

**25 MARCH 2021****CARBON REDUCTION TARGET****Issue**

1. Next steps on agreeing an FC-wide carbon reduction target and how it would be delivered.

**Recommendations**

2. The Board is asked to agree that:
  - a. A realistic FC wide target is likely to have to be less ambitious than Forestry England's existing or updated target.
  - b. The Working Group described at paragraph 8 should be tasked with producing a recommended FC wide target and plans for achieving it, for agreement at this Board's 18 November meeting, following necessary pre-scoping work over the summer and further clarity on the proposed Defra Group Sustainability Strategy to be published in 2021/22.

**Background**

3. At its last meeting the FC Executive Board agreed that:
  - a. The FC should agree an FC-wide carbon reduction target.
  - b. This target should be as ambitious as it realistically can be.
  - c. Forestry England, Forest Research, Forest Services and the Commissioners Office should remain free to set their own targets, as long as together they at least equal any FC-wide target agreed.
  - d. The FC Executive Board would oversee the FC wide target and delivery strategy, focusing on those things best done together, while the leader of each organisation would be accountable for their own organisation's target and strategy.
  - e. A cross FC-working group should now be established to recommend a target and how it could be achieved, for Executive Board agreement.
4. Since then, Richard Greenhous (Forest Services), Head of Estates (Forestry England) and Research Forester (Forest Research) have met and established that:
  - a. Forestry England already have their 2018 Energy and Infrastructure Strategy and carbon free by 2033 target. This summer they will be reviewing this and determining whether to update this to be more ambitious and extend the scope to their whole supply chain.

- b. Forest Services and the Commissioners' Office rely heavily on Forestry England for relevant services, so would logically follow Forestry England's lead, becoming embedded in Forestry England's plans. The exceptions would be where staff are hosted by other organisations, largely Defra and the Environment Agency, whose ambitions are likely to remain similar to Forestry England's. Further work will be required to establish the relevant baseline(s) and contributions to the FC wide target. Strategic Development Team Manager (Forest Services) has been invited to join Forestry England's project board. Steve Meeks has agreed that the Commissioners' Office's interest should be covered through Forest Services' engagement with Forestry England and that, if required, he would nominate a Commissioners' Office colleague to join the working group.
  - c. Forest Research have established a reliable baseline for their Environmental Management System, which is certified to ISO 14001:2015 but have yet to set any specific carbon reduction targets. Further work is required to establish what Forest Research could contribute to the FC wide target, which will take several months to complete, noting that their current significant reliance on gas for heating is likely to remain a barrier to progressing as fast as Forestry England. Forest Research is in the process of moving its bought electricity to '100% Clean Renewable' tariffs, which will substantially reduce its associated carbon emissions, progressively, during 2020-21 and 2021-22. Recently completed commercial energy audits for Alice Holt and Northern Research Station have identified costed and quantified options to de-carbonise its heating systems. However, extensive architectural survey work is still required to identify further measures to reduce and eliminate wasted heat energy, and surveys are required to support planning for future generation from renewables and storage capacity. Pending confirmation of funding, these surveys are expected to take place during 2021-22.
  - d. All parts of the FC share a significant appetite to share knowledge and ideas to accelerate progress towards as ambitious and realistic FC wide target as possible.
  - e. Richard Greenhous has agreed to be the project's Senior Responsible Officer.
5. Wider government targets and initiatives could overtake our own plans, requiring specific targets and means of achieving them beyond our direct control. A Defra group Sustainability Strategy is currently being developed for publication by the end of 2021/22, with which we can expect to have to align. Its scope *'includes all environmental impacts and all operations – from our IT and our property, to the way we manage our woodlands and carry out our science'*. In April Defra ExCo are due to consider this strategy's vision, a draft of which is *'To take from the environment the minimum that we need to operate, and to put back more than we take; and be the first Government group to reach net-zero'*. Consideration is being given to whether to follow the Environment Agency's target to be net zero by 2030, or whether this would be too challenging given Defra group carries out several 'carbon intensive' operations such as pumping stations, construction, laboratories, ships and plant nurseries. Most of these will be difficult to decarbonise quickly, and would require significant investment that may never achieve economic payback. The plan is to baseline Defra Group's environmental footprint by October 2021.

### **Consideration**

6. Taking all of that all into account:

- a. A realistic FC wide target is likely to have to be less ambitious than Forestry England's existing or updated target.
  - b. It will take several months to agree a realistic FC wide target based on and backed by a robust delivery plan that we know we can deliver, given the aforementioned scoping work required first required over the summer, and the need to align with the forthcoming Defra Group Sustainability Strategy.
7. An alternative approach would be to set a bold FC-wide target now and use this as a spur to action to develop a full delivery plan, as other organisations like the Environment Agency appear to have done. But this is not recommended over an evidence based and planned approach.

### **Next Steps**

8. With the Board's agreement, a working group of Head of Estates (Forestry England), Research Forester (Forest Research) and Strategic Development Team Manager (Forest Services), chaired by Head of Policy and Strategy (Forest Services), will be tasked with leading and co-ordinating work to produce a recommended FC wide target and plans for achieving it, building on Forestry England's and Forest Research's planned scoping work over the summer and engagement with the developing Defra group Sustainability Strategy, for agreement by the FC Executive Board at its 18 November meeting.

**Richard Greenhous**  
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**Forestry England**

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**19 March 2021**