

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING 18TH MARCH 2008

MINUTES

- Attending:** Bill Evans, Russell Rowley, Barbara Yates, Graham Hunt, Helen Woodman, John Swift
- Present:** Bill Heslegrave, Ian Hickman, Amanda Pearce, Julia Hall (secretary)
- Apologies:** Andrew Woods, David Hallam

1. Welcome and Introduction

The Chair introduced Amanda Pearce, on secondment from Natural England to fill in for Simon West whilst he is on secondment to AWM.

2. Minutes of meeting of 6th November and matters arising

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the last meeting.

Matters arising

Item 3 – the West Midlands section of the Coleford office had closed since the last meeting, following the admin officer based there taking a position with Forest Enterprise. The Woodland Officer would have a hot desk at the Coleford office, but would be based in Worcester.

All other items would be covered under the agenda.

3. Agenda Management (paper for information/discussion/agreement)

GH introduced the paper he had prepared on this subject and asked for comments from members.

IH suggested that the agenda should be split into the two sections for clarity. It was agreed there should be flexibility to discuss a paper labelled for information only if members felt it was important.

BE suggested looking at agendas a meeting or two in advance to timetable issues. This could be done in the afternoon on the day of a meeting. GH also felt that the afternoon could be used to brief members on various issues they felt they needed information on (for example, areas highlighted from the questionnaire circulated previously). However it was decided that members could not give a whole day for every meeting of the RAC. As an alternative, briefing papers could be used to inform members of issues – these may be obtained from other regional groups and e-mailed to members between meetings. The change to the agenda structure should also ensure that the meeting is more efficient and items are dealt with more quickly.

The Committee agreed with the structure set out in the paper.

4. Habitat Regulations – update + report on workshop (verbal, information item)

BH informed the committee of a regional workshop which had been held on this subject and which was well-attended. This continued the roll-out of information and guidance within the region.

There would also be a day's workshop training for technical staff concentrating on the licencing process, which Natural England lead on. This would probably be held in May. It was felt that licences would not be issued regularly as best practice guidelines were sufficient in most cases to ensure protected species were not harmed.

5. Ancient and Native Woodland Management Practice Guidance (paper for information/discussion)

BH reported that there would be a field-based event at Wyre on 24th June to look at different woodland types, management options and best practice in Ancient and Native Woodland. Steve Cresswell had been seconded to the Programme Group for 2 days a week for six months to work on this guidance and he would be organising field meetings around the country. There would only be one meeting in each region due to time constraints on the experts who would be attending the events to give guidance. The invitations would be carefully targeted (Steve Cresswell would be leading on this for WM) and should be available to RAC members.

Action: BH to ensure RAC members receive an invitation to the field event.

6. Baylis's Hill Disputed Case – Report from the RAC sub-committee (report for discussion/agreement)

This item is confidential. It is advice to the Forestry Commissioners and as such is exempt under the Freedom of Information Act. If you have any queries, please contact the Committee Secretary.

7. Business Planning (paper for information and discussion)

BH reported that a final financial settlement with Defra had still not been reached. There had been a significant re-profiling of work from 08/09 to 09/10 nationally, but this was restricted as most of the grants had already been committed. More significant in the region was the reduction in the partnership budget by some 30% at a late stage.

He added that grant payments were expected to match committed funding quite closely, and the prospectus for 2008 was expected to be issued in May.

BE asked about the woodfuel project in the Wyre. BH replied that this funding came from the national Woodfuel Challenge Fund which the region had bid for and was therefore separate from the partnership budget.

8. England's Trees Woods and Forests – working version of delivery plan (paper/presentation/discussion)

BH distributed a copy of a powerpoint presentation, which gave an overview of the process of putting together the delivery plan.

He reported that the delivery plan was being constructed around the 5 aims of ETWF. The working version was now out for discussion with key stakeholders, and RACs, with a series of national meetings taking place. Wider consultation would then take place once the consultation draft was produced in April.

BH had organised a workshop in GOWM with regional agency partners to seek their feedback on the working version and the process involved. The group agreed on a number of inconsistencies and issues which they felt needed to be raised. BH had spoken to Laura Jones, the Programme Group lead on ETWF, to voice these concerns then followed up by email and she agreed to relay to drafting colleagues.

BH asked members in the light of this information and their own reading of the document, for any significant views they wished to express.

BY felt that the language was not very clear in places, highlighting as an example paragraph 11, which referred to hardware and software in relation to planting trees and other activities within woodlands.

RR felt that there was a mismatch between the tables and the rest of the document. He also thought that the aims read negatively. There were also key omissions such as deer and squirrel management.

BE felt that for aim 5, 'where we want to be in 2020' didn't address the issues.

Action: all to feed back any comments in the next two days to BH.

9. Regional Director's Report (paper for information)

BH also distributed a paper on *the West Midlands woodfuel supply chain RDPE application model* for information. This was to be used in a workshop of the woodfuel and wood industry task groups of the Woodland Forum to discuss the project on Wednesday.

He reported that the secondments (Simon West with AWM, Amanda Pearce with FC) were working very well. He, together with colleagues in AWM and Natural England, were keen to ensure that the experience gained was not lost when the secondments came to an end.

10. Forest Management Director's Report (paper or verbal)

For information only.

11. National Briefing

None received.

12. A.O.B. / Date & Location of next meeting

Action: BH to find out if a date for the national tree safety meeting had been fixed.

GH asked members for any issues that they would like raised at the RAC Chairs' meeting on 21st May, which he would be attending. The issues suggested at the meeting were:

- Landscape Character
- Experience of disputed case process (this may be constrained as the case in question will still be confidential at that stage).
- Understanding the EIA process, both for RACs and regional teams.

Action: Members to let GH know of any other issues they would like raised.

BH reported that Andy Sharkey had made some recovery and had been able to work part-time in more of a national position than a regional one. BH had tried to contact him regarding his future on the Committee in several ways without any response to date. IH suggested that a forester who is a neighbour of Andy's could find out the position from him.

The next meeting will take place on 1st July. Paul Hill-Tout from National Office will be attending. Venues were discussed, and suggestions included the Forest of Dennis, with an alternative of the Cannock office.

Action: BH to talk to Mark Pritchard about suitability of visiting the Forest of Dennis.

Items for the next meeting's agenda:

EIA

Progress of the Forest of Dennis

Action: GH to inform members of date of pre-meeting to discuss agenda so they can feed in any other items.

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