

Ref: FCDAG 07/2025

DAG Minutes: 17/07/2025**Location:** Webinar/teleconference**Chair:** Jane Hull**Secretary:** Sarah Lawson**Attendees****DAG Members:**Graham Garratt (ICF) **GG**Claire Robinson (NFU) **CR**Paul Orsi (Sylva) **PO**Graham Clark (CLA) **GC**James Russell (Community Forests) **JR**Luke Hemmings (NPFPG) **LH**Simon Marrington (Woodland Management Companies) **SM**Greg Vickers (RFS) **GV**Laura Bower (W&C LINK) **LB**John Bruce (Confor) **JB**Adrian Jowitt (Natural England) **AJ**Claire Douglas (RPA) **CD****FC/Defra:**Jane Hull (FC) **JH**Sarah Lawson (FC) **SL**Penny Oliver (FC) **POI**Richard Hofman (FC) **RH**Sharon Rose (FC) **SR**Rhianne Harris (FC) **RHa**Kiran Patel (FC) **KP**Sam Osinowo (FC) **SO**David Jam (FC) **DJ**John Place (Defra) **JP****Apologies:**

Simon James (Small Woods)

Clive Thomas (Soil Association)

David Lewis (RICS)

John Blessington (Local Gov)

John Deakin (National Trust)

Jackie Dunne (Confor)

Neville Elstone (ICF)

DAG Minutes

Welcome

JH opened the session and welcomed all.

'State of the Nation'

- Spending Review – in terms of Defra, the headlines look positive but awaiting to see what the impact is for the Forestry Commission.
- Groundswell – Secretary of State announced Capital Grants through Countryside Stewardship were opening.
 - Capital Grants now open for applications – Farming
- Farming & Equipment Grant closed recently but Adopt Grant (through Innovate UK) is open until 20th August.
 - Competition overview - Full ADOPT Grant Round 2 - Innovation Funding Service
- Trees to Timber campaign concluded – there is a useful case study that looked at the economics of creating 100ha of woodland.
 - Trees to timber: how landowners can benefit from commercial forestry - GOV.UK
- Woodland Creation: Financial case study, 100 hectare site - GOV.UK
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- Annual KPI report shows highest amount of woodland creation for some time and two largest contributors to that were the Community Forest programme and EWCO.
 - Forestry Commission Key Performance Indicators - GOV.UK
- Trees Outside Woodlands Fund is open and being run by Tree Council, for local authorities and charities to apply to for urban trees and trees outside woodland.
 - Trees Outside Woodland Fund - The Tree Council
- Sycamore Gap sentencing noted.
- Consultation on green finance and nature-based approaches ongoing:
Expanding the role of the private sector in nature recovery - GOV.UK (open until 7th August)

PO commented that spending review appears positive for trees, noting a 27% increase in Nature for Climate funding.

JH acknowledged and confirmed working through further details with Defra.

GC asked about the Trees to Timber campaign, as hadn't realised it was time-limited and enquired if there are any plans to continue that activity.

JH confirmed that there have been a number of targeted campaigns on different topics. Some of the resources remain available on GOV.UK and can continue to be used.

ACTION: JH to follow up with Lucy Wyatt about the nature of messaging and why some good messages are only shared in time limited campaigns.

Response after the meeting: FC balances the mix of promotion of 'always on' messages and campaigns. Campaigns have been a particularly useful tool for FC recently, but, in order to grab attention, these need to change topic on a regular basis. Whenever FC runs a campaign, as with Trees to Timber, the resources are captured for use at other points by all – see <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/trees-to-timber-how-landowners-can-benefit-from-commercial-forestry>

JH reviewed previous minutes and action log. Commented that Historic environment mapping is now live. On Forestry Commission Map Browser Land Information Search Go to Targeting and Scoring / Historic Environment. Also the Woodland creation enquiry form [What's your name? - Get support to plant trees and woodland – GOV.UK](#) is now available. In terms of action log, the Partnership action is deferred until autumn and Species issues to be addressed in current meeting.

FLOv2 Update

KP (Development Manager, FC) and **SO** (User Researcher, FC) presented slides.

GG asked when setting up a new set of credentials if the existing agent authority form could be used. Also currently have a series of felling licences online and have been told they won't be considered without written evidence from county archaeologist that replanting on a different site is acceptable even if there is a previous feasibility study that has covered all the archaeology. Will this system have that information within the constraints check or will there still be a need to visit an external agency.

SO confirmed that you can use your existing agent authority form. In terms of the query regarding the constraints check will need to take this away.

ACTION: SO to follow up with **GG** regarding constraints check.

PO queried whether the new system would include mapping uploads and CSV uploads. Also raised a point about consistency as on felling licence online. You currently have to write species using the common name, but in the plan of operations you write the three letter code which is widely used. Therefore so not sure why the common name is being used.

SO confirmed that that they would include mapping and CSV uploads and those are being refined to include error checking. Also in terms of the species list, this was recently being reviewed and happy to follow up on this.

ACTION: SO to follow up on issue with species.

LH asked whether there has been consideration to have accounts for multiple users within the same office or organization. Also asked if the management plans will eventually be dealt with in the same system for ten year felling licences.

KP confirmed that there is activity looking at being able to transfer between an organization and users. Also responded that there is a process to manage ten year felling applications but the integration of the woodland management plan is a later activity that hasn't been looked at yet.

Species Update

RH (ELM Development Manager, FC) presented slides.

Species Management Plan template

GG commented about people not having a map for accessibility purposes and wondered in what situation you see this being the case, as presumably the land needs to be registered with the RPA and would need a woodland management plan to make a grant application. There may be a possibility that you will receive lots of applications without maps because it's easier.

RH acknowledged the point but hoping this won't be the case. The text is Defra standard text and needed to be added to cover those with accessibility requirements and are in a circumstance when they really are unable to provide a map. In the long run it could end up being more time consuming for the applicant so hoping that it won't be an issue.

JH also noted the comment and raised that the wording does then request a detailed description in those circumstances.

Cull and Effort Form

LH commented that some clients have stalkers or syndicates that keep their own equivalent records that multiple stalkers inputting information. A little concerned that if this is going to be prescriptive and this form needs to be used then how can we make it work where we have multiple stalkers.

RH responded that we are not prescribing that this form needs to be used. We are aware that there may be issues for some users. It's ok as long as there is a cull and effort record that is kept live and active during the duration of the agreement and it is in a form that can be sent to us.

LH queried whether it would be possible to add applying for PA7 at the point of woodland management plan grant application.

RH agreed and commented that we need to get messaging out about this. Writing a species plan is an important part of the Higher Tier pre-application and doing it at the management plan stage, that's even better. We are working on getting all these products better aligned.

CSHT Update

RHa (CS Incentives Team Manager, FC) and **JP** (Defra) provided update.

RHa provided Pre-application update

PO commented that had received feedback that some people are not applying as they are worried that they will start the process and then the money will run out. There seems to be a confidence issue and may need to address that with some communications to say that it is well funded and try and restore confidence.

POI acknowledged feedback.

JB commented that he would be happy to share some messaging with members regarding the pre-application and to give them a chase if we can supply some wording.

ACTION: POI/RHa to supply wording for pre-application chaser.

LH commented that messages are going out to listed contact on RPA portal but that person is not always the best person to act upon it. By the time it is picked up, may have already been withdrawn and causing issues. Also raised that there is no visibility of the applications and being able to check on the submitted pre-application forms.

RHa responded that if there were individual cases that need to be checked then she is happy to do that. There will be a pre-application approval letter being sent once all of the work has been done. Advised that if there is a species management plan outstanding the pre-application won't be signed off.

LH commented that this will cause a delay. Getting the data takes time and also getting the agreed funding for the species management plans is taking a bit of time.

POI commented that if there are issues with receiving the funding for species plans, let us know and we can try and follow that up.

LH commented that also some deer officers are keen to discuss and arrange site visits and it all takes time. It feels like we are being asked to do a lot in the application stage.

POI responded that comments were noted and we have talked through the updated plans and we are looking at all the guidance. However, the plan is really important because that is actually what you are being asked to deliver when the agreement is approved. It is important that we have the best information possible.

JP provided Higher Tier update

LH commented that there are questions about what requirements are going to be for quite a lot of things and where the limits are going to be set. We are trying to set people's expectations of what the funding might be but we don't have a lot of details or understanding of the repercussions. There may be unpredictable events such as windblow or disease that are a worry especially as they are longer agreements. The concern is having to pay stuff back if something unexpected happens.

POI acknowledged the need for more information and commented that we are working on getting more information into voluntary guidance for the scheme which will help. Unexpected things happen now in current agreements and we acknowledge this then changes things and we would address that. We are expecting to review ten year agreements around the five year mark to make sure they are still right and changes can be made.

PO asked for the definition of summer and also asked if the applications are going to be done via the new portal.

JP responded that summer takes us through to September, so the key thing is it will be soon. Also confirmed that we will be using the portal and as it is new we will be bringing people in in tranches to make sure it works and so it may take a little while. We will try to make sure it is clear when we will be inviting people in.

AOB

SR advised that they are looking at our extraordinary payments for exceptional circumstances and following the Environment Agency defining the North West and Yorkshire as drought areas, looking for feedback regarding experience on the ground and whether you are hearing much about tree losses.

SM commented that in Yorkshire and north of England are seeing higher than average losses of 30-40% on some schemes that have gone into the ground this year.

JB echoed this feedback and at a recent committee meeting for the East and South East the figures were up to 50% losses.

JR agreed that locally they are seeing up to 50% losses on some sites and 30-50% on larger planting schemes. In East Anglia there has been no notable rain since February and the losses we are seeing are higher than expected.

SR advised that funding has been allocated. We are just deciding how quickly we can get the offer out. We are looking to make it less demanding on customers to apply and speed up the process to get the money out of the door quicker. The offer we give to woodlands is going to slightly different to the offer we give to trees in urban spaces as this will be more expensive and we are working through the figures but once we have a better idea about the amount of money we would like to come back to the DAG for assistance.

ACTION: SR to pick up with DAG regarding drought payments once more information available.

LH asked if it will only be areas declared as drought areas that qualify. Commented that higher than normal losses in Northumberland and think it was the timing of the dry weather that has been particularly significant and the lack of rain between February and June. Think we are probably still waiting to see the full impact.

SR commented that need to speak to the Environment Agency as the number of areas that are considered in drought now may be different to in a few weeks and need to ensure that we are picking up the emerging areas as well.

GG confirmed that East and West Midlands have also been declared as drought areas by the Environment Agency. Also wanted to know if the provisions would extend to Agri environmental tree and hedge planting.

CD commented that in terms of Countryside Stewardship and SFI we keep an eye on what is coming in regarding people requesting minor and temporary adjustments for CS and

changes of circumstance for SFI and surprisingly we haven't received many of those. If there are issues, people need to go through those processes as this will trigger a review.

JH confirmed that the next meeting would take place on 18th September and would be face-to-face in Birmingham.

Meeting ended 12:00