

Trees and Woodland Scientific Advisory Group (TAWSAG)

Meeting 30 Minutes: 26th November 2025 10:00 -12:00

Attendees

- **Rob MacKenzie** (RMK) - [Chair] School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Birmingham; Birmingham Institute of Forest Research
- **Ruth Mitchell** (RM) - [Chair] Biodiversity and Ecosystems Group, Ecological Sciences Department, James Hutton Institute.
- **Maggie Roe** (MR) - Landscape Planning Research & Policy Engagement, Newcastle University.
- **Keith Kirby** (KK) - Department of Biology, University of Oxford.
- **Julie Urquhart** (JU) - Environmental Social Science, University of Gloucestershire.
- **Paul Burgess** (PB) - Sustainable Agriculture and Agroforestry, Cranfield Soil and Agrifood Institute, Cranfield University.
- **John Healey** (JH) – Professor of Forest Science, Bangor University.
- **Stephen Cavers** (SC) - Ecology Evolution and Environmental Change - Centre for Ecology and Hydrology.
- **Martin Lukac** (ML) – Professor of Ecosystem Science, University of Reading.
- **Bianca Ambros-Oji** (BAO) - [Observer], Chief Scientist, Forest Research.
- **Richard Buggs** (RB) - [Observer], Kew Gardens, Plant Health Group.
- **Mike Morecroft** (MM) - [Observer], Principal specialist on climate change, Natural England and Visiting Professor, University of Reading.
- **Daisy Ellis** (DE) - Head of Strategy, Engagement and Analysis, Defra.
- **Dan Doherty** (DD) - Head of Trees, Woodlands and Forestry Policy, Defra.
- **Iain Dummett** (ID) - Evidence and Analysis Team Leader for Trees/ Forestry, Defra
- **Chris McGurk** (CM) - Evidence and Analysis Team for Trees/Forestry, Defra.
- **Alex Elsy** (AE) - Evidence and Analysis Team for Trees/ Forestry, Defra.
- **Richard Bridge** (RBr) - Monitoring and Evaluation lead for Trees/Forestry, Defra
- **Lucy Faber** (LF) - Monitoring and Evaluation team for Trees/Forestry, Defra
- **Morgan McGreevey** (MMc) - Monitoring and Evaluation team for Trees/Forestry, Defra
- **Andrew Crawford** (AC) - Strategy team for Trees/Forestry, Defra
- **David Edwards** (DEd) - Research Impact Coordinator, Forest Research
- **Sandra Angers-Blondin** (SAB) - Research Officer, Liverpool John Moores University

Apologies

- **Anjali Goswami** (AG) – Defra Chief Scientific Advisor
- **Ian Bateman** (IB) - Director of the Land, Environment, Economics and Policy Institute. University of Exeter.

Item 1: Welcome and Introductions

1. RMK welcomed attendees and thanked RM for chairing in his absence.

Item 2: Review Minutes From Previous Meeting

2. The minutes from the last meeting were agreed and the actions were reviewed
3. Review of previous actions:
4. Action: Share Forestry Programme business case – Defra confirmed that a component had been shared previously and that the full case could be shared if TaWSAG felt it would be beneficial. RMK confirmed the action was **closed**.
5. Action: Forestry team structure update, structure still under development, **ongoing**.
6. Action: WCPF extended note. Testing plan expected by February 2026 (potentially via email), **closed**.
7. Action: Programme evaluation slides have been circulated, **closed**.
8. Action: Evidence synthesis has been circulated, **closed**.
9. Action: New R&D proposals, **ongoing**.

Item 3: Updates from Defra

10. DE provided an update on Defra priorities and recent ministerial engagement, noting that publication of the Environmental Improvement Plan is expected this year.
11. Defra outlined updates ahead of the Programme Board meeting, including the introduction of a two-year planting window for Forestry England land acquisitions, progress on National Forests including the OxCam Forest and a future competition, and recent Tree Week activity, which was overshadowed by UNFCCC (climate) COP30.
12. DD confirmed Defra's responsibility for domestic forestry policy, with DESNZ leading on COP negotiations, and noted that the final COP text was considered acceptable.
13. AC introduced scoping work for a new Trees Action Plan, integrating tree health, resilience and forestry policy and aligned with the EIP, with lessons from previous plans informing development and long-listing of actions underway; publication is anticipated in late spring 2026.
14. Defra also provided an update on the Forestry Programme Business Case, including the introduction of the Woodland Carbon Purchase Fund, development of new National Forests and a Trees Outside Woodland Fund, ambitions to sustain planting rates above 10,000 ha per year, and a programme trajectory to 2029/30 with a transition towards business-as-usual. [Post-meeting note: TaWSAG members should be aware that RMK is sitting on the Design Authority Working Group of WCPF and will keep TaWSAG abreast of progress in general terms, whilst observing confidentiality.]
15. TaWSAG highlighted the importance of learning from previous plans, reflecting cultural and wellbeing values, and ensuring strong alignment across Defra policy.

Item 4: Multicriteria species selection project

16. AE introduced the project, noting that a provisional species list is expected by the end of March.
17. DEd outlined the methodology, including long-listing species by operational familiarity, assessment against eight criteria covering productivity, resilience, environmental impacts and end use, and the development of ranked lists using quantitative scoring supported by qualitative refinement.

18. The approach distinguishes between an operational shortlist and a reserve list to help prioritise future research and development.
19. TaWSAG discussion highlighted the importance of economic sustainability, the impact of evidence gaps on less-studied species, the need to prioritise R&D and silvicultural guidance (including mixtures), and questions around the future viability of productive forestry in parts of the south-east.

Action 1: Defra to consider how R&D priorities arising from this and related work can be advocated within UKRI.

Item 5: LJMU NCF TPP Indicators Portal and Report Refresh

20. RBr provided an update on the LJMU portal and report, which were due for publication later that week.
21. SAB (LJMU) outlined proposed social indicators, including measures of access to woodland using OS MasterMap and deprivation indices, alignment with Natural England access standards, consideration of footpaths and rights of way, and use of the Outdoor Recreation valuation tool (ORVal) to value recreational benefits.
22. TaWSAG welcomed the increased focus on social indicators, strongly supported the inclusion of footpaths and rights of way, and noted the challenges of incorporating wider wellbeing metrics within current timelines.
23. RBr noted that 73% of woodlands lack public access, underlining the importance of this work, and confirmed that JU will lead the final stage of the evaluation.

Item 6: Treescapes and Britain's Forest Future feed in session

24. JU summarised the conclusion of the UKRI Treescapes programme, noting £15.7m of funding since 2020 and delivery of public dialogue, academic outputs, conferences and impact materials.
25. The programme placed a strong emphasis on co-design, accessibility and knowledge integration, and reflected on regulatory barriers and challenges in translating R&D into practice.
26. Future opportunities include European partnerships and the potential development of a Treescapes network.

Item 7: AOB

27. Bex has returned part-time and is expected to attend a future meeting.
28. Update on R&D proposals: 43 short proposals received; feedback to be issued shortly. Reflections noted on the strength of relationships with research providers.
29. An ICF meeting on Ancient Woodland was noted.