

**FORESTRY COMMISSION ENGLAND
NINETY FIRST MEETING OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE
NATIONAL OFFICE BRISTOL
19 APRIL 2018 AT 13.00hrs**

Minutes

Present:

Sir Harry Studholme (Chairman)
Mary Barkham
Ian Gambles
Julia Grant
Richard Greenhous
Simon Hodgson
Steve Meeks
Shirley Trundle
Clive Tucker

Also present:

Richard Barker - Secretary

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. Mark Pountain had sent his apologies.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 1 FEBRUARY 2018

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a true record.

3. MATTERS ARISING/UPDATES

Plant Health

Richard Greenhous advised the Committee that the management of plant health had moved from Corporate and Forestry Support in Edinburgh to Forest Services England, which meant that Forest Services had an increased role to play in management of plant health activities. He updated the Committee on the team's current work.

Pre-Border

The number of pests entered onto the UK Plant Health Risk Register had increased by 51 since the beginning of the 2017-18 financial year. This brought the total number of pests to 994 of which 320 are considered to be potential pests of trees. Over the year the FC considered over 24 new tree pest risk register entries and new pest risk analyses for tree pests. An updated pest risk analysis on pine tree lappet moth had been produced.

New border controls

New Plant Health (Forestry) legislation came into force on 1st January 2018 bringing in new measures:

- controls on timber against *Saperda candida* (Round-headed Apple Tree Borer);
- amendment to the UK Protected Zone for Oak processionary moth and new UK Protected Zone status for pine processionary moth and Elm yellows phytoplasma;
- a legal gateway with HMRC that allows the sharing of import data with the FC.

FC Border control checks 2017-18

Inspectors had performed 3,280 inspections of 375,569 m³ of controlled timber of which 15 were found to be non-compliant and remedial action was taken. Additional checks had been performed where there was evidence of poor compliance including imports of sawn softwood from other parts of the EU and Russia. Inspection of packaging with steel and stone consignments from China had continued with 1,387 inspections taking place. There were a total of 32 interceptions of non-compliant wood packaging consignments associated with these imports from China. This year we made a rare interception of Asian longhorn beetle from dunnage associated with a bulk shipment of steel.

A statutory notification scheme for non-controlled firewood was introduced on 1 January 2017. We had been notified of over 2,335 consignments comprising 67,450 tonnes during the year with 145 importers enrolled in the scheme. There were 35 cases where either the conifer wood packaging material associated with the firewood consignments or the firewood itself was non-compliant. Our inspectors served notices for the destruction of material where it was found to be non-compliant. There were no cases of high risk material where pests were present. Importers were encouraged to acquaint themselves with the relevant guide and to specify to suppliers that compliant wood packaging is used with consignments.

Outbreaks

Sweet Chestnut Blight: the Statutory Instrument introduced banning movements had now been lifted as the risk of disease spread via the movement of material was no longer considered a high risk. From the observations at Warboro and the South East London sites the destructive interventions that had so far taken place (predominantly at Warboro) would appear to have increased rather than decreased the risk of sporulation on the site due to the aggressive saprophytic colonisation that has taken place on rapidly killed bark (either through felling or herbicide application). The intention now was to flame treat stumps to eradicate spore colonies.

Oriental Chestnut Gall Wasp: There were now more than 50 known sites in the South East centred around London.

Chalara: there had been a decline in number of new sites being reported in England and Wales this year but we are now starting to see a significant impact on mature ash trees across the UK but particularly in Norfolk, Suffolk, Sussex, Kent and moving into Hampshire. This created new health and safety risks that were recognised in updated guidance from the Forestry Industry Safety Accord. . At present there was no change

in policy and pre-emptive felling was not supported. However, it was recognised that there were situations, such as with roadside trees, where the highway authority may request permission to remove all ash trees in a single operation for cost reasons. In light of all these factors, work was currently underway to review and if necessary refresh the FC's approach and guidance to others. Once this work had been completed an update would be provided to the Committee.

There was reduced evidence of new *P. ramorum* infections of Larch but Sweet chestnut infection remained of concern. Forest Research was working on management recommendations. Work was also continuing to enforce the non-compliance (to the requirement to fell) cases, but these were particularly challenging.

OPM caterpillars were expected to emerge at any time, and treatment of trees with insecticide would commence immediately.

The House of Lords EU Energy and Environment Sub-Committee is undertaking an inquiry into Brexit: plant and animal biosecurity. The Forestry Commission had contributed to the Defra submission to the Committee.

The Tree health and resilience strategy was nearing completion and expected to be published within the next couple of months.

Woodland Creation

The current 'dashboard' was shared with the Committee. There was a high degree of confidence that the 11 million tree target would be met and exceeded, although the final figures for planting in 2017-18 had been below expectations, partly because of delays within Natural England Countryside Stewardship Services, but principally attributable to adverse weather conditions in March. There may be some catch up planting in the autumn and FS staff would be discussing the situation with agreement holders. More of the information behind the dashboard would be brought to the next meeting.

25 Year Environment Plan

Richard Greenhous reported that developing the implementation plan was a major task that was still at an early stage; forestry was spread across work areas and would require multiple contributions. Forest Services were already engaged in a number of areas including local natural capital plans and the working group on methods of assessing progress. The priority for forestry included the Forestry Investment Zone pilot, the Northern Forest, the Tee Health Resilience Strategy and the future Environmental Land Management incentive scheme.

Shirley Trundle advised the Committee that progress was expected to be assessed at a high level on the big issues such as clean air and clean water, with a series of lower tier indicators, such as tree numbers to support the headline issues.

Corporate Plan

A number of minor comments were made which would be taken into account before seeking ministerial approval.

4. FINANCE REPORT

Paper 06/18

Steve Meeks advised the Committee that the end of year had been successfully finalised with a marginal managed Resource underspend to cater for potential audit adjustments. The main area of concern was the underspend on RDPE Grants which fell outside the FC's budget. Some of this was down to the delay in woodland creation planting and therefore claims, but Richard Greenhous added that delays to the issuing of agreements and the payment of claims and the lack of availability of information on applications that were in the approval process limited the ability to forecast likely spending. It was also noted that RDPE spending was across the programme period, not in year, so it could be re-profiled and was not necessarily lost to forestry support mechanisms.

Business Planning

Steve Meeks confirmed that the 2018/19 budget allocation had been received from Defra, and internal allocation was being finalised, but overall Defra budgets remained under pressure and the allocation was subject to change. Ian Gambles added that the FC had made a substantial contribution to the savings needed to balance the Defra group budget, but recognised that the risk of a further requirement for savings remained.

5. ARAC ANNUAL REPORT

Paper 07/18

Julia Grant (ARAC Chair) drew the Committee's attention to main challenges for 2018/19 and beyond and noted that the internal audit service provided by GIAA was now being fully effective after a difficult start. Simon Hodgson added that he was pleased with the new audit service and the quality of the material it was producing.

The report was accepted by the Committee.

6. FC RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION (Future of Food, Farming and Environment)

Paper 08/18

The Chairman opened the discussion by reminding the Committee of how big an issue this was for the forestry sector and how it would set the future drivers for forestry in England. Richard Greenhous added that it was the most important policy change in a lifetime and was the opportunity to help trees, woods and forests to deliver for society and government.

A wide range of comments were made by committee members, the most significant of these concerning what should be considered as part of the response included:

- That forestry should have parity with agriculture.
- Forestry should be working in harmony with surrounding land use, not being separated or conflicting.
- Emphasise the commercial importance of forestry and its links to the wider economy.
- Co-operation and joint working supported in order to enable landscape scale working and positive change.

- The need to recover the skills that have been or are being lost to the sector with a lack of new entrants.
- Simplify the process for gaining approval for activities without limiting the range of activities supported.
- Align with the high level objectives in the 25 year plan.
- Identify market failure and the reasons why there should be intervention and support.
- Emphasise the importance of making woodland resilient to climate change and help ensure long term survival.
- Provide, or have to hand, the evidence to back up any claims made.

It was agreed that the response to the consultation should be concise and in the areas where the Forestry Commission had greatest competence. Issues covered in the response should also continue to be supported by the activity at an official level, backing up the approach being taken in the formal response. It was also agreed that the response, but not any cover letter, should be published in the same way as any other consultation response. However, this should not necessarily be before the closing date for the consultation. Any effort to get others to respond to the consultation should not be based on encouraging people to follow the Forestry Commission response. It was also agreed that the Chairman's final sign off could take place without further reference to the National Committee.

7. FUTURE GOVERNANCE AND EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

Paper 09/18

The Chairman introduced the item and ran through the recommendations. In response to questions Ian Gambles explained that the other government official proposed for the Forest Services Board was to reflect the role of Forest Services in the delivery of wider government policy, not limited to those where the Defra group lead. It was also noted that Forestry England Board terms of reference needed to recognise the public corporation status.

The Committee considered the proposed frequency of the Forestry Commissioners meetings, a minimum of three times per year. It was accepted that this should be sufficient to support the joint working and co-ordination between the three parts of the organisation.

The Committee was keen to ensure that the right skills and experience were identified for the roles before recruitment commenced so that people with the right skills and experience were appointed.

Having commented on the proposed governance documents the Committee endorsed the proposals for the FS Board non-executives and the proposal for an Executive Commissioner.

8. FWACs

Paper 10/18

The Committee agreed to the re-appointment of John Moverley up to the 10 year limit. All other Chairs, except John Wilding who had only recently been appointed, should be approached with a view extending their terms of office for a further three years. The Committee also agreed the re-appointment of members with 9 years' service, where possible, for an additional year and that FWAC Chairs should be encouraged to fill outstanding vacancies by direct approach where there were suitable candidates. This would enable the recruitment exercise in 2019 to be undertaken with the new governance arrangements in place.

9. FESB Update

Oral

Simon Hodgson reported that end of year performance report had been good; with the capital underspend being rolled forward on the delayed projects.

Good progress had been reported on the Centenary Project and the corporate services transition was, so far, progressing close to plan. The new financial system was operational and the HR system iTrent was now live.

The UKWAS audit had resulted in a small number of corrective actions being required and these were being addressed. GDPR has been added to the FE Risk Register in respect to the marketing database.

10. FOREST HOLIDAYS and CAMPING IN THE FOREST

Paper 11/18

Simon Hodgson highlighted the success of the planning appeal at Delamere, which was a confidence boost for the business and the new investors who were taking a close interest in how the business was operating. Negotiations on a revised Framework Agreement were now open and the opportunity for the company to buy out the third party interest in two sites was being considered.

CITF had a good year with the clearance of legacy debts and the opening of the new Sherwood site now expected in spring 2019.

The Committee briefly discussed the recent publicity and protests around the proposal for a new Forest Holidays site at Juniper Hill in Mortimer Forest. Protest was a normal expectation for any new site, but it was noted that the main theme of the journalist interest, privatisation by the back door, was factually inaccurate; the Framework Agreement and model site lease very clearly showed that the developments were closely controlled and the land ownership remained unchanged.

11. ACCORD WITH NATIONAL PARKS IN ENGLAND

Paper 12/18

Richard Greenhous expanded on the background to the planned Accord, which would form the basis for better local engagement on issues of mutual interest, including joint opportunities and resolving disagreements more easily. The Committee made a number of comments, including some concern that economic activity and employment had not been given the attention they deserved.

It was agreed that the Accord should be progressed and that, unless there were major changes, it did not need further approval from the Committee. The proposed joint launch was also supported.

12. AOB

Future Meetings

It was noted that James Cross had accepted an invitation to attend the next meeting.

It was agreed that the September meeting should be moved to a location convenient for the APF exhibition in Warwickshire.

NTSG

Clive Tucker gave a brief update on the work of the National Tree Safety Group which had asked if the Practice Guide, Hazards from Trees (A general Guide) published by FR in 2000 could be updated. This guide was still being cited as a definitive work, but was now old and in need of an update. It was agreed that steps should be taken to see if it could be updated.