

# Forestry and Woodlands Advisory Committees

## Annual Report, 2015 – 2016

June 2016

A report co-authored by the nine Forestry and Woodlands Advisory Committee Chairs

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## About this report

This report summarises the work of the nine Forestry and Woodland Advisory Committees (FWACs or Committees) from April 2015 to March 2016. The Committees are required to provide a joint report annually which describes the business highlights against the founding FWAC principles set out in 2013:

- Champion forestry interests and partnership working at local level for woodland resilience and sector development, providing independent insight into local needs and priorities.
- Provide advice on the application of national policies into local programmes, and help feed local priorities into national programmes.
- Support the Government's interests by developing strong local connections and networks to enhance synergies across the diverse forest and woodland sector, including the public forest estate.
- Conciliate in disputed applications for grant aid, felling licences, or approval of forest plans where there is a sustained objection by a statutory body.



Committee members made significant contributions to this report, through agreeing contributing reports and preparing copy. Thanks to Chris Starr (NW) for his contribution on skills, education and training. Thanks and credit to the Mersey Forest for the cover image.

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## Introduction

This report is the collective effort of the nine Committees and the Urban FWAC Network over the course of the year from April 2015 to March 2016. Building on the previous FWAC Annual Report 2015, this report covers key themes as well as the work, achievements and actions of the Committees. The Committee members contribute to a large number of wider networks advocating the interests of the forestry sector and bring together professional knowledge and experience to bear in the regular meetings.

In 2015/16 the Chairs and members met with leaders and officers of the Forestry Commission and Defra and (via the Forestry Forum and other routes) the Forestry Minister.

The Chairs are unchanged from last year and principally represent three perspectives of the forestry community:

- Social, Access and Environment (4)
- Local community, Economy and Government (4)
- Forestry industry and Land Ownership (1)

The Committees continue to assess their contribution and direct their focus according to the PIE – Protect, Improve, Expand agenda but have moved this on to explore specific themed areas to focus added value.

The FWAC Urban Network is chaired by Jane Carlsen and includes representatives from across the 9 Committees.

The 100 volunteer members and 9 Chairs are themselves members of many professional organisations, networks and associations, including Chartered Foresters, Surveyors, Planners, and Environmentalists. Many FWAC Chairs are company directors and serve on charity, government and company boards including: Natural England, RSPB, Cabinet Office, Audit Commission and Employment and Skills Boards.

This report is prepared for approval at the May 2016 Chairs' meeting.

## Executive Summary

Unlike Peppa Pig, we don't think trees are boring! We think trees are vital, inspiring, precious and hugely valuable to the way we live and to the biodiversity of our towns, cities and rural areas. With over 100 members and contact with hundreds of networks and organisations (no stone is unturned) we can help join up cross-government plans and objectives for the benefit of trees and woodlands.

The bottom line is that some key indicators are moving in the right direction but there remain significant concerns regarding the levels of timber for industrial use, urban tree loss, and a dwindling network of support for partnerships across the country.

The Committees continue to make the case for focus and debate to ensure that up to date evidence and ideas are disseminated across the sector. Whilst a lack of resources and uncertainty regarding future resources is having an impact on capability, capacity and delivery, FWACs continue to support innovation and a network of support across the sector.

We are concerned about the health of our trees and woodlands. Pest and disease pressures vary from place to place and year to year e.g. Phytophthora ramorum in several regions and the gall wasp outbreak in Kent, while grey squirrels and deer continue to be a problem nationally. The Committees can and do see the impact of a lack of resources on day to day activities.

The role of the Public Forest Estate is crucial and significant. Working with the leaders of the Public Forest Estate and Forest Services, we can be a collaborative force helping to keep the public and private forest estates in touch with each other.

We support change. As the Defra family evolves and changes, we can act as a super 'user forum' to check draft ideas and then monitor delivery. The Committees regularly take part in opportunities to shape policy and guide best practice thinking.

2015 saw progress on many fronts, not least the launch of a new Vision for a Resilient Urban Forest. The details are contained in this report, but in short the Vision sets out, with available evidence, the priority areas for focus moving forward. The report has ministerial backing and support at the highest levels in the Forestry Commission.

The Committees, as well as contributing to discussion, being a critical friend and bringing local views, can also be an important tool to help FC deliver their objectives. The Annual Report demonstrates how this is happening and how we can do even more by helping to set the national agenda. We stand ready to do just that.

We speak for the trees, for the trees have no tongues. We advocate for investment, policies and research that extend the benefits to society, the environment and the economy in productive woodlands, street trees, parks and open spaces.

## Context

The election of a Conservative government in 2015 meant that the policy approaches affecting the sector continued into 2016. Government has maintained its focus on reducing government spending in non-protected departments and the Forestry Commission has played its part in consolidating back office costs and transferring core admin functions to the Natural England and in due course the Rural Payments Agency. Nonetheless the Committees remain a core component of the Government's engagement with the sector.

The Forestry Minister Rory Stewart has continued to support the work of Forestry Commission and has taken an active role in supporting the new Vision for a Resilient Urban Forest set out in a document prepared by the Urban FWAC Network.

The role of business and the community sector remains significant in terms of delivery and resource. The Community Forest Conference in March 2016 was a fantastic testament to the energy, passion, commitment and perseverance of the community forest sector. The business and third sectors continue to innovate, exploring and funding new ways to deliver trees and woodlands in communities across the country. Local Enterprise Partnerships are now well established and proven vehicles for focus on policy and economic growth priorities locally. FWACs have links across the country to LEPs and their Local Nature Partnerships. Coverage and partnership working is not consistent across the country but examples of good practice are easy to find.

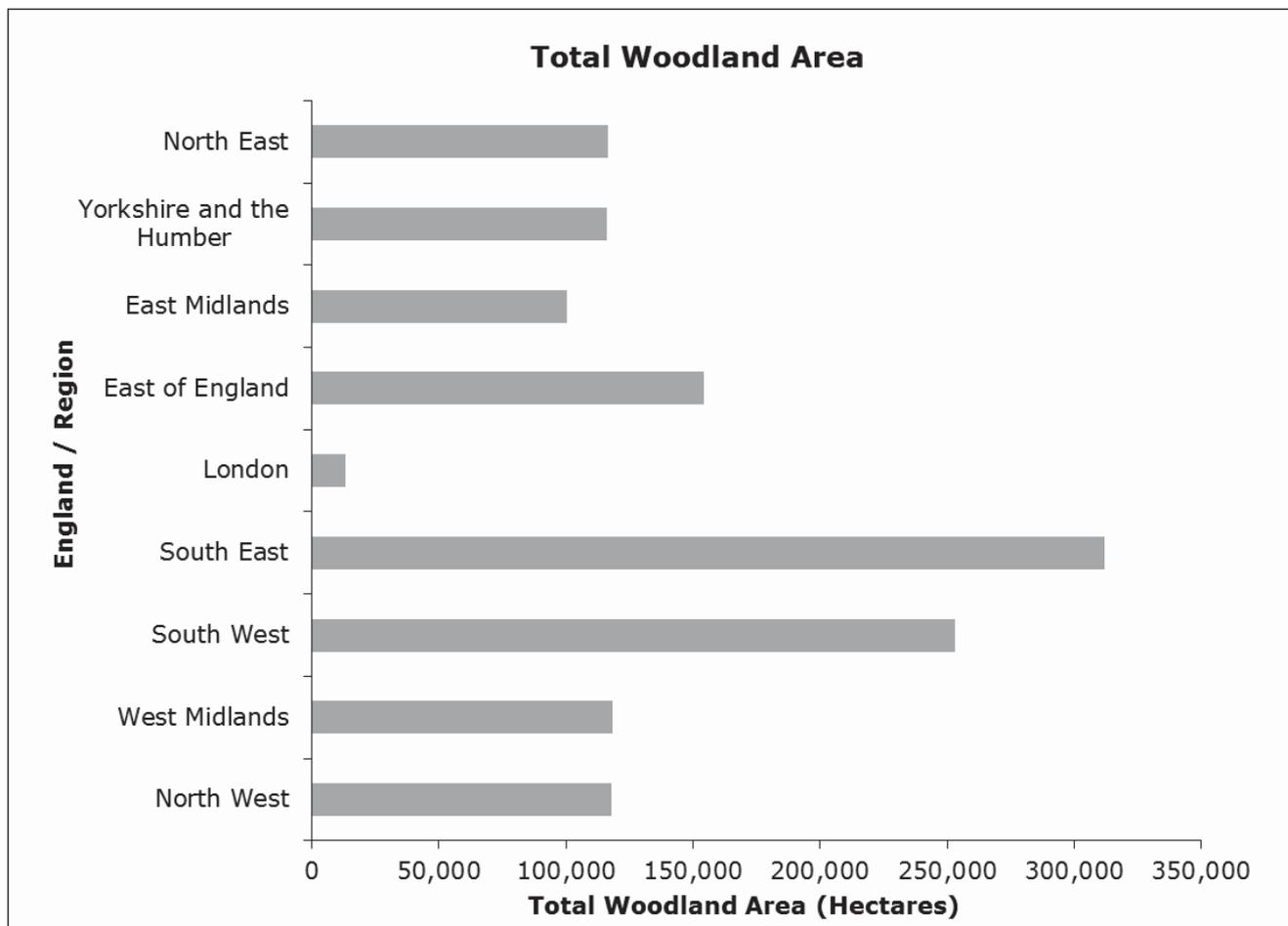
### Selected Forestry Commission England Headline Indicators by FWAC Area

English Region	Total Woodland Area (Hectares) <sup>1</sup>	% of Woodland in Management		Woodland Creation supported by RDPE (Hectares)	
		at 31.03.2013 <sup>2</sup>	at 31.03.2016 <sup>3</sup>	2012-2013 <sup>4</sup>	2015-2016 <sup>5</sup>
North East	116,595	69.6%	77.9%	303	86
Yorkshire and the Humber	115,823	55.7%	60.1%	100	65
East Midlands	100,423	53.1%	56.7%	242	82
East of England	154,407	50.1%	57.4%	292	17
London	13,042	24.3%	29.1%	0	0
South East	311,828	48.2%	55.2%	237	27
South West	253,265	49.9%	54.5%	194	45
West Midlands	118,462	52.0%	55.6%	170	74
North West	118,052	53.8%	60.2%	262	150
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,301,896</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>1,831</b>	<b>546</b>
<b>England Average</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>58%</b>		

(from Selected Forestry Commission Headline Indicators by FWAC Areas report April 2016)

## Progress across the sector

The 2015 FWAC report included an ambitious and challenging suite of next steps and areas identified for further work. In particular, tree health was a major concern of the FWACs as the understanding of the scale of ash dieback and other pests and diseases became clear. 2015 was also a transition year to the new grant scheme and so much of the emphasis last year related to reviewing and discussing issues around the new funding arrangements.



<sup>1</sup> Largest woodland area: South East (311,828 ha)

<sup>2</sup> Smallest woodland area: London (13,042 ha).

## Advocacy and Champion

A key role of the Committees is to advocate and champion good practice in the woodland and forestry sector and support the promotion and understanding of the benefits that arise as a result. FWACs have engaged in opportunities to promote the sector through Local Nature Partnerships, member organisations, and national and international conferences.

The FWACs continue to support and promote national initiatives through direct involvement, including the new LEADER programme, Grown in Britain, the forestry sector growth plan 'Roots to Prosperity' and the work of the Trees and Design Action Group (TDAG).

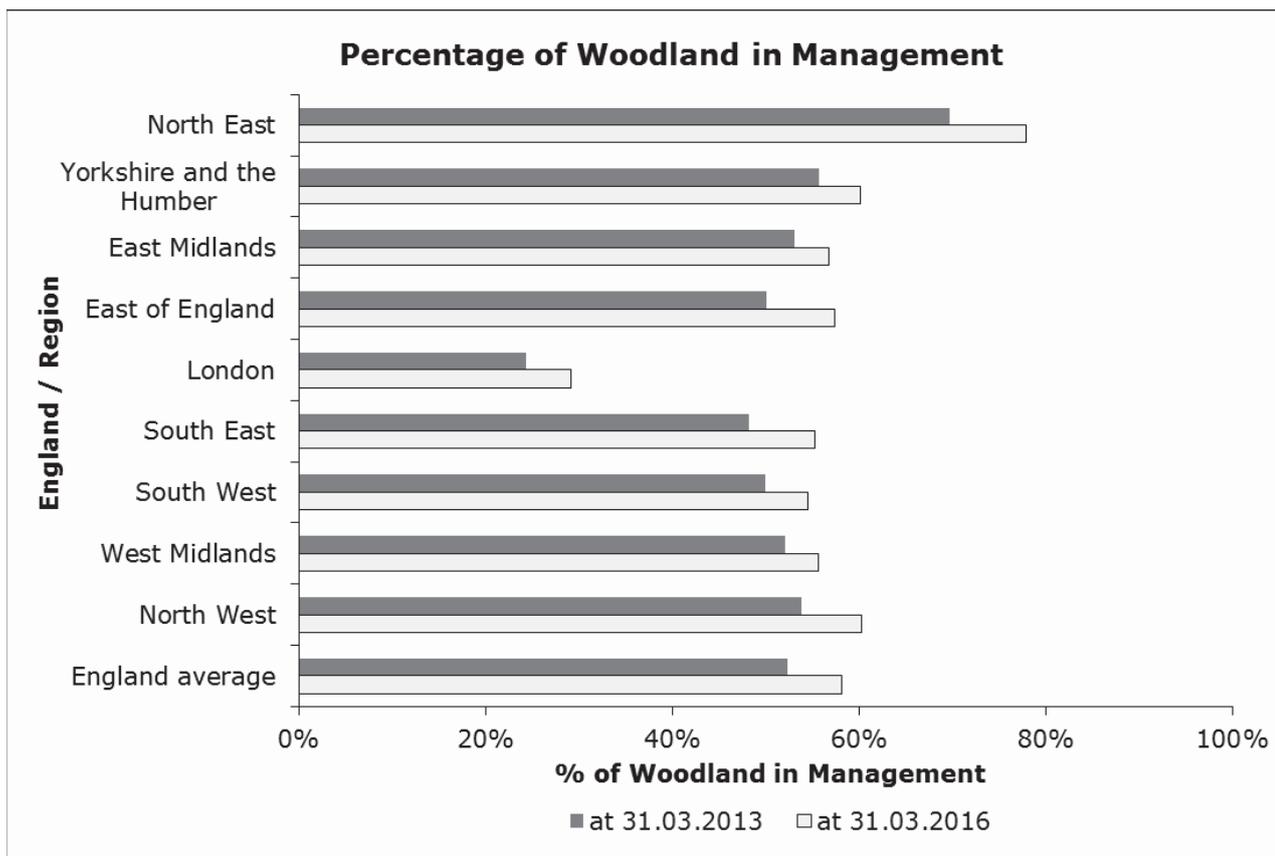
## Protect, Improve, Expand Implementation Priorities

The work of Committees continues to be directed and assessed against the 'Protect, Improve, Expand' Implementation Priorities. The themes within this report illustrate how the implementation priorities maintain our focus, whilst developing our work in specific key areas.

## Woods into management

The Forestry Commission's ambition is to bring two thirds of woodlands into management by 2018. Achieving this goal would bring substantial benefits for people, nature and local economies but it remains a challenge. Shortage of woodland management skills, fragmented ownership of some woodland areas, owners' different perspectives on the purpose of their woodlands and finding ways to make woodland management financially viable are typical barriers.

Countryside Stewardship Grants for management plans and programmes are a key tool to help owners bring their woodlands into management. Each of the FWACs has supported and participated in regional events, such as Pie and Pint evenings by local Forestry Commission staff and Rural Development workshops which are opportunities for woodland owners to find out more about grant programmes.



The recent changes in the grant regime have had a negative, though probably short-lived impact on woodland owners being able to access grants for woodland management. We have provided feedback to the Forestry Commission on grant applicants' experience of Countryside Stewardship. A key recommendation has been providing sufficient advance notice of the window for grant applications to allow woodland owners enough time to prepare their applications.

## Woodland Management Summary

At 31.03.2013	Highest percentage of woodland in management: North East (69.6%) Lowest percentage of woodland in management: London (24.3%) Average percentage of woodland in management: 52.3%.
At 31.3.2016	Highest percentage of woodland in management: North East (77.9%) Lowest percentage of woodland in management: London (29.1%) Average percentage of woodland in management: 58.1%.
	Largest increase in percentage of woodland in management between 31.03.2013 and 31.03.2016: North East (8.2%).
	Smallest increase in percentage of woodland in management between 31.03.2013 and 31.03.2016: West Midlands (3.6%).
	England Average increase in percentage of woodland in management between 31.03.2013 and 31.03.2016: 5.8%.

While grant programmes are important, it is essential in the long term to find financially sustainable models for woodland management.

Grown in Britain provides a national framework for this and there are several regional initiatives, woodfuel projects and social enterprises supported by the Committees, such as the wood allotments project by the Mersey Forest, the Ward Forester and Westwoods projects , and the Exmoor National Park Woodland Management Project in the South West. As yet, these projects have not fulfilled their potential and achieved significant impact or scale. Most recently Stobart Biomass has secured funding from the Regional Growth Fund to increase fuel production from unmanaged woodland in the North West and West Midlands.

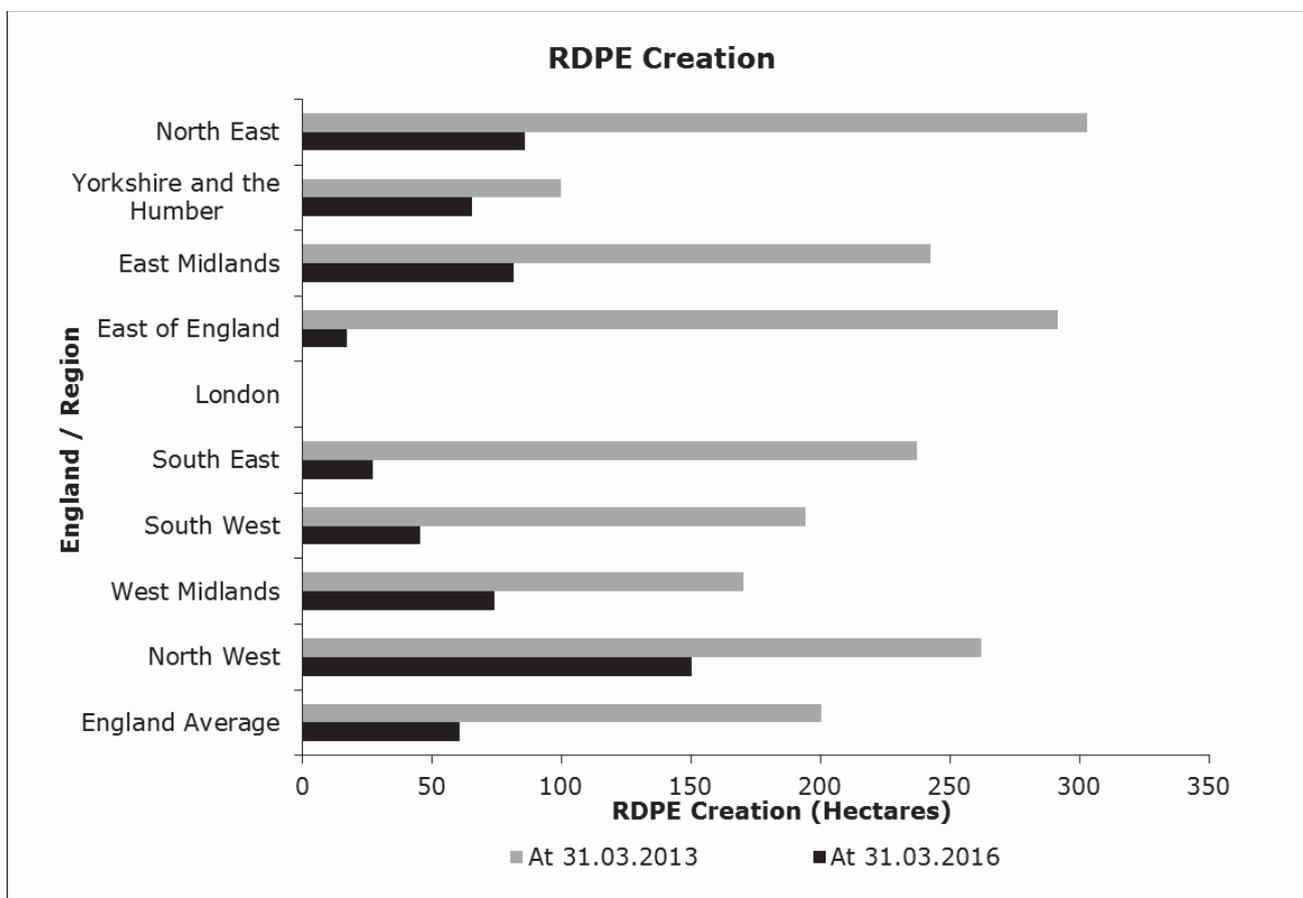
Looking ahead, the FWACs plan to review the progress of these regional level initiatives and use their networks to lend further support. For example, the unique role of social enterprises in the management of woodland will be the theme of the joint summer meeting of the East of England and East Midlands FWACs. Their review of the lessons learnt from social enterprises in those regions will be shared with the other FWACs and disseminated through their networks.

## Woodland creation

In the north east it is inspiring to see the area of woodland planting and although that is primarily a rural activity, the expansion of trees into the urban landscape is of equal merit and is receiving new impetus - the impact on the population at large will pay dividends. London has its own exciting programme under the Mayor's Street Trees Programme and I-trees report are great calls to action.

The importance of the role of the Environmental Impact Assessment within development proposals is mentioned by a number of Committees, including the North East FWAC, which has nearly completed the intelligent targeting process in its second area, Northumberland (following on from Durham); the learning will allow other areas to also target where new trees can be planted with maximum gain for society.

### Woodland Creation supported by the Rural Development Plan England (RDPE)



Countryside Stewardship is clearly a crucial incentive for planting, supporting 40% (this year's agreements may be around 1,600Ha) of the targeted woodland plantings. FWAC network has been working hard to encourage and to target Countryside Stewardship (CS) as a mechanism for effective forestry delivery, aspiring to work alongside initiatives promoted by the private sector. Committees such as East of England have met to discuss areas of best fit. East Midlands have also given strong feedback on the issues within stewardship that help and hinder land coming forward for planting. The London Committee is concerned that there have been no applications for CS grants in London and are following up on the effect of the omission of the access criteria from the CS process.

Roots to prosperity – covering the North East/North West and Yorkshire is very keen to start to fill the ‘creation’ gap through more activity such as the budget-inspired LEP-supported initiative called the ‘Forestry Innovation Fund’ launched by the Forestry Commission England in 2015. This woodland creation planting grant had a good initial take up with over 10 schemes with a total area of 1100ha coming forward in what was a short application window.

Trees and their new purposes is a topic with increasing relevance, with the East of England, South West, West Midlands and East Midlands utilising them for flood mitigation and water quality improvement. The South East, after their two day event in Oxon, talk of a collaboration to get landowners in flood plains to consider planting. The South West have encouraged woodland partnership under Countryside Stewardship facilitation fund in two Devon locations.

More support is needed for community and woodland trusts, parish councils and such groups as rail companies who are all keen to create woodlands and plant targeted trees and shrubs. West Midlands have examples of this through the Mercia Community Forest Initiative. In the North West, the Committee supported the Woodland Trust buying land in Bolton for woodland creation. Urban forests and the work of the Mersey Forest, Manchester City of Trees, Community Forest Trust and Land Trust were also highlighted in the North West.

Lastly it is worth looking at the Roots to Prosperity areas of recommended action:

- Regulation – EIA and grants journey;
- Consultation – requirements;
- Funding and finance – carbon, natural capital, Countryside Stewardship and plastic bag tax; and
- Silviculture – know how.

The targets of the Government and FCE are tough in terms of woodland creation and meeting higher aspirational targets will be a stretch - but between all of the Committees we see non-executive skills, contacts and knowledge helping the staff to achieve them.

#### **RDPE Woodland Creation Facts**

Financial year 2012/13:

- Most RDPE creation: North East (303 ha)
- Least RDPE creation: London (0 ha)

Financial year 2015/16:

- Most RDPE creation: North West (150 ha)
- Least RDPE creation: London (0 ha)

Smallest decrease in RDPE creation between financial years 2012/13 and 2015/16: Yorkshire and The Humber (34 ha decrease). This is the smallest decrease after London, which returned values of ‘0’ for both dates.

Largest decrease in RDPE creation between financial years 2012/13 and 2015/16: East of England (275 ha decrease).

## Water/ Natural Solutions / Resilience

The importance of trees in providing a sustainable and resilient future, combined with social, economic and environmental benefits, is widely accepted. Trees in the right place can also make a major contribution to water management, both in improving and protecting quality as well as towards flood alleviation and community resilience in such situations.

Whilst trees are not the solution on their own, they are part of a more integrated approach to land management, making best use of our natural features. This is now widely referred to as a natural solutions or natural processes approach and offers the route to the sustainable and progressive delivery of all our own and joint agendas through meeting, understanding, defining and managing integrated delivery and outcomes. The topics of water, resilience and natural solutions have been discussed and acted upon by all the Committees and here are some examples.



In the West Midlands, much progress has been made in such an approach. The chair of the Severn & Wye Flood and Coastal Protection committee made a presentation at the WM FWAC and building upon this there are discussions and initiatives being taken forward. Indeed, in considering any flood alleviation scheme in the area, it is a requirement to consider if natural processes and tree planting and management can have impact.

In Shropshire, all the main agencies concerned with such issues have come together seeking to focus on shared objectives and maximise available resource. In the Stroud area of Gloucestershire, a multi-agency project has focussed upon natural solutions to meet water challenges and forestry and trees are a key part of that. A video clip on this can be found at [www.stroud.gov.uk](http://www.stroud.gov.uk)

The newly established Birmingham Institute of Forest Research has a key interest in the resilience agenda and its Director sits on the WM FWAC.

In London, the Committee has put much work into the document establishing a vision for the resilient urban forest and has identified case studies showing the important role played by trees. The I-tree report highlighted the role of trees in the attenuation of storm water and the improvement of poor air quality in urban areas. This evidence will feed into future work on the Mayor of London's strategies.

In the North West, a Committee member who also sits on their regional flood committee led a session with the Environment Agency on the "Slow the Flow NW" project and role of trees in flood control. The Committee was very keen to progress the opportunities and synergies between forestry and flooding and this certainly came to the fore in the major flooding in Cumbria recently. In the North East, Woodlands for water has been a very timely review and politicians have been quick to underline that trees will be part of an ongoing policy to 'slow the flow' but, like most big issues it is complex and there is a need to evidence the benefits. This is being taken up by the Committee. Again taking an integrated approach to land management issues is emphasised.

In the East of England, the role of trees and woodland in the mitigation of flooding and improvement of water quality has received much discussion, and the challenges of delivering against this topic in a lowland arable landscape remains of great interest to the Committee and the area. The East Midlands have addressed the issues surrounding woodland resilience supported by the FCE National Expertise team and by site visits. The FWAC urged the need for a national plan to enhance resilience and to extend the work being done on the PFE. They have sought a collective FWAC view on the importance of resilience linked to the Climate Accord, clearer information on the links between management and resilience and greater opportunities for woodland owners and managers to 'look over the hedge' at examples of good practice.

**London i-tree**

The London i-tree project involved hundreds of volunteers conducting the largest city tree survey of its kind in the world. The most common species found in Outer London were sycamore, oak and hawthorn and in Inner London birch, lime and apple trees. Using the information collected, the quantity and value of some of the benefits that London's trees and woodlands provide were calculated. These included over 8.4 million trees, providing 21% canopy cover and an amenity value of £43 billion. The benefits include removal of air pollution (over 2000 tonnes p.a.), reduction of storm water run-off (3.5 million cubic metres p.a.), and carbon sequestration (over 70,000 tonnes p.a.).

This project helps deliver a key part of the Urban Forest Vision – "Where the many benefits of trees are recognised and invested in" – which has been developed by the Urban FWAC Network.

## Local Growth - Leader/ LEPs and other funding

Accessing funds to support local growth in the forestry sector was a priority for all the Committees during 2015-16. It was also the key topic at two meetings of the FWAC Chairs and Commissioners, with discussions stimulated by presentations from representatives of the New Anglia LEP and the Rural Development Directorate of the Rural Payments Agency (RPA).

We have therefore worked with Forestry Commission's Area teams to support a wide variety of information sessions for woodland owners and forestry businesses, including 30 "Pie and Pint" evenings and two small-scale harvesting demonstrations across the country (which attracted 980 participants), as well as Countryside Productivity/LEADER master-classes.



Rushmore Biodiversity Research Project, showing the results of irregular high forest management, a form of continuous cover forest management being trialled on the Rushmore Estate (Dorset/Wiltshire border) to enhance biodiversity, timber potential and resilience through natural regeneration.

We have supported the Area teams and representatives of the forestry sector to engage England's 39 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), advocating the forestry message and creating 'hooks' for accessing funding streams. The main task has been to integrate forestry as part of the natural environment into the growth deals using opportunities such as the green and low carbon economy, flooding and coastal management, green space, recreation and tourism and Environmental (or woodland) Enterprise Zones. The Stobart Ltd woodland management programme in the north of England shows the huge potential of even a small proportion of transport infrastructure budgets being allocated to woodland creation.

As a result of our combined effort with forestry commission colleagues, several LEPs have identified forestry as a priority within their rural funding allocation, although the broad economic focus and limited administrative resources of the LEPs has inhibited many from engaging in forestry issues. Direct contacts and strong advocacy remain very important. We have urged Forest Services to work with the RPA to develop a targeting strategy for LEPs, and to maintain a national overview of progress and practice. RPA is also preparing a LEP Advice Note for forestry, including information on what can be funded with European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) in the Growth Programme.

Achievements so far (at least Phase 1 proposals accepted by a LEP) include:

- Success in the SE area with *Coast to Capital* and *EM3* LEPs securing over £5million funding into the sector so far, with contracts signed for a dozen or so new capital projects to boost the local supply chain
- A successful stage 1 application in the SW in response to a "Low Carbon" call by the Heart of the South West (HotSW) for a £2 million Woodheat Project.
- In the NW, Cumbria Woodlands also achieved a successful stage 1 application for a "Low Carbon" call by Cumbria LEP

Thus, although only a moderate amount of funding for forestry has so far come to fruition from the LEPs, there are still many opportunities to pursue.

The LEADER programme continues to provide vital funding for forestry in rural areas, and most FWACs and Area teams have good links with the new local LEADER structures and have been able to argue for significant allocations of budgets to forestry. For example, across the East of England almost £1m of LEADER budgets have been ring-fenced for forestry as a direct result of this engagement. Funds are available and the FWACs are encouraging individuals, businesses and communities to apply for woodland-based applications.

However, the sector continues to need come up with good project and funding ideas, and there is a continual challenge to finding match funding.

Whilst most focus has been on public sector funding, the FWACs also need to explore innovative funding modalities such as Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). PES has good potential in relation to flood risk management and carbon offsets, while CSR has been highlighted as a potential funding source in London, and proved to be particularly significant for supporting the i-tree project report and launch.

## Public Forest Estate

Although no definite timeline has yet been given for the introduction of legislation to fulfil the Government's commitment to create a new management body to hold the new public forest estate in trust for the nation under revised governance arrangements, several Committees had briefings during the year on the changes already underway in readiness for the new organization, and all Committees continue to receive regular updates on key developments on the PFE through briefings at meetings both written and in person.

The Committees, as regional stakeholder bodies, have a particular interest in the governance arrangements for the new organisation. Until those are in place, our role in scrutinising and challenging decisions on the estate and in consultations regarding major development plans and on plans for estate reconfiguration, remains important. Links between the Committees and the PFE work well across the country and are particularly strong in London and in the East of England where a Committee member chairs the PFE Friends Group and so ensures focus on future governance arrangements.

Dialogue continues on other issues of shared interest to the public forest estate and private owners. For example, discussion on wild boar in the Forest of Dean led to the inclusion of wild boar management at the Tree Health Event.

In the South West, the Committee has emphasised the need for an integrated approach to forestry for the whole woodland resource, across the PFE and privately owned woodlands, and advocates softer boundaries and more shared learning with the PFE. This includes such practical matters such as approaches to squirrel and deer control reviewed by other Committees as well.

We have also welcomed how partnership approaches on shared woodland management challenges are mirrored by partnerships with other sectors. The public forest estate in the Kielder area is developing stronger links with the local tourism partnership to draw in tourism business to the Forest and local communities, through promotion of 'Dark Sky' status for example.



## Landscape/ Historic

The Committees continue to engage with numerous historic and protected landscapes across the country and several committee members represent AONBs, National Parks and other relevant organisations. Through this engagement, the Committees have either visited, discussed or welcomed guest speakers from those with an interest in historic and protected landscapes, topics covered include:

- The contribution of woodlands to the local economy;
- Trees and their place in landscape character;
- Impact of past and future planting to landscapes;
- The value of single trees in the landscape;
- Impact of blocks of forest;
- Value of street trees to a sense of place;
- The risks of disease and other threats to special trees and woods in precious places;
- Natural flood management; and
- Ecosystems services.

Factors to emerge from discussions included the need for balance where so many influences and asks are apparent and the importance of collaboration and sharing of expertise.

Examples of Sites and organisations engaged include:

- North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve;
- New Forest National Park;
- Smithills Estate with the Woodland Trust;
- North Kent Downs AONB;
- Northern Devon Nature Improvement Area;
- Heart of England Forest;
- The Earth Trust;
- National Trust;
- London Tree Officers Association; and
- City of London (Hampstead Heath and Epping Forest).

### **Kielder – dark skies**

All year round - a star gazing and astronomy heaven! Kielder Observatory is located in the heart of Northumberland International Dark Sky Park.

We have the largest expanse of dark night sky in the whole of Europe, thanks to minimal light pollution. Winter nights are darkest and best for viewing deep sky objects such as galaxies, while in summer you can view the beautiful Milky Way, passing comets, shooting stars and see the Sun's surface using our incredible telescope.

- Learn about the night sky and use the powerful telescopes.
- Meet experienced astronomers and learn how to take stunning photographs of distant objects in the Universe.
- Experience meteor showers (shooting stars) and other celestial events.

Kielder campsite is filled twice a year by the Kielder Forest Star Camp which draws hundreds of observers from across the UK for five nights of stargazing. There are also other venues hosting star gazing events throughout Kielder Water and Forest Park. Search in the events section for more details.

It is not just stargazers who benefit from the reduced light pollution, Kielder Water & Forest Park is abundant with a variety of wildlife. The dark skies can enhance the habitat for many of our woodland species such as birds, bats, moths and insects.

## Education, training & skills

Many of the Committees continue to be concerned about the breadth and depth of skills and qualifications across the sector, with many employers drawing new staff from a small pool of candidates. In addition continuing professional development is seen as key to responding to new initiatives and business opportunities. Over the last year a number of Committees have been involved in gathering market intelligence and promoting new solutions for a sector comprised primarily of small SME's.

Recruitment of young people wishing to study forestry in the university sector is not buoyant and the Committees have been involved in a number of initiatives to promote more effectively the many and varied opportunities the sector offers to young people.

Research-led specialisms in for example tree health, climate change and flood mitigation is leading to increased cooperation with a wide range of universities including, for example, Birmingham, Reading, Newcastle and Harper Adams.

Committee members have been involved in some interesting and innovative developments including:

1. Professor Robert McKenzie, who is taking forward Birmingham University developments on woodlands and forestry and leading the prestigious international BIFOR project, has been co-opted on to the West Midlands FWAC to work alongside other members who also have experience in this area.
2. John Moverley had meetings with the Principals of Staffordshire and Warwickshire Colleges to promote training and skills, building upon the review previously undertaken by the North West and West Midlands Committees.
3. Geraint Richards and Caroline Harrison (South West) are actively involved in national efforts to promote forestry learning, development and apprenticeships. The England forestry sub-group for the 'Trailblazer' apprenticeship, working closely with the FC and the wider sector, succeeded in gaining acceptance from BIS for an apprenticeship standard for a forest operative.
4. In the South East, Committee members are exploring the development of a post-graduate apprenticeship scheme whereby new entrants are placed on an agreed programme of experience delivered by a number of members and the wider sector.

### Heart of England Forest

The forest is in an area covering the borders of Shakespeare's Forest of Arden south to the edge of the Vale of Evesham. The first trees were planted in 1996. The Heart of England Forest's mission is to restore and rebuild some of the lost ancient forest that previously meandered across this countryside. So far, they have planted over 3,000 acres (1m trees). The ambition is for this broadleaf forest to grow to 30,000 acres. The original vision for the Heart of England Forest came from the publisher Felix Dennis and is now managed by a Trust managing funds left by Mr Dennis who wanted to bring back trees to the local landscape that would provide vital green corridors for wildlife, as well as a light and airy place for everyone to enjoy.

The FWAC visited in the year to consider how this development could contribute to the PIE agenda and how we might facilitate ways of coordinating funding initiatives both public and private to maximize the opportunity. There was also discussion about tree species linked to commercial potential and tree health. We also looked at ways in which this new forest might contribute to flood alleviation in this region and be part of an integrated land management approach.

5. Chris Starr led a session on the challenges faced by university departments in a market-driven economy and the perceptions of forestry as a career amongst young people, with additional input from Steve Fowkes (FC) and Dr Andrew Weatherall from the National School of Forestry at the University of Cumbria.
6. Professor Ted Wilson is leading the 'future foresters' initiative for the Royal Forestry Society and has been active in developing partnerships with education providers and training organisations.
7. In the North West and West Midlands, the Committees have facilitated discussions between the University of Cumbria and Birmingham to discuss future HE developments and research

Given that there is a growing need to work more collaboratively at the catchment and landscape scale it is perhaps worth the sector in general, and the Committees in particular, to look at partners across the land-based disciplines in order to explore the viability of a University Technical College to meet the future demands for skilled staff in England.

Most of the Committees continue to have education and training as a key cross-cutting theme in 2016-17.

## Joint Working

With no executive powers or substantive staff resource, the Committees rely entirely on joint working to help the Forestry Commission deliver Government priorities; working with others in partnership, influencing debate and action, and using the experience and acumen of their members to help drive change.

An excellent example of this is the work that the East of England and East Midlands FWACs facilitated between Natural England and the Forestry Commission in the delivery of the new Countryside Stewardship scheme. It was clear that this new grant scheme, delivered jointly by the Rural Payments Agency, Natural England and the Forestry Commission, adopting new EU Rural development rules and processed and using new untried technology was going to be a major challenge (as indeed it proved despite our best efforts!).

To help develop and strengthen professional and personal relationships between the field teams, the Chairs extended an invitation to the three Natural England senior Area Managers working within the FC East & East Midlands Area to test a number of grant delivery scenarios in the field. Thanks to the generosity of the Lord Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire, who kindly provided his estate for the exercise, these scenarios were fully tested, protocols agreed and relationships deepened. Although both the sector and FC staff experienced considerable frustrations with the roll out of Stewardship, the gravitas the FWACs were able to bring increased the profile of the topic and the seniority of staff attending at this early stage.

The lessons learnt by the Committees from this joint working on Stewardship have helped shape the initial response to Defra's 25 year Environment Plan, expressed through discussions with FC and Defra officials, which will be a major topic for engagement later in 2016.

The joint working between paired FWACs with Forest Service Area boundaries has also been a key feature in the West Midlands and North West, meeting the Forest Services team to explain the role of FWACs and strengthening and developing relationships and modes of operation.

The three northern FWACs have helped in the delivery of the pan-regional “Roots to Prosperity” strategy, hosting events, championing the sector to decision makers and articulating the benefits of trees, woods and forests at every opportunity.

In London, the joint working with the I-Tree project and the GI Task Force have enabled strong links with the GLA; and in the South West, joint membership across the Committee and the South West Applicants Focus group has ensured pertinent input into operational regulatory delivery.

We have used their members’ networks to promote and encourage action in areas where the FC itself is not resourced to take direct action (e.g. squirrels, wild deer) and to take key messages to a wider audience (e.g. tree health, resilience).

## Urban FWAC Network

Through the Urban FWAC Network, all the Committees engaged in commenting on and supporting the Vision for the resilient Urban Forest. The Vision was successfully launched at the Community Forests Annual Conference in Birmingham on 23 March 2016. Rory Stewart, the Minister for Forestry at Defra sent a message of support for the Vision and identified some ways in which he can help delivery.

*Our Vision for the resilient urban forest in England is:*

*Where the many benefits of trees are recognised and invested in*

- *It will be considered as critical infrastructure for urban areas, on a par with utility, transport and the built environment. Infrastructure does not appear by chance; it is planned for, designed, created, managed and maintained.*

*The urban forest is integral to the form and function of all our urban areas*

- *It will be viewed and managed as a whole and not considered as separate trees. Trees in parks, streets, private gardens, public land, highways and urban woodlands will all contribute.*

*It helps create healthy and economically successful communities and liveable places for people and wildlife*

- *It will inspire collaboration and creativity to ensure that the urban forest thrives and expands in a world of increasingly complex institutional, ownership, stakeholder and financial arrangements.*

The urban forest is complex and multi-functional, resisting easy classification. Therefore, the Vision document brought together a supporting evidence base and a number of case studies where projects had already been delivered. In order to set these out in more detail the Vision has been split into eight main themes:

- 1 Strategic planning and infrastructure
- 2 Climate change
- 3 Natural environment

- 4 Human health and quality of life
- 5 Planning and development
- 6 Economy and growth
- 7 Value and resources
- 8 Risks and resilience

Sir Harry Studholme, Forestry Commission Chairman, in his Foreword to the document set the FWACs and partners three challenges to meet to help in delivering the Vision. We are starting to develop their action plans for their regions and the actions they can take to meet these challenges.

The Network is developing a strategic communication plan to set out the range of stakeholders invited to lend support to the Vision and to consider how they can help delivery. The Network is starting engagement with the business and voluntary sector as well as with wider local government to overcome some of the barriers to delivery.

In London the i-tree report and launch took place in December 2015 in the House of Lords hosted by Lord Framlingham. The FWAC has commented on and contributed throughout the development of the project. The FC is now considering how this can be rolled out with partners to other urban areas. This work will help to meet one of Sir Harry's challenges around securing data about the existing urban forest.

The London FWAC has close links with the GLA and with the Green Infrastructure Task Force that included FWAC members, ensuring that trees are regarded as a key element of green infrastructure. Green infrastructure is now identified by the Mayor of London's Infrastructure Plan to 2050 alongside utilities and other more usual infrastructure. The Task Force report has made some innovative recommendations to the next Mayor that could significantly protect, improve and expand green infrastructure in future development, ensuring the GI is thought of at the start of the development process. The London FWAC has started to identify the key Mayoral policies that will need to be included in the new Environmental Strategy and the revised London Plan to support delivery of the Vision for the urban forest.

Several of the FWACs have visited peri-urban and urban woodlands in their areas to better understand the challenges that these face. These include Norwich in EE and Greenwood in EM. FWACs have also been keen to show support for the important role that Community Forests play, particularly in the NW and NE.

## Key challenges

The country is currently enjoying much of the successes achieved through publically funded partnerships and projects to deliver forestry and woodland projects over the last 20 years. Stakeholders from the charity sector have been responsible for remarkable improvements to our communities, particularly those in more deprived areas, and have helped deliver a significant increase in woodland cover. To support this investment, the sector has focused on the lessons learned and benefits of these projects to society and evidenced the impact to show that benefits far outweigh the initial investment. The case for woodlands is clear.

A key challenge for us is that the resources and programmes of public support have dwindled significantly, as have the resources available to the Forestry Commission to support its functions and the sector. Furthermore, we are currently witnessing the demise of community forestry in England with the closure of a number of partnerships and organisations and an ever smaller role of the state in supporting forestry delivery and policy. Key initiatives supported by the private sector include Manchester City of Trees and

Heart of England forest and show how cross sector partnerships can come together and deliver projects. Such private sector initiative and enterprise needs support from everyone and further active encouragement for such investment by policy makers is very important.



Given the evidence of benefits, this lack of resources is of major concern and a key challenge moving forward. More resources need to be made available and focused on woodland and forestry in both rural and urban areas and with this a drive to support innovation in funding as well as innovation through new partnerships. Even now, economic growth funding from UK and EU is actively steered away from the sector by Government departments. This needs to stop. We need to support the delivery of a healthy, functional urban forest and a resilient forestry sector across England.

Feedback regarding the management of funding programmes remains a key challenge with many problems reported. Too often, applicants are put off Countryside Stewardship by the complexities and delays in accessing Countryside Stewardship support, particularly for management plan approval.

The threats from pests and diseases are far better understood than this time last year, with significant efforts by Forestry Commission and partners to disseminate information and advice. However, the impact of Ash Dieback and *Phytophthora ramorum* in Larch is yet to be fully understood, and significant areas of woodland will be lost over the next decades. We will continue to monitor the situation in the regions and report on particular areas of concern.

There is also a key challenge around quality, standards and professionalism across the sector. FWACs will continue to drive quality and minimise the opportunity for poor quality schemes and practices.

Taking an integrated approach to land management is easy to say but not easy to deliver. However increasingly we are urged to take such an approach with increased working between agencies and organisations. How can FS best contribute to this agenda, and through it deliver better on its objectives? This is a major area in which FWACs can contribute with their networks and influence.

## Next steps, a look ahead

The following gives an overview of the areas of interest for us in 2016:

- we will continue to engage with and seek to influence the Defra 25 Year Environment Plan and the future of the PFE. We want to ensure a joined up approach is advocated – environment, economics and social. The Committees will consider the scope of achievable targets, barriers to progress and structure and governance questions.
- Woodland resilience, supported by the FCE Policy and Advice team;
- The unique role of Social Enterprises in the management of woodland. The East area has some innovative examples of woodland social enterprises and the lessons learnt may have wider applicability;
- The role of trees and woodland in the mitigation of flooding and improvement of water quality is particularly topical, and the challenges of delivering against this topic in a lowland arable landscape remains of interest to the Committee;
- Contribution to a natural solutions approach to water management: The Severn & Wye Flood and Coastal committee now require the Environment Agency to always look at natural solutions to flood alleviation as an option when considering investment. Following good liaison between the Flood Committee and the West Midlands FWAC, this is now being taken a stage further and the Area Directors for FS and EA are now actively engaged in discussions to see how trees and forests play a part and present a fully integrated approach aimed at meeting objectives of both parties and maximising return from funding;
- Report on the work of the Birmingham Institute of Forestry and in particular its research on carbon capture and the urban focussed natural environment as well as its contribution to urban forest in Birmingham, part of a cross cutting approach by the City seeking to green the city, reduce carbon emissions, attack heat islands etc;
- Particular challenges presented by small woodlands in having the resource to take advantage of assistance and their place in assisting the achievement of the PIE agenda;
- Landscape character areas and woodland creation – how to maximise opportunity;

### A FWAC Vision for forestry within context of Defra 25 Year Environment Plan

- Nearly everyone connects to nature through trees and most people understand that in most woodland, sustainably harvesting trees is good. Woodlands are about livelihoods as well as beauty;
- England's woodland cover should increase;
- Most woodland managed for ecological and economic resilience;
- The threat from pests, diseases and invasive species is manageable;
- Enterprising public forest estate held in trust for the nation;
- Skilled workforce, data, private investment and demand for British wood result in innovative businesses and strong private enterprise; and
- Everyone in forestry makes decisions that balance society, the economy and the environment.

- Promotion and understanding of key issues regarding education; communications & silviculture;
- OPM - need to advise on how responsibility for addressing the spread of OPM can be taken forward by partners in light of limited resources;
- Consider linkages between London and its surrounding authorities eg the Green Arc initiative -to deliver increased access for Londoners, protecting landscapes and resilience to climate change. Exploring links between London and South East re natural solutions particularly in the Upper Thames catchment area
- help to address the skills gap identified as a barrier in bringing woodlands into management in London
- work with new London Mayor and others to take forward the recommendations of the GI task Force and to influence development of the new Environmental Strategy and London Plan to embed the vision of the resilient urban forest and to enable its delivery and increasing canopy cover.
- investigate the benefits and possibilities of Natural Capital Accounting to support the PIE agenda
- NW and WM working to promote economic growth, seeking to promote the outcomes of key initiatives, including the Stobarts project to bring undermanaged woodlands into its supply chain.

The focus of the Urban FWAC network is to:

- support the Vision and seek mechanisms for ensuring that the benefits of the urban forest are fully understood and incorporated in policies and projects to bring about delivery.
- work with Defra, FWACs and their wider networks to develop actions plans for delivery.
- work with Land Regeneration and Urban Greenspace Research Group of Forest Research and other partners to extend the evidence base for the benefits and opportunities provided by the urban forest.

## FWAC Network in England

