

Agenda Item 8 COMMISSIONERS MEETING Memo No 20/17**28 September 2017****ENGLAND COUNTRY REPORT, DIRECTOR ENGLAND****Woodland creation**

A total of 518 hectares of woodland creation was supported by the RDPE in the second quarter of 2017-2018.

Woodland creation applications from the 2017 Countryside Stewardship offer are progressing well. Of the 163 applications proceeding (representing 1,670 hectares) 86 agreements have now been offered, of which half have been approved. This puts us 3 months ahead of the 2016 performance, increasing the likelihood that these schemes will be planted in the first year of the agreement.

In July 2017 Minister Coffey announced £13m funding would be available in 2018 for landowners to plant more trees as part of Countryside Stewardship. We intend to publish application forms and guidance during September to support early planning of applications. The minister also lowered the area threshold for Woodland Carbon Fund applications (to 10 hectares) for a year from 31 July 2017, to encourage more landowners to create high quality, productive woodlands.

Forest Enterprise England 2016-17 Natural Capital Account and visitor numbers

We have published our Natural Capital Account (NCA) for the year 2016-17, building on the 2015-16 NCA which published the country's first natural capital accounts for an organisation of our scale. The report shows that the total net natural capital asset value for 2016-17 was £22.476bn.

Natural capital accounting is an ever changing field, for example data isn't yet available on our contribution to flooding mitigation, or air and water quality. We hope to include more by the 2017-18 accounts.

For the 2016-17 NCA, more robust data collection means we can confidently say we have 220m visits to our forests each year (up from our previous estimate of 70m).

Mammal reintroductionPine marten

Forestry Commission England are collaborating with the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust on a feasibility study for the reintroduction of pine martens to the Forest of Dean. The study is supported by Forest Holidays and the Woodland Trust and will run for 2 years, engaging with

the local community and including a full public consultation to determine the feasibility of reintroducing pine martens.

Forestry Commission England have been working with the Yorkshire Pine Marten Project, run by non-profit social enterprise NatureSpy, for the past four years with camera traps set up in various locations around the North York Moors. In August a male pine marten was captured on a wildlife camera in the North York Moors, the first time for approximately 35 years.

Lynx

Lynx Trust UK has submitted a license application to Natural England for the reintroduction of lynx to Kielder Forest. Following a consultation process which FEE will contribute towards, Natural England will advise ministers on the final decision on the application.

NAO investigation into the New Forest Verderers Higher Level Stewardship scheme

The National Audit Office (NAO) investigation into the New Forest Verderers Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme has now concluded. Following a complaint from Desmond Swayne MP, and subsequent complaints from members of the public and Burley Parish Council, the main NAO conclusions of the investigation were that:

- There is no issue of dual funding because the activities taking place under the partnership agreement (to deliver the Verderers HLS) do not form part of the Forestry Commission's statutory duties for which it is already funded.
- The NAO was satisfied that suitable processes were in place to ensure inspections of the work were independent of the partnership participants and suitably qualified and that there was no evidence that the work has failed to meet the standards expected of the scheme. However, recommendations were made in this area.
- The NAO was not able to form a view on eligibility (of the Verderers) but did review the process of approval. The conclusion was that bodies such as the Verderers were eligible for HLS and that Natural England's judgment, that the Verderers had the necessary management control, was acceptable.

The NAO also made recommendations to the Forestry Commission which we have taken steps to address. We will improve the monitoring of the outcomes with the appointment of a dedicated Monitoring Officer, and we will discuss and agree appropriate review measures with GIAA. We are continuing to improve communications and rebuild relations with the local communities.

Lobslack Nursery

Progress towards the redevelopment of Lobslack Nursery at Delamere continues, and the glasshouse is very nearly complete with the final electrical and mechanical fit out taking place. The containers are now in place on the rolling benching system.

Director's Report – September 2017



The tanks and pumps are installed within the pump room.



Director's Report – September 2017

Outside, the lagoon is mostly lined and the well point and spillway construction are underway.

