

# Trees and Woodland Scientific Advisory Group (TAW-SAG)

Meeting 9 Minutes: 7 July 2022

## Attendees:

- **Rob MacKenzie** (RMK) – (Chair), School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences University of Birmingham; Birmingham Institute of Forest Research
- **Paul Burgess** (PB) - Ecology and Management, Cranfield Soil and Agri-food Institute Cranfield University
- **Keith Kirby** (KK) - Department of Plant Sciences, University of Oxford
- **Richard Buggs** (RB) – (Observer), Kew Gardens, Plant Health Group
- **Ruth Mitchell** (RM) - Biodiversity and Ecosystems Group, Ecological Sciences Department, James Hutton Institute
- **Chris Quine** (CQ) – (Observer), Chief Scientist, Forest Research
- **Julie Urquhart** (JU) - Environmental Social Science at University of Gloucestershire
- **Mike Morecroft** (MM) – (Observer), Principal specialist on climate change, Natural England (NE) and senior visiting research associate, Oxford University
- **Maggie Roe** (MR) - Landscape Planning Research & Policy Engagement, University of Newcastle
- **Daisy Ellis** (DE) - Head of Strategy, Engagement and Analysis, Defra
- **Rebecca McIlhiney** (RMI) - Evidence and Analysis Team Leader for Trees/ Forestry, Defra
- **Clare Williams** (CW) – Evidence and Analysis Team for Trees/Forestry, Defra
- **Charlotte Williams** (ChW) (secretary) – (Minutes), Research & Development (R&D) Project Delivery Advisor, DEFRA
- **Rebecca Waite** (RW) – Head of Design and Delivery, Defra
- **Andrew Clements** (AC) – Chair of Natural England Scientific Advisory Committee (NESAC)
- **Hugh Loxton** (HL) – Head of Environmental Policy, Trees, Woodlands & Forestry Policy Defra

## Apologies:

- **Patricia Thornley** (PT) - School of Engineering and Applied Science, Aston University
- **Ian Bateman** (IB) - Director of the Land, Environment, Economics and Policy Institute. University of Exeter
- **Stephen Cavers** (SC) - Ecology Evolution and Environmental Change - Centre for Ecology and Hydrology
- **Yadvinder Malhi** (YM) - Ecosystems Research, Environmental Change Institute, Oxford University
- **Bella Murfin** (BM) – Tree Programme Director, Defra
- **Naomi Matthiessen** (NM) – Tree Programme Director, Defra

## 1. Item 1: Welcome and updates

1. RMK welcomed everyone to the ninth meeting of the TAW-SAG and welcomed RMI to the group who had returned to the team from a period of leave.

## **Item 2: Shared Outcomes Fund - Nature-based solutions for climate change at the landscape scale**

2. MM presented to the group on the nature-based solutions for climate change at the landscape scale project which is funded from the Shared Outcomes Fund. The key points were:
- The project is co-sponsored by BEIS and DEFRA. It's led by NE, but works in partnership with RBG Kew, the Environment Agency (EA) and Forestry Commission.
  - It is testing methods for creating and restoring natural habitats in ways that address both climate change and biodiversity loss, whilst testing blended funding approaches and building evidence/ frameworks for carbon markets.
  - Applications for grants for pilots opened in July 2022.
  - A range of habitats will be looked at, focussing on those less understood in terms of carbon e.g. heathlands, scrub, woodlands established by natural colonisation and more.
  - Four workstreams –
    - i. Programme Management and Pilot Development. Led by NE.
    - ii. Comparative assessment of carbon storage and sequestration.
    - iii. Carbon storage, flux and biodiversity. Led by RGB Kew. They are also developing a landscape modelling tool incorporating social and ecological data across biodiverse landscapes.
    - iv. Blended Funding and Governance. Led by EA. Understanding successful models for blended funding and ensuring there's no double funding of the same work. Developing tools and templates for funding plans and potential investors.

### **3. Summary of Key Points raised in the discussion:**

- A question was raised about how will the four pilot areas be distributed throughout the country and how will the conditions be determined? Grant applications for the pilot areas have been advertised in an open competition so the decision will be determined by what comes in, but a lot of effort went into developing the criteria for selecting schemes. They will aim to get a selection from different parts of the country and they are not restricted to four areas.
- Proposals will need to include at least two of the priority habitats for filling the gaps, so if this can be done on the urban fringe or within a city then that's in scope. This is the same for marine. Nothing has been excluded, just prioritised.
- JU highlighted the need for linking up with Treescapes and knowledge sharing gathered on the projects, whether at their conference or through another mechanism.
- For the work on monitoring carbon fluxes, chamber measurements will be used. Ground based LIDAR approaches will also be of interest for scrub and hedgerows. Carbon flux towers will not be a core part of the project.
- A point was raised that it's important to undertake work on habitats (rather than evidence of land use change) which is a key part of the evidence base that's missing, but this Shared Outcomes Fund project doesn't currently focus on land use and landscape change which is a current challenge for the Nature for Climate Fund programme.

**Action 1: ChW to capture links shared in Teams chat.**

**Action 2: MM to circulate the recent communications issued on this project**

### **Item 3: Review and agree minutes from previous meeting**

4. The minutes from the last meeting were reviewed with no amendments required.

5. The actions were reviewed:

- Action 1 – complete. DE provided an update on whether the strategy will be published. Currently the plan is to widely distribute the R&D strategy, with the groups support. And then in slower time to publish online.
- Action 2 – complete. Check with Dan Doherty.
- Action 3 – complete. DE gave an update on Monitoring and Evaluation. The specification is being drafted and once the new contractor is in place they can then come in and update TAW-SAG.
- Action 4 – complete. The policy team are working through the biodiversity net gain additionality rules as well as how it could stack with the Woodland Carbon Code.
- Action 5 – complete. PT and SC have been provided the VDL staged pathway for comments. September will be too late for comments and further advice will be sought by correspondence. There is an advisory group that's consulted on developing the staged pathway and that includes members from the National Forest Company and Community Forests.
- Action 6 – complete.

**Action 3: RW and MR to liaise regarding planting on derelict land and linking with the Landscape Institute.**

**Item 4: Programme Board Update**

6. This item was pushed back due to availability of guest attendance for Item 5.
7. DE highlighted that the publication of the planting statistics was discussed and that the R&D strategy was signed off and funding approval has been granted by HMT. The strategy will go out in phases. ALBs with collaboration first, then if there's still gaps to fund it will go out further.

**Item 5: Breeding Waders Update**

8. RMK Gave a brief background on the breeding waders issue. Wading bird populations are in decline. Any proposal for afforestation in areas that have good evidence of breeding waders will cause delays. A sub-group of NESAC and TAW-SAG worked together to produce an interim common statement, to provide firm principles so Defra can make evidence-based decisions. NESAC have agreed on the statement and asked that they continue to be consulted on for advice on developing delivery mechanisms and that to progress this from interim advice to substantial long-lasting advice there is further analytical work required. Agreement is sought from TAW-SAG on the statement.

**9. Summary of Key Points raised in discussion:**

- The statement needs some context at the start to explain some terms. AC confirmed the statement wouldn't need ratification from NESAC again if this was added.
- The document will be an internal document used by Defra policy and Ministers, via Defra policy.
- Agree with the two NESAC comments for further consultation on the modelling work and to be updated of any responses that come back in September.
- Was this a pre-existing problem affecting woodland planting or is it a new issue?
- The target for breeding waders is to turn around the decline.
- The common statement includes a point that highlights that it's more than just a simple problem between birds and trees and a multi-criteria analysis is useful.
- Natural colonisation versus tree planting has been addressed at point nine in the statement, so it's not specific as any tree can have a negative impact to breeding waders.

10. HL gave an update on the work to date and how policy have been responding to the advice provided to date. The key points raised were:
- A decision-making flowchart has been produced.
  - There are several key products currently being worked on for the short, medium and longer term, including a national survey policy, to implement a monitoring framework and exploration of a compensation strategy for lost wader habitat.
  - The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) have been commissioned by NE to do further research with the report expected in September.
11. The decision was to sign the statement off from the sub-group and not the wider TAW-SAG due to the lack of context. See also para 14, below.

**Action 4: AC to write a paragraph of context for the statement.**

**Action 5 – RMK to circulate the additional papers to members, and as an appendix to the statement.**

#### **Item 6: AOB**

12. JU provided an update on the second round of the UK Research and Innovation Treescapes proposals. There was a strong set of proposals and applicants should know the results in next few weeks. There are still some gaps around commercial forestry, timber production and economic benefits from woodland. There is only one small call left.
13. With the Fellowship scheme, that closes on 29 July, there's been a lot of interest and may be oversubscribed. Near December 2022, there will be a third call around knowledge exchange.
14. The links shared during the meeting are:
- <https://www.kew.org/science/our-science/projects/landscape-ecology-programme>
  - <https://www.kew.org/read-and-watch/nature-unlocked-animation>
  - <https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2021/07/23/nature-based-solutions-for-climate-change-at-the-landscape-scale-a-new-12-5m-pilot-programme/>

#### **Post-meeting update on Ministerial submission for breeding waders**

15. The submission to Minsters was made on 13 July with the proposed short term interim approach to improve the clarity of guidance on wader conservation and woodland expansion. The approach included three parts:-
- a. A risk-based survey policy to be clearer where woodland creation is likely to be approved and whether breeding wader surveys are necessary to progress this;
  - b. Improvements to the site scoping process to better account for local site conditions that determine site suitability for waders;
  - c. Using a decision chart to assess applications.

Further medium- and long-term plans were also presented.

The common statement from NESAC and a sub-group from TAW-SAG was included in the submission as an annex.

**Trees and Forestry, Strategy Engagement and Analysis Team August 2022**