

# Forestry and Woodlands Advisory Committees

## Annual Report, 2014 - 2015

May 2015

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

Hilary Allison, East Midlands

Ian Brown, North East

Jane Carlsen, London

Dougal Driver, South East

Sian Ferguson, Yorkshire and Humber

Mike Moser, South West

John Moverley, West Midlands

Jane Rabagliati, East England

Iain Taylor, North West



### **About this report:**

This report summarises the work of the nine Forestry and Woodland Advisory Committees (FWACs) from April 2014 to March 2015. The FWACs 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.



## 2. Advocacy and Champion – progress highlights

A key role of the FWAC is the advocacy and championing of the multiple benefits of well managed forests and woodlands. Together the FWACs have been active in the following areas:

**Communicating proactively with Government Ministers** and Agencies on particular issues, including for example:

- The Implications for industry and FC staff/expertise around EU payments announcements and delays (especially the decision by Ministers to operate a single agri-environment grant scheme administered by the Rural Payments Agency);
- The potentially negative consequences for community forestry and urban woodland of setting minimum thresholds too high for the new woodland grant scheme; and
- Concern regarding the Dendroctonus beetle by South West FWAC

Considering the role of **FWACs within the new Public Forest Estate Management Body**, with particular regard to the proposed role of ‘guardians’ and how FWACs might best place a role in future determining this.

Woodland for Water; for example, the West Midlands FWAC have been strong advocates for ‘woods for water’ working in partnership with stakeholders. Initial research is being taken forward in Staffordshire and other FWACs are involved with similar discussions and activities.

Developing links with Flood and Coastal Committees. Again as example, the Chair of the West Midlands FWAC is a Chair of the National Flood Forum and is leading on initiatives focussed on natural solutions to water management with a number of pilot projects in the area and a countywide approach adopted in Shropshire.

Helping to shape endorse and participate in **Forest Services sector briefings on new Rural Development Grants**

Working across the sector to support an **industry study of forestry businesses in the East of England and East Midlands regions**. The North East and Yorkshire and Humber FWAC’s have engaged directly with Egger UK to understand the investment and supply chain issues associated with this international chip board manufacturer.

**Supporting new project proposals**, including:

- New £30m project, going through its due diligence phase and seeking to bring an additional 500,000 tonnes to the woodfuel/biomass market across England from undermanaged woodlands.
- Supporting new delivery structures for the development of community forestry initiatives with the Woodland Trust at their Smithills Estate
- Development, led by the SE, of a national integrated woodfuel programme worth approximately £9m

Working with **Local Nature Partnerships** across the Country, including:

- Liverpool, Cumbria, Manchester, Devon, Warwickshire, North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, Northumberland and the Northern Upland Chain



**Dendroctonus beetle**

The South West FWAC is increasingly concerned about the escalating spread of the Great Spruce Bark Beetle *Dendroctonus micans*. The forestry sector is entirely reliant on Forest Research for provision of the larvae of the predatory beetle *Rhizophagus grandis* which is used for biological control of *D. micans*. In 2014, there was a complete failure of the breeding programme of the predatory beetles. The FWAC therefore raised its concerns with FC senior management about the scale and resilience of the long-term provision of larvae for control, given the strategic threat.

## Public Health

- Discussed synergies and joint working with the Faculty of Public Health and FC England
- A member of the London FWAC Chairs the Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) Advisory Group along with FWAC members serving on the group. Through direct influence on the group the importance of a plan for the management of OPM has been recognised by stakeholders. The London FWAC is also directly engaged with Public Health England.

Supporting the **Trees and Design Action Group** and their recent work on **Trees in Hard Landscapes, A Guide for Delivery**.

Across several FWACs (North West, West Midlands, South West as examples) work to promote **training, skills and education opportunities** in the sector have been progressed, for example, strong links have been created with the new Birmingham Institute of Forestry. Discussions have also taken place and facilitated with the University of Cumbria and the Institute of Chartered Foresters to promote training and sector skills development.



The forestry sector is one of the most dangerous sectors in which to work in the UK. FWACs, in particular, Yorkshire, focused on methods to improve health and safety.

**All FWACs have advocated the issues around tree health;** the North East FWAC utilised their tree nursery experience to visit a tree and shrub business to look at phytosanitary precautions as they are and how they can be improved.

Several FWACs identified the **importance of the new LEADER programme** and explored opportunities to support emerging partnerships and consider synergies with other aspects of the Countryside Stewardship Programme

The **forestry sector growth plan 'Roots to Prosperity'** was widely recognised by the FWACs, with focused work by the North East FWAC looking in detail at how the outputs can be considered in light of funders' requirements and the ambitions of the Forestry Commission. Yorkshire FWAC has highlighted the Environment Scrutiny Report finding that working with LEPs remains a challenge and therefore frustrating efforts to contribute fully to an economic growth agenda.

The South West FWAC undertook a stakeholder mapping exercise that showed that it could **reach 89 partnerships directly and around 700 organisations/key persons**. Similar exercises undertaken in other regions are identifying similar findings.

London FWAC has used the London Tree and Woodlands Awards to promote urban forestry with a range of professionals and third sector stakeholders. The London FWAC has also contributed to the strategically important London i-Tree Eco project with FWAC members contributing to the final report. The evidence and lessons learned from the London i-Tree project will serve to drive further work on the urban forest nationally.

The South East considered the role of SE woods in natural capital accounting and how their contribution to ecosystem services might be developed.



### 3. Local Growth

A key aspect of the FWACs role is to seek opportunities for contributions by the sector to help drive economic growth. Contributions were made to the rural forestry sector, in particular representations to CONFOR's Roots to Prosperity report, but also in working with Local Enterprise Partnerships to understand the role of the forestry sector to the economy, both directly and indirectly through, for example tourism, health, property value and ecological value. Key aspects of the Urban Agenda are captured in the policy paper in section 5.

FWACs have provided a sounding board for FC to test the applicability of its projects and policies to an economic growth agenda and have played an active role in supporting several significant initiatives, including:

- Grown in Britain
- Woodsure
- RHI sustainability criteria
- West Woods
- Woodheat Association
- Thames Chase
- Urban Forest

FWACs across the country have advised on priorities for local delivery against the Forest Services Business Plan for 2014/15. FWACs are also becoming more embedded in the wider structures supporting economic growth, for example, an EE FWAC member joining the LEP European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) Committee. In the SE, several FWAC members are very closely linked to LEP areas of work.

FWACs have an important role to play in supporting the ability of the forestry sector to deliver economic growth aspirations directly. In an urban context, the networks of community forest trusts providing an essential delivery role for the sector in delivering economic growth. Community forests invest in communities, enhancing the quality of local environments, creating new wildlife habitats, promoting investment, improving public health and employing and training people directly. Increasingly the work of the community forests is measured by its economic outputs and the FWACs will continue to support this activity going forward.

More specifically, FWACs have engaged with the local growth agenda through the following examples:

South West FWAC is working with the Heart of the South West LEP to establish a the Woodland Enterprise Zone in Devon, exploring connections with emerging LEADER groups and actively supporting the Rural Skills Initiative and has provided advice on how the South West should develop its work on leading and piloting the 'Woods into Management' programme.

The West Midlands FWAC has supported and been involved in the creation of a Woodland Enterprise Zone in the Marches and directly engaged with the LEP to champion its further development. West Midlands FWAC has challenged the FC regarding the workings of the new EU payments system (the issue has been of concern across the FWAC network).



East of England and East Midlands FWACs endorsed a public private business model demonstrated through Forest Holidays cabin investments. East of England FWAC led on the development of a new concept for using growth funds for Green Infrastructure Investments with the LEP.

North West FWAC members have worked with the Cumbria LEP to target £1m for a Woodland Enterprise Zone initiative with a call for proposals closing in May 2015.

North East FWAC undertook a site visit to an EIA Pilot Project to the West of Durham City to consider how significant amounts of productive forestry could be placed into the landscape providing a net gain to society. The FWAC also took the opportunity to discuss with the local authority bringing its own woodlands into management.

Yorkshire FWAC has highlighted the important role of social media, for example twitter and raised concerns of the focus on recreation, missing opportunities to address misconceptions of commercial forestry.

In London, close links with the Greater London Authority have proved valuable in ensuring that trees are regarded as a key element of green infrastructure. GI is now included in the Mayor of London's Infrastructure Plan to 2050.

In the South East, in discussion with National Forest Inventory, the FWAC demonstrated how the southeast is the timber capital of England but despite a vibrant potential demand for home grown timber products from industry there is a yawning gap in supply chain capacity to stimulate the economic management of woods and processing of material that could deliver against this market potential.

The SE considered the issue of natural capital accounting and ecosystem services which stimulated a high level discussion as a result of presentations from the Natural Capital committee, FS NET, the Sussex Wildlife Trust and Forest Enterprise.

Throughout the year FWAC members have worked closely with the local FS team to engage and raise the profile of forestry with the LEPs. In the South East, FS would not have been able to secure the £2.8 million for forestry under the LEP Growth Deal without the support it has received from the FWAC.

FWACs have challenged FC to:

- Determine how the two Natural England and Forestry Commission components of Countryside Stewardship could be presented in a more cohesive, holistic and connected fashion
- Mobilise a more progressive approach to developing the forestry supply chain
- Further consider how to use natural capital accounting and payment for ecosystem services to support the enhanced stewardship of woodlands
- Consider a more inclusive approach to prioritising their work that includes the networks represented by the FWAC in their strategic decision making



## 4. 'Protect, Improve, Expand' Implementation Priorities

### Protect

**Tree Health:** The FWACs maintain a watching brief on Tree Health issues, provides regular review and advocacy for continued support for Phytophthora and other disease control measures and flights. One member sits on the UK Plant Health Advisory Group. In the East Midlands and East of England FWACs over 200 people attended three tree health seminars and about 100 people attended a similar event in the North West organised by the North West Forest Forum. Yorkshire FWAC focused on biosecurity, actions to minimise risk of operations and communications messages to disseminate through FWAC member networks.

**Deer:** The FWACs have been advocates of collaborative landscape-scale deer management and some of them responded to the FC's deer management consultation. The Deer Initiative is chaired by a FWAC Chair and several FWACs are represented on regional deer forums and steering groups. For example, Yorkshire FWAC visited the Humberland Peatlands NNR where deer monitoring has identified a population of 200 red deer. Through the establishment of a Deer Management Group, this will be reduced to 120 to establish a sustainable deer population.

**Grey Squirrels:** The FWACs have been advocates for the promotion of grey squirrel control through the squirrel accord and through various workshops and landscape partnerships and discussions have started in several FWACs on how to deliver FC's new squirrel policy. A watching brief is maintained on other re-introductions, such as boar and beavers and their impacts on woodlands.

**OPM:** The FWACs, in particular, London and the South East, will engage in the delivery of OPM control plan through FWAC meeting discussions, the Advisory Group and OPM business development

**Resilience:** FWAC Members are active on the national and South West Woodland Biodiversity Groups. They have been advocates of appropriate provenances and the use of localised seed sources, promoting benefits of irregular and species diverse forestry systems via training and forest visits. In London, several FWAC members are attending Urban Forest resilience Conference at Kew Gardens in June 2014.



The FWAC Chairs serve as reference committees Chairs and FWAC members have volunteered to sit on reference committees. The Minister accepted the report from the East of England FWAC Chair regarding illegal felling in Cambridgeshire and FC practice has changed as a result.

### Improve

**Funding:** The FWACs has worked closely to renew the development of the CAP Reform and RDP support in the new programme and are advocates on how best the forestry sector can access the programme. They are now working with Natural England and RPA to ensure effective operation of the new system.

**Woodlands into Management:** The FWACs continue to provide advice on the local delivery of the Woods into Management programme and supports the development of new economic growth opportunities for the forestry sector. For example, in Yorkshire, FWAC members considered how best to use existing databases of landowners and to understand better the motivations for bringing more woodlands into management. The Yorkshire FWAC did not consider it prudent to simplify the Felling License mechanism and this could lead to unsustainable felling activity and over thinning. The London FWAC has identified woodland ownership across London and is working to bring them into active management.

The FWAC have provided ongoing advice and support for the Westwoods/Ward Forester pilot, the South West Timber Development Programme, Grown in Britain and the Rural Skills initiative.

**Biodiversity:** FWAC members have been advocates for implementing PAWS restoration.

## Expand

The FWAC has been advocates of promoting the use of woodland creation for improving water quality, flood alleviation through several landscape scale partnerships, including for example the Upper Thames Catchment.

Wallshield – the FWAC played a key role in considering a significant large scale conifer planting project and effectively managing it through the formal Disputed Case procedure.

FWACs continue to support the network of community forests.

FWACs have contributed to targeting statements for the Countryside Stewardship programme, helping FC articulate woodland priorities to Natural England. In the South West, 66ha of new woodland has been created through the above approach and one member sits on Woodland Carbon TF.

In Yorkshire the FWAC is exploring opportunities to collaborate with York Potash and the Potash Mine Foundation to secure resources to support the delivery of Roots to Prosperity should the potash mine secure planning permission.

FWACs continue to develop understanding of how trees and green infrastructure can be resourced and provided for in developments, ensuring that GI is thought of at the beginning of planning stages rather than a late stage add on.





## 5. Urban FWAC Network

The Urban FWAC network has had two meetings held on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014 in Birmingham and 21<sup>st</sup> January 2015 in London. A third meeting is planned in Liverpool in July 2015.

Progress Update:

- Terms of reference have been agreed for the network.
- Seven of the area FWACs have nominated representatives to attend the Urban FWAC network. Reporting structures from the Network meeting back to the Area FWACs and vice versa have been established.
- Paul Nolan has been co-opted onto the Network to firm up connections with Community Forest network
- The Network members, working with the London FWAC, are developing a document that sets out a vision for the urban forest in England to be supported by case studies and evidence of the multiple benefits of the urban forest.
- Input was made to the development of the FC's new Science and Innovation strategy to ensure recognition of the urban forest.
- Good links are established with Trees and Design Action Group (TDAG) and the National Tree Safety Group
- Information was provided to the newsletter of the Green Infrastructure Partnership to promote the Network.
- Next meeting planned for Merseyside and will visit a number of successful community forestry projects

### Local Growth agenda

- Members of the Network are involved in regeneration projects eg Atlantic Gateway project that closely integrates the benefits of trees into new development.
- The network is sharing current working arrangements within local authorities and gathering evidence of good practice where and how resources are being deployed to maintain, manage and plant the urban tree stock under the current financial circumstances.

The Urban FWAC network has challenged FC to:

- Adopt a vision for the urban forest
- Work to support this vision through research and identification of resources
- Continue to support the development, and wider roll out of i-tree accreditation

The Network has a keen interest in

### Protect:

- Raising awareness about the urban forest.
- Ensuring adequate protection of woodlands under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

### Improve:

- Collecting case studies and evidence to support good practice on urban forestry.
- Spreading the use of i-tree valuation system throughout urban areas

### Expand:

- How appropriate FC support can be secured for urban forestry
- Support the planting of more trees in and around towns and cities and as a vital part of any new and existing green infrastructure proposals.

## 6. Next Steps

Crucially, the next 6-9 months include the formation of a new government. All FWACs will work to understand and influence new government policies and ideas locally.

Particular ideas for future work include:

- Understanding tree resilience, response to pests and the long term outlook for native species
- Roots to Prosperity:
  - o Provide challenge and advice on how the sector growth plan is implemented
  - o Explore how further resources can be allocated or re-directed to support delivery, including how engagement with LEPs can be improved.
- Helping the sector access the new woodland grants
- Supporting role of urban within Countryside Stewardship Scheme
- Progressing work on Climate Change adaptation, including urban shading; right tree, right place
- Continued leadership and participation in the Oak Processionary Moth Advisory Group
- Further development of the I-Tree project and findings in London and nationally
- Explore links to the Releaf partnership
- Green Infrastructure as part of wider infrastructure funding
- Further strengthening partnerships and developing closer links with LEPs
- Continuing to advocate the importance of FC
- Continuing to take a strong lead on education and training issues
- Supporting stakeholders as advocates for a natural solutions approach to water management and the importance of trees
- Continuing to innovate and support stakeholders to deliver projects with resources outside of FC/RPA grants
- Exploring links with water companies to evaluate their interaction with trees and woodlands, for example in the NE with Kielder Forest where partnership work around dark skies, tourism, astrology, access and sport has been positive.
- Continuing to engage with the development of the Public Forest Estate
- Monitoring and reviewing Payments for Ecosystem Services – how the values assigned to the PFE have implications for the wider sector.
- Promoting the continuation of Forest Services role in providing supporting technical guidance online and in face of moves to cut back such provision.
- In Yorkshire, review the progress of ‘Slow the Flow’
- Building potential for woodland to benefit from payments for ecosystem services and natural capital accounting linking this with the outputs of the SE woodland wildlife initiative
- Woods for water in the Upper Thames Catchment, including how we learn to live with pests and diseases such as OPM and Chalara and build more resilient woods for the future
- Reflecting on new Government ideas and emerging agendas for Forestry

With consideration to the Protect, Improve, Expand agenda, areas of future work include:

### Protect

**Tree Health:** To provide comment on strategic changes to Defra control plans and their impact on the forestry sector and to champion through their networks continued action and advice on how best to achieve compliance

**Mammals:** To support, advocate and promote landscape scale management of grey squirrels and deer, working with existing networks and facilitating the creation of new ones where appropriate.

**Resilience:** To support and be advocates for improving woodland management and composition for resilience to pests, diseases and climate change, and the provision of health benefits.

**Regulations:** To take opportunities through their networks to be advocates for management planning, professional application of forestry regulations and for simplifying regulatory burden.

To provide advice on sensitive or testing cases of regulatory application.

Joint membership across FWAC and England Applicants Focus Group (AFG) and regional AFGs ensures FWAC inputs into operational regulatory delivery pertinent to the FWAC regions.

## Improve

**Woodlands into Management:** Take a strong advocacy role and contribute to the Woods into management programme using their local knowledge to inform delivery. For example, the South West FWAC supports the woodland management partnership project with Exmoor National Park and in the North East expanding woodland under management by 2%.

**Biodiversity:** To understand and promote benefits of irregular forestry systems and promote the ecological benefits traditionally associated with the favourable condition of priority habitats, through the next South West FWAC meeting which will look in detail at the applied research in Dorset. To support South West Woodland Wildlife Partnership towards completion, adoption, resourcing and targeted roll-out of the Toolkit for Woodland Habitat Managers.

**Communities:** To be active in Urban FWAC and suggest ways of communicating and contributing to positive messages about trees in urban and urban-fringe landscapes.

**Funding:** To provide comment on strategic updates of grant programmes alongside existing consultation channels, and Members who are involved with funding opportunities through LEPs, Leader Groups or others will share their experience with the Regional Teams and advise on how the sector might utilise those funding opportunities.

## Expand

To champion woodland creation through existing networks and signpost stakeholders to opportunities, in particular where woodland will improve water quality and flood resilience.

To positively encourage private investment in woodlands.



## Urban FWAC Network

- A scoping paper is being prepared to identify other networks contributing to the understanding of the urban forest so that the FWAC network can identify gaps and opportunities for synergistic relationships.
- Progress on agreeing a vision for urban forestry. Preparing case studies and the evidence base into a document that the Network can use for wider circulation and future engagement
- Look at how the Network can be used to spread support and gain resources for the urban forest. In particular how to create a business case.
- Topics for later in the year are likely to look at research into the urban forest, including how the proposed FC research programme addresses urban forestry

# FWAC Network in England

