Resilient ecological communities and positive trends in populations of open habitat species are linked:** all groups identified this relationship.
- Timber sector confidence and financial viability were linked by two groups.
- Quality of life and landscape was linked with access and recreation and /or positive engagement by local and other user users by all groups.

Criteria for choosing between policy options.

Most groups found developing these challenging probably because it is difficult but also because of lack of time. In addition, several groups seemed ready to start discussing policy options rather than spending time on working out how to judge between hypothetical options. Developing policy options is the next step so it is promising that many stakeholders are pushing ahead constructively.

Despite the challenges all groups came up with some useful advice on criteria including:

- **Carbon balance:** The monetised cost of the carbon impact. Test impact against public acceptability.
- **Timber sector confidence:** Impact on timber production forecast. Does the sector have a clear understanding of impacts on production?
- **Resilient ecological communities, positive trends in populations of open habitat species:** Quality of habitat as well as extent. Include connectivity and patch size.
- **Financial viability:** Resource requirements for long-term maintenance.
- **Positive engagement by local and other users:** Use a focus group.
- **Water quality and yield:** Contribution to river basin management plans.

³ Not all groups identified all of the outcomes listed as belonging to the category.

Figure 1: Outcomes for a policy on restoration of open habitats from woods and forests in England: rank for appraising policy options.

Feedback from stakeholder workshop 26th September 2008.

Outcome	Group:	Rank ⁴				
		1	2	3	4	5
Financial viability		2	5	1	4	3
Keeping to Government commitments on woodland cover.		11	10	2	1	9
Resilient ecological communities.		1	1	3	4	1
Carbon balance.		6	8	5	11	10
Positive trends in populations of open habitat species.		3	2	7	1	5
Quality of life and landscape.		7	2	11	9	1
Learning about landscape history.		15	14	12	15	12
Preservation of historic features.		12	12	15	14	12
Commitments on native and/or ancient woodland.		13	15	6	7	11
Desired trends in woodland biodiversity are not compromised.		4	6	8	4	7
Water quality and yield.		10	9	13	12	12
Air and noise pollution.		14	13	13	13	12
Positive engagement by local and other users.		5	4	9	8	3
Access and recreation.		7	7	9	10	6
Timber sector confidence.		7	11	4	1	7

Actions arising.

We will use the advice from the workshop and our own analysis to weight the outcomes for appraising policy options and to develop criteria by which we will make the appraisal. Figure 2 shows our current analysis. This is a tentative initial analysis only and is subject to change as we proceed through the policy development cycle. The ranking is not our ranking of the importance of the issue in forestry policy as a whole. Rather, it is our assessment of the importance for appraising policy options. The ranking is therefore the product of both overall importance and likelihood of differential significant impact. For example, landscape is an issue with high economic valuation. However, we have given it a low rank here because there is evidence that the impact of this policy on landscape will be relatively minor. Note also that actions arising from the review of evidence imply that some of the outcomes may change.

As well as criteria arising from the outcomes the feedback implies that some other criteria are likely to be required. These include:

- Does the policy allow local decision making and regional prioritisation within a national framework?
- Does policy set a long-term direction of travel?

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⁴ Group 6 was amalgamated with other groups following unavoidable early departure of several of its members.

Figure 2: Outcomes for a policy on restoration of open habitats from woods and forests in England: rank for appraising policy options and possible criteria.

Forestry Commission (FC) initial assessment following workshop 26th September 2008.

Outcome	Proposed FC ranking	Possible criteria ⁵	Comments
Financial viability	High	To what extent does long-term delivery of public benefit rely on long-term public funding? Does policy give practitioners flexibility to choose cost effective land management options?	Overall burden will be another key criterion.
Keeping to Government commitments on woodland cover.	High	Can Government influence the rate of woodland removal to avoid slipping into net deforestation?	
Resilient ecological communities.	High	Does policy promote increased patch size, connectivity, heterogeneity and management for beneficial ecological processes?	The definitions of these need to be established.
Positive trends in populations of open habitat species.	High	What is the contribution to Habitat Action Plan targets?	We will try to monetise the biodiversity benefits to facilitate comparison with carbon balance.
Positive engagement by local and other users.	High	Does policy promote high quality local participation in decision making?	This outcome could be delivered by following good practice. However, we judge the risk of negative impact is high enough to merit separate appraisal against this outcome.
Carbon balance.	High/Middle?	Is the negative impact on carbon balance publicly acceptable? Does policy promote good practice to minimise emissions during restoration?	Carbon is a major factor in forestry policy so a high rank may be appropriate. However, it may be best as a middle-ranking factor for choosing <i>between</i> policy options. This is because the negative impact on carbon balance is likely to be relatively small compared to national carbon emissions. Whatever the rank, we believe that it is desirable to monetise the costs of additional carbon emissions to enable resolution of competing policy priorities, particularly with the biodiversity ones. "Do the biodiversity benefits outweigh the carbon costs?" may be a useful criterion.
Timber sector confidence.	High/Middle?	Can Government predict the reduction in the timber production forecast to within reasonable limits at a regional scale? We will consider developing a criterion based on a threshold	Current evidence is that the impact on timber production is relatively moderate at a regional scale. This would imply a middle rank. However, the link between a reduction in timber production, business confidence and economic activity is uncertain. We need to try and

⁵ Note these are not the same as indicators for policy evaluation. Evaluation planning will be covered as part of the formal consultation planned for launch in November 2008.

Outcome	Proposed FC ranking	Possible criteria ⁵	Comments
		level of impact, e.g.: a proportion of the current production forecast.	work this out before we assess the importance of this outcome for the policy.
Desired trends in woodland biodiversity are not compromised.	Middle	Does policy allow practitioners flexibility to take account of specific woodland biodiversity requirements?	
Quality of life and landscape.	Low	Does policy encourage practitioners to follow good practice?	The local and other user concerns criterion will cover much of this.
Learning about landscape history.	Low		
Preservation of historic features.	Low		
Water quality and yield.	Low		This may become more important if a review of evidence indicates the local impacts add up to a national scale factor.
Air and noise pollution.	Low		
Access and recreation.	Low	None	The local and other user concerns criterion will cover much of this.
Commitments on native and/or ancient woodland.	Low	Is this policy consistent with the Keepers of Time policy framework?	