

**Agenda Item 6**

**COMMISSIONERS' MEETING**

**Memo No 09/15**

**10 June 2015**

## **COUNTRY REPORT, DIRECTOR ENGLAND**

### **Rural Development Programme for England**

The first element of the RDPE, Woodland Capital Grants, was successfully launched on 17 February. The application window for this interim offer will close on 31 May 2015. This offer has so far resulted in more than 200 applications with more than 1,000 hectares of woodland creation applied for. Given this is the first year of the scheme this is a good result and has maintained the momentum that Ministers and the sector wanted. The support levels for broadleaved and coniferous woodland creation are the same.

Countryside Stewardship is scheduled to open on 1 July 2015. This new scheme will contribute around £925 million to farmers, foresters and land managers to help them protect and improve the environment. The main priorities for the scheme are biodiversity and water quality. The scheme will support the forestry sector by bringing more woodland into management, creating new woodlands, and improving response to tree health issues.

To ensure the successful delivery of the new scheme, in the light of performance issues in the customer interface, it was announced last month that the creation of a "One Business" transactional hub in the Rural Payments Agency at Foss House in York will be paused. Natural England will now lead on the set up and delivery of Countryside Stewardship for the first year until the new online transactional functions are established at the Rural Payments Agency. Permanent FC staff remaining in the York hub will be seconded to Natural England to provide experienced support for this initial period before transferring to the RPA in due course. To apply, customers will first register online and then complete a paper-based form, so the interim processes will require significant manual input.

### **GIB Certification & BSW Timber**

The Grown in Britain licensing scheme has really started to gain momentum in recent months. Licences have been taken out by owners of small private woodlands, private estates, community forests, Forest Enterprise England and the Crown estate. Around half of the softwood reaching market in England is associated with a Grown in Britain licence. Further down the supply chain, furniture makers, woodfuel suppliers, hardwood and softwood sawmills, have taken out licences. BSW, the largest sawmilling company in

Britain, celebrated their licence at their Newbridge on Wye mill in spring 2015, during a visit from Prime Minister David Cameron. BSW supply around 1 million tonnes of sawn timber to market each year from their mills based in England, Wales and Scotland. BSW report that their licence makes good business sense and that it has helped persuade one of their largest clients, a house builder, to continue using British grown timber even when exchange rates have favoured imported products. This bodes well for both woodland owners and timber processors, suggesting the brand can add value to British grown timber products.

The entire Public Forest Estate in England is now qualified to use the Grown in Britain certification mark on any timber produced across its 1,800 sites. The certification mark has been granted after a rigorous audit assessment, which recognised FEE's successful woodland management programme and its production of home-grown timber.

### **BUPA Sponsorship deal**

We have negotiated a two year sponsorship deal with Bupa at five forests to support the Active Forests Programme. This forms part of Bupa's commitment to improve the wellbeing of the nation through its recently launched 'Feel Great Britain' Campaign.

As part of the sponsorship Bupa have supported four existing Active Forests co-ordinator roles at Dalby, Sherwood, Bedgebury and Delamere, and enabled the recruitment of a new co-ordinator at Cannock. These staff will bring together a range of Bupa branded activities e.g. 'Bupa Tai Chi', and help develop 'Wellbeing trails'. Bupa will also fund the development and delivery of a new cycling event to be delivered in early autumn this year and a cycle series for 2016.

### **FE Environment Conference**

The staff conference was held at the end of March 2015 at Durham University. It involved over 50 internal staff from across the organisation and a number of external speakers from organisations such as the British Trust for Ornithology, and the University of Aberdeen. The two-day event covered a range of items based around the topic of the future of the environment across the PFE.

Amongst the external speakers were a keynote opening address given by the former Bishop of Liverpool, James Jones (who chaired the Independent Panel for Forestry), an engaging talk on the topic of 're-wilding Britain' from George Monbiot, and a view on the Public Forest Estate from an 'outsiders' perspective by Mark Avery (former Conservation Director for the RSPB). Internal Forest District staff also gave a number of presentations on local environmental issues, case studies and successes, with the topics ranging from natural flood management in Yorkshire, to engaging with the public and compromising with local stakeholders in a West-England pasture.

The conference was a huge success with very positive feedback received from all involved, and it highlighted what our staff are achieving for the environment, across the PFE. The intention is that another conference will be held again in two years, and it will go on to become a biennial fixture involving as many staff as possible.

### **Oak Processionary Moth**

Ministers agreed a revised strategy for 2015 whereby FC would focus Defra funded control efforts on the outer perimeter of the West London population. Those properties in the 'core' area are now responsible for undertaking their own survey and control with the assistance of an "Oak Tree Owners' Manual" published on the FC website. This approach was communicated before purdah to the 230 properties in the core area known to have had nests in the last two years. The majority were publicly owned sites but 25% were private householders. While firm data is not available, there has certainly been significant spraying activity in the core area, including at Kew and the Royal Parks.

The FC-led spraying programme ended on 22 May with the vast majority of sites receiving 2 spray applications. Two-way communication with stakeholders has been enhanced this year by the publication of a weekly update (including during purdah) indicating spraying progress and plans. This has been well received and has successfully encouraged reports of others' activity. This has supplemented the usual press release, tweets and publication mailing. Nest building is anticipated during June/July when ground survey will commence and this is the period we are more likely to identify 2015 spread and to get reports of any significant insect activity at sensitive sites.

### **Commendation for an FE Staff Member within a Met Police Citation, following a Crown Court appeal case**

Commissioners are invited to record their appreciation for Norman Healy, FEE Head of Wildlife, for his public-spirited work in support of the Police, in an appeal case lodged in relation to an application to possess a .45 ACP semi-automatic handgun. The appellant was a long-standing licensed firearms holder and prominent member of the Sportsman's Association who applied to possess the hand-gun on the grounds that it would be necessary for the humane despatch of wild boar.

It was recognised by the Police to be an important case, as had the appeal been upheld, it would have increased the availability of high powered handguns. The appeal was drawn out longer than expected and involved witnesses having to rearrange workloads and travel extensively in order to accommodate several court sittings over the course of a year. Tribute was paid by the Police to Norman Healy for recognising the gravity of the appeal should it be upheld, along with his demonstrated professionalism, teamwork, and

commitment, which were essential to the successful case made for the rejection of the appeal.

### **Visit England Awards**

Congratulations to Bedgebury Pinetum, Grizedale Forest and Westonbirt Arboretum, which were awarded prestigious accolades by the national tourist board VisitEngland earlier in the year.

The accolades, introduced by VisitEngland in October 2014, recognise outstanding attractions that go the extra mile to create an enjoyable and memorable experience for visitors.

Bedgebury and Grizedale received the Visitor Welcome accolade, in recognition of the excellent welcome extended to customers. Westonbirt was awarded the Gold Accolade, in recognition of an extremely enjoyable all-round visitor experience. Westonbirt is one of only 11 sites in England to receive the Gold honour.

### **SW Wood Fuel Business**

Woodfuel is booming in the South West. Innovative programmes in the South West over the last few years have helped to build expertise and demand. The South West BioHeat Programme, supported by FCE, led to 33 new installations delivering 23MW. These ranged from two 7MW heat processors for Dairy Crest's Davidstow Dairy to smaller biomass boilers for rural businesses and schools. All this activity fuelled demand and spread good practice. The BioHeat Programme also helped many woodfuel suppliers with business support and training.

FCE has also supported the establishment of the UK's first woodfuel cooperative, [Dartmoor Woodfuel](#), which sources and processes wood from Dartmoor's woodlands, including the PFE, to supply their own and other boilers in the area.

Since this programme ended there has been a steady increase in installations, with one-fifth of all Renewable Heat Incentive applications so far coming from the South West. The new [Countryside Productivity Scheme](#) and some of the new LEADER programmes can also be used to support woodfuel supply chains by, for example, offering capital grants for equipment. And on 21 April, FCE exhibited at RegenSW's annual [Renewable Energy Marketplace](#), highlighting the market opportunities of woodfuel to forestry businesses.