

# Forest Services Board

3 October 2019

Minutes of the third meeting of the Forest Services Board

The Classroom, Santon Downham, Brandon, IP27 0TJ

## Attendees

Sir Harry Studholme (Chair)  
Ian Gambles  
Richard Greenhous  
Fiona Harrison  
Liz Philip  
George McRobbie  
Steve Meeks

Gemma Thomas – minutes

## 1. Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting. Shirley Trundle had sent apologies, Fiona Harrison was attending the meeting in Shirley's place. Due to train delays, Fiona Harrison was delayed.

## Declaration of Interest

The Chair asked if board members had any conflicts of interest to declare, beyond those declarations of interest published on the Forestry Commission website at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/register-of-interests-forestry-commissioners>.

George McRobbie declared an interest in Item 3, section 7; that his Directorship at Tilhill and his membership of the Steering Group of FISA would both end in October 2019.

## 2. Minutes of the last meeting and Matters Arising

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

Richard Greenhous updated the Board on the non-executive member recruitment campaign, for which 37 applications had been received.

### 3. Director's Update

The Board welcomed the new Director's Update as being well balanced and honest. The Board agreed that future Area Reports should be less discursive and include relevant area based metrics. The Board noted how stretched the relatively small Forest Services team were, challenging whether sufficient prioritisation was taking place? Richard Greenhous noted that the current order of priorities was first to expand, second to protect and third to improve England's woodlands but that the nature of each priority did not necessarily see this being reflected directly in resource allocations. The reality was that demands on Forest Services continued to grow and were not always matched with sufficient additional resources. The English Tree Strategy was noted as an opportunity to revisit priorities with government and to seek to match these with adequate resources. Opportunities were also sought to increase productivity, including through improved systems and processes.

**Action 1: Richard Greenhous to consider what area based metrics could most usefully be added to future Director's Updates.**

**Action 2: Gemma Thomas to add the following agenda items to the Board's forward look:**

- i. **Forest Services' IT strategy**
- ii. **The pollution incident referred to in East and East Midlands' report**
- iii. **EU Exit's implications for forestry, revisited after the UK leaves the EU**
- iv. **Statutory plant health notices enforcement**

### 4. Dashboard

The Board thanked David Cross and all contributors to the dashboard. The Board welcomed the improvements made, which reflected their previous comments. They agreed the need for a simpler, shorter and more immediately accessible front page dashboard. This should include more prominent RAG ratings to draw the Board's attention to what most required their decision or action. Much of the detail of the current dashboard could then sit behind that, as required for the Board to be able to test and challenge the Director's proposed RAG ratings, in line with the Board's terms of reference and agreed ways of working.

The Board asked to be told more about the ancient woodland and ancient semi-natural woodland that had been lost in recent years.

**Action 3: Richard Greenhous to commission further development of the Dashboard in line with the Board's comments.**

**Action 4: Richard Greenhous to provide more information on what ancient woodland that had been lost in recent years and why.**

## 5. Finance Report

Steve Meeks summarised that Forest Services remains largely on track to spend in line with its agreed budget. The 95% commitment cap required by Defra remained, for the time being. A Budget was expected to be announced this autumn, to which relevant bids had been made. The next Spending Review was expected in the spring and would cover both Capital and Resource. The Board noted that the increased demands arising from the Ips outbreak and Oak Processionary Moth interceptions this year would be sustained for some years yet, for which adequate provision was required.

## 6. Woodland Management

The Board welcomed Joe Watts and Mark Broadmeadow to the meeting in person, and Ian Tubby on the phone.

The Board discussed Forest Services' strategy for bringing more woodlands into management, including the effective delivery of woodland management plans and felling licenses. The Board discussed Forest Services' strategy for bringing more woodlands into management, including the effective delivery of woodland management plans and felling licenses. The Board agreed that there were no additional resources currently available and any proposal to increase resource would need to be developed as a bid for the next Spending review. The board were supportive of a bid being developed but asked for more consideration of alternative and novel options in addition to the proposed increase in woodland officer posts, which could be difficult to make the case for.

**Action 5: Ian Tubby to lead work on developing a bid to the next spending review for the additional resources required to bring more woodlands into management.**

The Board thanked Ian Tubby, who left the meeting.

## 7. Woodland Creation

The Board discussed Forest Services' strategy for addressing non-financial bottlenecks for woodland creation. The Board's discussions focussed on addressing skills shortages, the weakness of incentives for tenant farmers and many landowners' lack of knowledge of the economic case for woodland creation. The English Tree Strategy might provide opportunities to address some of these bottlenecks.

**Action 6: Mark Broadmeadow to liaise with Liz Philip on how gaps in education provision for woodland creation skills might be addressed.**

The Board thanked Joe Watts and Mark Broadmeadow, who left the meeting.

#### 8. Future meetings

In recognition of her moving on to new employment with the Scottish Government, the Board thanked Fiona for her wise and insightful contributions to Board meetings and beyond, wishing her every success in her new role.

The proposed location for the December Board meeting was in or near Exeter.

**Action 7: Gemma Thomas to book a room for the December Board meeting and confirm this with members.**

The Chair closed the meeting.