

21 May 2019

FUTURE FORESTS RESILIENCE

Purpose

1. To **update** the Executive Board on developing thinking since the February 2019 Exec Board meeting,
2. **seek feedback** from the Board on the suite of proposals,
3. **seek views** from the Board on how to align the level of ambitions (for the behavioural changes we would like to see) and the actions we would seek to take.

Recommendations

That the Board

4. **agrees** that the **position statement** (Annex 1) and **actions plan** (Annex 2) should be finalised in line with their comments,
5. **agrees** that the *Agriculture and Forestry - Climate Change Impacts. Report card 2016*' (Annex 3) should be used as the underpinning **evidence**,
6. **agrees** to these documents and actions plan being deployed as proposed in the 'communications' section (paragraph 15),

Background

7. FC has a long history of seeking to address the challenges of climate change for forestry, but evidence to date suggests that the uptake of resilient practices is slow and inconsistent. This is covered in the 'Future Forests' paper discussed by the FC Board of Commissioners on 13 December 2018.
8. The Board of Commissioners agreed that Forestry Commission should take a proactive approach to this issue and that this should be a priority for the new Executive Board. Suggestions made included:
 - strengthening the FC's relationship with the Committee on Climate Change;
 - considering the crucial role of skills and knowledge play a crucial in increasing resilience;
 - importance of ensuring continuation of monitoring as well as planning new research;
 - potential tensions between decisions required to increase future resilience, and current priorities and commercial requirements of the sector;
 - lessons to be learned from the past, and FC not to be too prescriptive about the way things should be done until there is further clarity and a more robust evidence base for the best way forward.

9. The new FC Executive Board discussed on 4 February 2019 how to take this work forward and agreed the following:
- focus to be primarily on resilience to climate change;
 - focus of FC role on ensuring that how woodland is created and managed will deliver resilience;
 - all types of forestry including commercial forestry should be in scope;
 - agreeing a handful of key points that FC management and staff can convey systematically and consistently;
 - identify where FR, FE and FS working together can make most impact;
 - build on the existing Climate Change Working Group coalition;
 - next steps should be to convene a small FS/FR/FS working group to develop a position statement and actions plan for FC. This action plan to focus on a small number of actions, within the gift of FC to pursue, most likely to make a difference.

Discussion

10. A working group involving FR, FS and FE met twice to discuss how best to take things forward (Chris Quine, Bianca Ambrose-Oji, James Simpson, John Weir, Mark Broadmeadow, Rebecca Isted). The main points from these discussions were:
- A simple position statement that all FC staff may be able to refer to, and that we could use externally may be useful, but there is a risk of duplicating the statements and commitments that FC has already signed up to in the Climate Change Actions Plan (CCAP). At the same time, there was recognition that the awareness of the CCAP within FC is quite limited. A short position statement explicitly referencing the CCAP has been drafted (Annex 1). The actions plan (Annex 2) reflects and cross-references the high level actions FC and other organisations have committed to in the CCAP.
 - A position statement should clearly make the link with the available evidence (why we think we need a position statement at all) and the actions (that flow from the statement).
 - There is a need to clarify what already available evidence and projections underpin FC's firm belief that there is a need for urgent action. The '*Agriculture and Forestry - Climate Change Impacts. Report card 2016*' (Annex 3) presents likely climate change scenarios and what the impacts already are, or may be for forestry. It is suggested that this is referred to as the main evidence base for forestry, rather than producing or commissioning a new piece of work.
 - The importance of communications, seen as absolutely critical; this includes making information clear and relevant to a range of audiences, and using or developing trusted channels to reach those. Recent FR reports *FERN036-Woodland managers' understanding of resilience and their future information needs*, *Understanding of resilience*, and *Understanding behaviours as the basis for policy design to improve the management of (tree health) outbreaks*

and build resilient treescapes provide useful pointers as to how to achieve this. This includes keeping communications up to date and consistent.

- Both widespread anecdotal evidence and recent FR reports referred to above suggest that a clearly signposted single 'resilience platform' would be of value. This would be to support communication, access to relevant information and tools, knowledge and good practice sharing.
- Promoting resilience practices for the future will mean challenging some views and practices for instance around forest management practices, species choice, and conservation – with stakeholders, eNGOs, but also in some instances Defra, Natural England, and internally. It may be beneficial to be proactive in our approach and engage relevant stakeholders ahead of any significant communications campaign to identify, and where possible resolve, areas of tension.
- It would be beneficial to review FC policies and practice to assess whether their prescriptions need to be clarified, or updated, to reflect climate change resilience objectives. The following policies or guidance documents have been identified:
 - Managing ancient and native woodlands – Practice Guide
 - Keepers of time
 - Broadleaves policy 1985
 - Open habitats policyA review of how our current regulatory and incentives offer support, or could better support, resilient practices, should also take place.
- In terms practical guidance to landowners and managers, reviewing and refreshing the management recommendations in *FR Research Note 201: Climate change- impacts and adaptation in England's woodlands* would provide an up to date overview of measures that landowners can take.
- In terms of further information to support decision making, the following has been identified as desirable:
 - decision support systems to reflect likely regional/local (rather than global) impact of climate change;
 - information and decision support systems to cover socio-economic features and benefits of alternative tree species;
 - case studies or examples of good resilience practices to be shared; it is important that the narrative around those extends beyond tree measurements;
 - trial and make more information available on species assemblages;

Resource implications

11. See Actions plan (Annex 2)

Risk Assessment

12. **Actions insufficient to deliver the desired step change** in practice

mitigation: match ambitions with actions, resourced as necessary;
mitigation: collaborate with Accord coalition to join up efforts

13. Actions match ambitions but **insufficient resourcing** – mitigation: secure resources to support work – see Annex 2

14. Disjointed approach with Accord partners leading to inefficiencies, or inconsistent, or disjointed communications or actions.
mitigation: share proposed approach with Accord and identify synergies

Communications

15. Subject to the Board agreement;

- FS, FE and FR to share with their respective Boards and secure support – May-June 2019
- Share proposed approach with Accord members at Climate Change working group meeting – 17 June 2019
- Communicate statement and actions plan via Roots – July 2019

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Annex 1 – proposed FC position statement

As a signatory of the **Climate Change Accord: a Call for Resilient Forests, Woods and Trees**, *‘we believe that it is necessary to act now to provide a secure future for our forests, woods and trees, that significant changes are required to widely-accepted and practiced systems of management to make them resilient, and we are committed to help realise the vision set out in this Accord’.*

‘We want England’s Forests, woods and trees continue to thrive and adapt in the face of climate change impacts and associated environmental pressures, and thus deliver the multiple benefits they provide for people and wildlife, now and in the future.’

England’s woodlands have been managed successfully to date under the assumption that the environment they are growing in will be relatively stable. This assumption is now challenged.

The rapid rate of climate change, and associated environmental changes, threatens the wide range of benefits delivered by woodlands in England.

We recommend the following the principles should apply for the management of England’s woodlands:

- anticipatory adaptation: making changes before the impact is observed, as this offers the highest potential gains for forest resilience;
- balanced risk management for short, medium and long term objectives;
- actions to consider the range of climate change projections to 2050.

‘There is no single approach that must be followed; different owners and organisations will apply the principles differently to meet their own objectives, which in itself will promote diversity and increase resilience’.

We will take action to support woodland creation and management practices that improve resilience, through:

- **evidence** about climate change scenarios, their likely impact on trees and woodlands, and how best to respond;
- which will inform the review of existing, and development of new, **policies**, standards, regulations, advice and incentives to encourage resilient practices;
- **implementation** of resilient practices in the Nation’s forests;
- continued **collaboration** with the wide coalition supporting the Accord.

Research – we will

- be **candid and open** about what evidence is available, and where the evidence gaps are;
- articulate clearly **what the evidence means** in terms of what woodland owners and managers could and should do;
- **improve** our available evidence and produce **new evidence** to fill most important evidence gaps;

Policy – we will

- base policies and standards on the **latest available evidence**;
- seek to further embed resilience in our **regulations and incentives**;
- uphold **UKFS compliant management, active management of pests and diseases, and biosecure practices** as fundamental to woodlands' resilience.

Practice – we will

- consistently and tirelessly **communicate** the need and means for action;
- embed resilient practices in the management of the **Nations' forests** increasing their extent, connectivity and diversity, and improving their condition;
- **support** landowners to implement resilient practices suitable for their existing woodlands and their objectives for those woodlands;
- improve the access to **information, tools and guidance** to support decision making;
- work with the **Accord partners** to facilitate knowledge exchange and experience sharing.

Annex 2 – proposed FC actions plan

Action	CCAP cross-reference	Owner	When?	Resourcing
1. Launch the FC climate change resilience position statement + actions plan Stating need for urgent action, commitment of Executive Board, and encouraging all in FC to relay and implement the key messages	Cross-cutting	FC Exec Board	July 2019	Within existing resources
2. Develop and manage a resilience knowledge hub Allowing easy access to, and sharing of, relevant information and evidence guidance, case studies, decision support tools - for external users and FC staff	Research 7, 8 Practice 9, 10, 12	Forest Research	Scoping – October 2019 Delivery – summer 2020	Build into SIS funded work
3. Review existing policies to identify, and implement where necessary, changes to support (better) climate change resilience In scope; - policies (Managing ancient and native; Keepers of time; Broadleaves policy; Open habitats policy), - regulations (UKFS, felling licence conditions, management plans), - incentives (grant conditions and offer) This may result in requirement for all future felling licences, woodland management plans, EIAs and grant support that all creation and management proposals must improve woodland resilience.	Policy 1, 2, 3, 4	Forest Services	Review and recommendations – October Implementation – tbc	Build into PAt work
4. Build resilient forests for the nation Develop an actions plan for the Public Forest Estate to increase the size, diversity and connectivity and improve the condition of woodlands	Practice	Forestry England	PFE approach statement – FE tbc Targets set – FE tbc Targets met – FE	Build into FE work

			tbc	
5. Develop and implement a programme of work to support evidence needs identified as part of the development of the new Science and Innovation Strategy	Research 5, 6, 7, 8	FR	Programme agreed -May 2020	Within
6. Develop an SR 19 bid for a Defra and government wide initiative to significantly accelerate actions to improve England's woodlands' resilience . Actions, and campaign, informed by behavioural change science and insights to change landowners behaviours (akin to say campaigns to encourage recycling) with appropriate investment and tailored approached and messages for different target audiences	Cross-cutting	FC Exec Board with Defra comms	Summer 2019?	SR 19 bid