

## Future of the Forestry Commission Brand

### Purpose:

To stimulate discussion on the possible options for the ownership and management of the Forestry Commission brand assets.

### What are the assets?

Our branding, or corporate identity, is made up of a number of assets:

- our logo – the two- trees
- the logotype – the logo plus our names
- supporting devices such as our corporate typeface VAG, and primary two-green colour palette; signage structures; and vehicle livery.



The two-tree logo was developed in 1981 to create a distinctive presence for our recreation facilities. It was derived from the symbol depicting wooded areas recommended by the Tourist Boards and Countryside

Commission list of symbols for guides and maps. It was initially used as badge on FC uniforms to identify our staff. The original version showed the conifer in front of the broadleaf tree but this was changed a few years later to reflect the growing importance of broadleaves. It gained much wider use on vehicles, signage and corporate documents over the following two decades.



In addition, we still have our official crest, with the royal crown and branch leaves representing England, Scotland and Wales. The crest was approved by the Lord Lyon, the official heraldic authority for Scotland as the Commission's legal domicile is Edinburgh. The device was created in the early 90s when we sought to create a greater division between our Forestry Authority and Forest Enterprise functions. It fell into disuse when we re-adopted the two-tree logo for all parts of the FC around 2006 after a major review of our brand and our corporate identity.



The old brown and green Forestry Commission tie, scarf and flag are no longer used. However, the newer 'leaf' tie is still being used.

Brand assets and detailed guidelines for using the branding are contained in our [brand manual](#).

As the different components of the Commission become more devolved we must start to consider the options for the future of our brand assets.

### **Ownership and protection**

The brand assets are technically the property of the Forestry Commissioners but protected under Crown Copyright by The Controller, HMSO. Government departments do not own copyright in their own right. However, all departments have the right, under a blanket delegation of authority, from the Controller, to authorise the reproduction of their own logos provided that it does not involve the reproduction of the Royal Arms. Permanent assignment of the logo to a third party may be possible but would require legal advice.

Our process for licensing and policing any misuse by third parties is not onerous, with only a few requests, or letters to cease usage, being received or issued per year.

Our brand has been identified as one of the issues to be looked at under CS's legal and governance workstream.

### **External factors - Brand alignment**

There have recently been two separate moves to align government brands more closely: the single government brand; and the Defra family brand alignment project.



The former policy brought all Westminster Departmental branding together to provide a cohesive, cost-effective and consistent

approach to branding government departments, their agencies and their ALBs. At the heart of the identity system is the Royal Coat of Arms, allowing citizens to easily identify when they are communicating with a government organisation. Our application to remain exempt from this requirement until the future arrangements for forestry are finalised, was accepted

More recently, in England Liz Truss, previous SofS at Defra, requested greater alignment of branding across the Defra family group. A rapid project to deliver this made some significant changes to how Defra agencies were branded. In a second phase ALBs were included and have adopted colourway and other adjustments to their existing branding. Although we agreed to some minor changes, we are largely exempt from the process - again until the future arrangements for forestry are finalised.

## **Wales**

When responsibility for forestry functions moved to NRW in 2013 the new body was not allowed to take any of the FC brand assets with it. A binding licence was drawn up with specialist legal advice which stipulated the period by which any particular asset, or manifestation of it, was to be withdrawn. The non-exclusive, non-transferable licence expired after 24 months. This allowed an orderly transition, particularly for more expensive items like official clothing or signage (although we believe that there is still FC logo signage on the NRW estate in Wales). This licence provided a high level of protection for the assets and for our reputation, and may form a useful template for any future changes.

## **Scotland**

If, as we expect, our functions in Scotland are transferred to a new body (or bodies) then that organisation will have no right to use the brand assets, which will remain the property of our Commissioners. It seems very likely in any case that the Scottish Government will want a more distinctively Scottish, and new, identity. Any transition will however, as with Wales, take time. The brand licence agreement for Wales should form a useful model when the time comes.

## **Forest Research**

Forest Research may want to retain its visual ties with the Forestry Commission as long as it remains a part of the organisation and these ties, in terms of increased recognition, credibility, trust and respect, are

advantageous to it. However, if greater distance from the Commissioners becomes desirable then a similar situation to Scotland and Wales would arise.

### **Forest Enterprise England**

In a similar vein to Forest Research, FEE may want to retain its visual ties with the Forestry Commission as long as it remains a part of the organisation and these ties are advantageous to it. Alternatively, FEE may want increase its distance from the FC in preparation for a more permanent change in status. Viewed in the same way as the approach to Scotland or FR set out above, conceivably a completely new branding would be required. However, the two-tree symbol, VAG font and two-green colourway have a high value brand image and are very well recognised and respected.

Replacing the branding on clothing, vehicles and signage will be highly expensive and may attract negative publicity. While the new body would be unlikely to want to continue to use the Forestry Commission name (indeed, research on the FEE/PFE name has started) it may well want to retain the familiar two-trees. A report prepared for FEE by market research experts Creative Research in 2105 recommended refreshing the FEE branding including the name:

- to signal the organisation's new status
- to reposition the organisation with the public away from being a regulator and to reflect its new positioning
- to create something with greater impact for the public
- to signal new ways of working, focus of operations, culture etc. for stakeholders, the public and internal audiences
- possibly, as the basis for creating more distinctive identities for key forests

However, the report also recommended "evolution rather than revolution in design because the Forestry Commission's reputation and the current visual identity are valued."

### **Forestry Commission England**

Until the future status of the Forestry Commission, the Commissioners and Forest Services are decided it is difficult to predict what our branding requirements might be.

Once the future status of FEE and FR are known there would be no compelling argument not to conform to the single government brand protocols and adopt the royal crown, as in the Defra logo above. This would release the two-tree symbol possibly for use by FR or FEE. This approach would retain our well recognised name but also visually strengthen our positioning as a government body with regulatory functions.

## **Public and political perception**

Government and private sector rebrands tend to attract very unfavourable public and political attention.

Reaction to the failed rename of the Royal Mail Group to Consignia in 2001 is a fine example. It was perceived as a waste of money (change for change sake) and the nation's attachment to the proposed loss of a well-known and trusted institution's brand provoked further outcry. The business rationale for change was sound, but this was not well communicated. Prolonged criticism eventually provoked an expensive and embarrassing u-turn.

More recently, Liz Truss, in requesting much closer alignment of the Defra family brands, was acutely conscious of the perils, insisting on a low-cost/no cost approach to avoid negative publicity, despite how long such an approach might take.

None of this should deter us from making necessary changes but it underlines the clear need for a very carefully reasoned, communicated, and well-measured approach.

## **Action**

The Board is invited to:

- discuss the possibilities;
- agree that the assets and name are the property of the Commissioners;
- take a view on possible options for FCE and FEE; and
- consider any further work that may be required.

Colin Morton  
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9 September 2016

