

Agenda Item 11**COMMISSIONERS' MEETING****Memo No 27/17****14 December 2017****ENGLAND COUNTRY REPORT, DIRECTOR ENGLAND****Woodland Creation**Lowther Estate

The Lowther Estate in Cumbria gained Countryside Stewardship (CS) approval for 170 hectares of new productive woodland 'Jacks Wood' within the Lake District National Park. The Lowther Estate also used the Woodland Creation Planning Grant (WCPG) to help with the design process for the new woodland, receiving payments to cover the costs of the planning process. The scheme will be planted this winter, 121 ha will be productive conifer; the remainder will be predominantly productive broadleaves. In total, 213,098 trees will be planted in compliance with UKFS guidelines.

Doddington North Moor

The Doddington North Moor afforestation project has been given consent which will see the creation of a new 350 hectare forest near Wooler in Northumberland. The scheme was successful in securing support through the Woodland Creation Planning Grant which helped generate the information needed to produce a UKFS compliant woodland creation plan. The forest will be planted over the next two years and will represent the largest of its kind to be created in England for over 30 years.

Countryside Stewardship

A total of 174 hectares of woodland creation was supported by the RDPE from July- September 2017. The area of paid RDPE claims in this quarter is greater than in the comparable quarters in the previous two years, in part reflecting delays in processing some claims in the previous quarter but, also, improved performance.

To date 137 woodland creation agreements have been issued from the 2017 woodland creation offer and further 18 remaining to be issued. Improved processes have meant that agreements have been offered earlier in the year – which should augur well for more of those agreements being planted this winter.

The guidance and application forms for the 2018 CS woodland offer have been available since September. Publishing this material earlier than previous years is allowing potential applicants to prepare and discuss their plans ahead of the application window opening on 2 January 2018.

Woodland Carbon Fund (WCF)

There has been an increase in interest in the scheme following the lowering in July of the area threshold for Woodland Carbon Fund applications (to 10 hectares) for a year, along with increased support for road infrastructure, and improved access to support for successful establishment and

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BPS eligibility. This has been supported by the appointment of two Woodland Creation Officers (WCOs) working with potential applicants both for the WCF and before then, the Woodland Creation Planning Grant.

Since the changes we have received 1 WCF application and a further 10 potential applications have been identified.

HS2 Woodland Fund

HS2 Ltd has established a £5 million fund to support the restoration of existing plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS) and the creation of new native woodland. This is in addition to its main tree planting programme. Forestry Commission England is delivering the first £1 million of this funding on behalf of HS2 Ltd under the HS2 Woodland Fund. This Fund is open to landowners within 25 miles of the HS2 Phase One route from London to the West Midlands. The fund will be open to applications in January 2018 with eligible landowners being encouraged to consider their plans and discuss potential applications with the Forestry Commission.

Woodland creation training

FCE is planning to hold joint training events in the New Year with the Institute of Chartered Foresters to increase the skills of the sector and FCE staff on woodland creation planning and the new Environmental Impact Assessment regulations.

Sence Valley

FEE have agreed subject to contract the purchase of 117 acres of farmland adjoining our land at Sence Valley near Heather in the National Forest. FEE will plant 100 acres of woodland in the autumn of 2019 as one of our centenary projects. This opportunity fits with our intention to increase our landholding and woodland creation together with the National Forest Company's targets of increasing woodland cover in the National Forest.

Record timber sales for November FEE

The online timber sale on 2 November 2017 saw FEE achieve its highest ever timber prices, during a sale that brought in £4 million to the Forestry Commission. FEE holds six national online timber sales a year, plus multiple, small, district-run sales. We also submit parcels to a live auction run once a year by an auctioneer.

Water vole reintroduction to Kielder

A project to reintroduce water vole to Kielder Forest is showing positive signs of progress. An initial project in partnership with Northumberland Wildlife Trust and Tyne Rivers Trust won funding for a two year project that showed that mink had declined to the point that FCE were confident water voles could thrive at Kielder. The project relied heavily on the expertise and landscape knowledge of our wildlife staff.

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Phase two of the project was a 5 year bid to the HLF for a five-year water vole re-introduction project. The bid was approved and funding was provided for a full-time project officer, breeding costs and education events.

The first release of voles into the wild was in June 2016 when 317 animals were released into the area north of Kielder Village. An additional release of 243 voles took place in August 2017 further downstream. So far the signs are positive and there continue to be very few records of mink. The project runs until 2021 by which time the partnership will have established a healthy Kielder population.

Written Ministerial Statement on the Future of the Forestry Commission

A written ministerial statement on the Future of the Forestry Commission was published in Hansard on the 7 November followed by the publication of the Future of the Forestry Commission document to staff. So far reaction from staff and those outside the organisation has been muted but positive. Implementation will begin in the New Year.

Establishment of Corporate Services in England

The transition of corporate services from Silvan House is in full implementation stage. All major procurement activity has been completed, and the majority of resourcing has taken place for the new national IT, finance and HR teams who will provide these services to England from April 2018. A huge amount of work is taking place across the corporate services functions to develop new, and transfer existing systems as smoothly as possible.

The transition will require some changes to the way that staff across the organisation work, a variety of support will be available to minimise the impact of these changes. This will include formal training, briefings, e-learning guides and videos, and named colleagues who can provide support locally.

A regular schedule of all staff communications is in place, and there is a range of information available on the intranet. This includes a briefing pack for managers to use when talking to their teams about the upcoming changes.