

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Trees and Woodlands Scientific Advisory Group (TaW-SAG)

Meeting 32 Minutes: 7 April 2026, 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) – Biodiversity and Ecosystems Group, James Hutton Institute

Keith Kirby (KK) – Department of Biology, University of Oxford

Paul Burgess (PB) – Sustainable Agriculture and Agroforestry, Cranfield University

John Healey (JH) – Professor of Forest Science, Bangor University

Stephen Cavers (SC) – Centre for Ecology and Hydrology

Maggie Roe (MR) – Newcastle University

Ian Bateman (IB) – University of Exeter

Martin Lukac (ML) – University of Reading

Mike Morecroft (MM) – **[Observer]**, Natural England / University of Reading

Bianca Ambros-Oji (BAO) – **[Observer]**, Chief Scientist, Forest Research

Defra:

Richard Chapman (RC); Stephen Nelson (SN); Iain Dummett (ID); Rebecca McIlhiney (RMI); Chris McGurk (CM); Alex Elsy (AE); Emily Warner (EW); Chris Jacobs (CJ); Noah Forbes (NF); Louise Hill (LH); George Capstick (GC).

Also present: Glyn Jones (GJ) Fera; Jon Stokes (JS) The Tree Council; Nick Farrington (NFa) Cube Lynx; Richard Marshall (RMa) Great Yellow; Marya Moujahid (MMo) UKGI.

Apologies

Anjali Goswami (AG) – Chief Scientific Advisor, Defra

Julie Urquhart (JU) – University of Gloucestershire

Richard Buggs (RB) – **[Observer]**, Kew

Daisy Ellis (DE) - Defra

Richard Bridge (RBr) - Defra

Standing Items

A: Welcome and Introductions

RMK welcomed attendees and confirmed recording had started. Apologies were noted. New attendees were welcomed.

B: Review Minutes from Previous Meeting

Minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record, subject to minor corrections. The importance of ensuring sufficient time for review of meeting papers in advance of meetings was noted.

Actions reviewed:

- Forestry team structure – ongoing

C: Updates from Defra

Defra provided an update on current activity, including recent parliamentary activity, publication of the Land Use Framework and wider policy developments.

Updates were provided on progress with the new National Forest programme, including continued work on delivery arrangements for future forests.

Defra reflected on closure of the Nature for Climate Fund and noted recent lessons learned activity and ongoing pressures affecting woodland creation delivery. Work on the Tree Action Plan (TAP) is continuing, with further engagement planned with TaW-SAG.

Defra also provided an update on progress relating to emerging forestry species and ongoing work on governance and transparency arrangements.

TaW-SAG discussed links between programme objectives and climate outcomes, land use considerations, productive forestry and connectivity opportunities within future woodland creation programmes.

Action 1: Defra to bring Tree Action Plan actions to TaW-SAG in June for further discussion.

Action 2: Future TaW-SAG meeting to include substantive discussion of Land Use Framework implications for trees and forestry.

Substantive Items

1: Improving Tree Planting Outcomes Project

Defra introduced a project led by Fera and the Tree Council focused on improving understanding of tree planting outcomes through development of a standardised monitoring framework.

The project aims to improve understanding of tree survival and condition, identify drivers of mortality and support future monitoring and adaptive management.

Discussion covered:

- long-term ownership and governance of monitoring;
- definitions of successful establishment and survival;
- distinction between “dead” and “missing” trees;
- communication of realistic survival expectations;
- opportunities for future experimental work;
- inclusion of provenance, nursery factors and natural regeneration;
- opportunities for learning, citizen science and engagement.

Members strongly welcomed the project and supported further engagement as work progressed.

2: Ancient and Veteran Trees – Evidence and Definitions

Defra introduced work relating to proposed changes to definitions of ancient and veteran trees within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Discussion focused on consistency across policy approaches, challenges associated with assessing condition and implications for implementation. TaW-SAG reviewed the available evidence and supported the broader “age, size **or** condition” approach within the NPPF, while highlighting the importance of ensuring definitions remain evidence-based, practical to apply and aligned with wider policy frameworks.

Action 3: Members to submit any further evidence or comments on the rapid evidence review to Defra.

3: Woodland Carbon Purchase Fund (WCPF) – R&D Risk Map

Defra introduced the Woodland Carbon Purchase Fund (WCPF), outlining work to support woodland creation and improve long-term investment confidence.

Cube Lynx, Great Yellow and UKGI introduced modelling and risk-mapping work to inform fund design, including development of representative project archetypes and approaches to assessing investment risks.

TaW-SAG discussed:

- representation of landowner and investor behaviour
- treatment of low-likelihood, high-impact risks
- regional and species-level variation
- climate, pest and pathogen risks
- resilience and future woodland composition
- balancing model simplicity with practical application

The project team noted that the framework represents an initial iteration and would continue to be refined.

Closing Item

D: Any Other Business

The group discussed concerns relating to future arrangements for the UK xylarium collection and noted wider issues around strategic coordination of collections and infrastructure.

The group also discussed developments affecting the US Forestry Service and noted potential implications for forestry research and collaboration.

RMK thanked attendees for their contributions and closed the meeting.