

Ref: FCDAG 11/2025

**DAG Minutes:** 13/11/2025**Location:** Webinar/teleconference**Chair:** Jane Hull**Secretary:** Sarah Lawson**Attendees****DAG Members:**Poppy Sherborne (NFU) **PS**Paul Orsi (Sylva) **PO**Graham Clark (CLA) **GC**Neville Elstone (ICF) **NE**James Russell (Community Forests) **JR**Luke Hemmings (NPFPG) **LH**John Deakin (National Trust) **JD**John Blessington (Local Gov) **JB**Nick Phillips (Woodland Trust) **NP**Simon Marrington (Woodland Management Companies) **SM**Greg Vickers (RFS) **GV**Laura Bower (W&C LINK) **LB**Julian Burchby (Confor) **JB**Adrian Jowitt (Natural England) **AJ**Claire Douglas (RPA) **CD**Brian Fraser (HTA) **BF**David Lewis (RICS) **DL**Clive Thomas (Soil Association) **CT****FC/Defra:**Jane Hull (FC) **JH**Sarah Lawson (FC) **SL**Penny Oliver (FC) **POI**Lucy Greenberry (FC) **LG**Harry Joyce (FC) **HJ**Sharon Rose (FC) **SR**

Charlotte Bagnall (FC) (observer)

Rhianne Harris (FC) **RH**David Robertson (FC) **DR**Kate Jones (FC) **KJ**Laura Farrugia (FC) **LF**Naomi Mervin (FC) **NM**Lisa Brooks (FC) **LB****Apologies:**

Simon James (Small Woods)

Jackie Dunne (Confor)

Graham Garratt (ICF)

## DAG Minutes

### Welcome

**JH** opened the session and welcomed all.

Previous minutes approved without amendment and action log reviewed.

#### 'State of the Nation'

- Defra Secretary of State and Director Generals were in front of Efra Select Committee on 11<sup>th</sup> November. Information shared included highlighting when Environmental Improvement Plan will be published. The Land Use Framework will follow, expected early next year. The Trees Action Plan is expected to be published in Spring 2026.
- Two new Forests for the Nation have been announced
- EPREC opened and applications are due to close 14<sup>th</sup> November
- EWCO guidance was re-launched on 23<sup>rd</sup> October
- Spruce Site Assessment is now open.

### Ridge & Furrow Guidance

**DR** (Historic Environment Adviser, FC) presented slides.

**PS** raised concern about differing opinions on importance of Ridge and Furrow (R&F), referencing past challenges with SFI particularly SHINE features. **DR** confirmed variability of opinion exists between foresters, local historic environment services, and FC advisors. Guidance aims to reduce disputes by creating a shared starting point. FC will make final decisions for proposals it oversees, based on UKFS and evidence.

**SM** queried obligations for active conservation management through tree monitoring, scrub control or grazing in open space management in Step 5, if outside scope of woodland creation application. **DR** noted that Step 4 is more applicable to the woodland creation process, but by developing a plan you would be looking at long-term management, including assessing R&F as part of this. If trees are planted on R&F, consider future management plans and intensity of future operations.

**JBI** suggested planting trees might protect R&F, given agricultural discussions looking at how to plough out these features, and whether R&F still has drainage function. **DR**

agreed this could be positive in some cases but stressed case-by-case assessment. Flagged that much of the R&F in grassland has regulatory protection under EIA agricultural regulations. R&F could potentially have drainage function, depending on site history and condition.

**JR** asked if the starting assumption is that planting is harmful to all R&F? Recognising that lots of R&F survives within ancient woodland. **DR** responded that need to review on a case-by-case basis. There are circumstances where tree planting would cause harm to R&F which would be against UKFS and there are circumstances where we would be comfortable with it as it offers protection and the long-term management is something that needs to be considered.

**GC** asked what "ground disturbance" covers and whether this relates to method of establishment or longer-term management operations. **DR** clarified it includes ground preparation, cultivation, levelling, planting techniques, vehicle movements, and harvesting. Guidance uses "ground disturbance" as a catch-all term for any type of ground disturbance that forestry involves.

**JD** suggested Forestry Commission could look at work to triage most important sites to reduce ambiguity and range of situations where foresters have to enter into these kind of negotiations. **DR** noted R&F already features in FC's historic environment opportunity mapping but will consider further refinement.

**JR** (in chat) commented there is growing experience across England's Community Forests that those landowners with R&F grassland who are wishing to introduce trees (to create silvo-pastoral agroforestry) are facing as much resistance as if they were proposing wholesale conversion to woodland. This feels like a major barrier to retaining such grassland and supporting more sustainable livestock models, whilst increasing canopy cover. How do you see this issue being resolved?

**SM** (in chat) commented need to be extremely careful of creating long-term management obligation re future management operations or mitigation requirements on land excluded from scope of the application - difficult/impractical to enforce and potentially just further erosion of the viability of WC projects to the landowner when compared with other options available to them.

**LH** (in chat) think it would be worth keeping a log of the area of schemes "rejected" under the new R&F guidance, as I think was done with the revised wader guidance, to monitor how it is impacting on delivery.

## FLOv2 Update

**KJ** (Business Change Manager, FC) presented slides.

**LH** raised concerns about inputting of data into new system and how time consuming this might be. Highlighted need to manage expectations as FLOv2 is a new system, not an upgrade and that data won't just be moved across. Need to be clear on how it's going to be supported.

**JB** (in chat) raised that a key concern for users is whether existing history and clients will be transferred across? **KJ** noted need to emphasis that this is a new service. Need to ensure clear messaging to avoid confusion and to be clear regarding the situation on existing data and the support mechanisms in place.

**JB** suggested adding a progress tracker for applications to improve transparency and client communication.

**PO** stressed importance of clear specifications for data that is to be sent across to avoid unusable submissions.

**LH** flagged that the ability to pick parcels from RPA Land Registry layer would be beneficial.

**KJ** noted above comments to be fed back to team.

**Economics of Woodland Creation** - [Economics of Woodland Creation in England - Forest Research](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/woodland-creation-financial-case-study-100-hectare-site/woodland-creation-financial-case-study-100-hectare-site) and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/woodland-creation-financial-case-study-100-hectare-site/woodland-creation-financial-case-study-100-hectare-site>

**NM** (Head of Economics, Evidence & Analysis, FC) and **HJ** (Economist, FC) presented slides.

**NE** queried about the native broadleaf/productive broadleaf split and need to consider the middle ground. **NM** clarified that native broadleaf covered the option that has not got the timber returns included in the cash flow.

**DL** commented that the income profiles of agriculture are very different from forestry and does make it difficult to compare. The case studies did not demonstrate how arrived at figures. If there was further information that could be shared that would be helpful. **NM** responded that these real case studies require some confidentiality around financial figures. If you have case studies to share, get in contact.

**DL** commented for the case study shared, the establishment costs were high with low grant payments in comparison. **NM** responded that they gave up some grant to meet financial additionality test for woodland carbon code so looks like an underestimate of total value.

**AJ** asked over what timescale the estimates were made. **NM** responded that woodland creation was 50 years

**NE** Floodwater: We need to value the rental value of the land for flood management, one of the most important societal values for land in the future.

**CT**: for the 100ha financial case study is the carbon income hypothetical or has it been assessed against the WCC additionality requirements? **NM**: yes it was a real situation, hence why there was the situation of 'giving up' some EWCO funding in order to meet additionality requirements.

**JB**: Auditor and professional fees are c£5k per verification and initial validation. If income is derived from felling, the costs of ground preparation and restocking should be considered. **NM**: The restocking, including ground prep costs are in the establishment costs; the timber income is based on standing sale.

**SM**: Current taxation treatment of both commercial forestry and carbon income will have a significant impact on the net result vs alternatives. **NM**: Some clarification is at: [IHTM25253 - Other relevant business property: Land used under the Woodland and Peatland Carbon Code...](#) **GC**: Taxation needs mention, especially for a large woodland creation project, plus IHT treatment is due to change significantly in a few months.

**NM**: It could be interesting to engage with private stakeholders. CLA have engaged with the private sector on this previously in collaboration with our Marketing, Comms & Engagement team

## CSHT Update

**POI** (Head of ELM, FC) **RH** (CS Incentives Team Manager, FC) presented slides.

**PO** asked why uptake is low and whether the new portal is being used. **RH** confirmed portal is being used. People are completing the pre-application offline and once that is approved they are invited to apply to Higher Tier online. There are some teething issues being worked through, but the system seems intuitive.

**POI** advised that in terms of uptake, Defra and RPA user research suggests some challenge due to people's capacity to engage with the process

**LG** (ELM Guidance & Communications Team Manager) commented that barriers include perceived complexity, admin burden, and confidence. Also urged people to check that contact details are correct.

**LH** raised agents are still not set as main contact despite submitting pre-app forms; emails go to landowners who may miss them. **RH** confirmed that there have been discussions with RPA and will follow up with them.

**LH** considered there are too many steps in the process; species management plan process seems overly complex in relation to payment value. **POI** acknowledged the aim is to move pre-application process online.

### **AOB**

**SR** provided an update on the proposed early closure of legacy agreements. Aim to free landowners for new schemes; reduce staff admin burden. Risks acknowledged; that no guarantee that landowners will move into other schemes, loss of restrictions on land, but feel benefits expected to outweigh risks. Want to know from DAG members if there are concerns, or issues that we haven't considered. A December meeting is planned for deeper discussion.

**PO** welcomed proposal; current legacy payments are sometimes confusing. Removing obligations would simplify management and free resources. **GC** supported and noted issues where land sales have left buyers unaware of legacy obligations. Early closure would resolve these anomalies.

**JH** confirmed that the next meeting would be on 29<sup>th</sup> January **SL** would send out 2026 meeting invites.

Meeting ended 12:31