

Meeting Notes

Title of Meeting:	Woodland Policy Enabling Programme CCG Meeting				
Purpose of meeting:	Meeting				
Location:	Telephone Conference				
Date:	Wednesday 26 th March 2014	Start :	18:00	End :	19:50
Attendees:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clive Coles (Save Sandlings Forest) • Imogen Radford (Save Sandlings Forest) • Bob Thacker (Save Sherwood Forest) • Anne Mason (Friends of Thetford Forest) • Alan Spidy (Friends of Thetford Forest) • Jack Ellerby (Friends of the Lake District) • Cheryl Mayo (Hands Off Our Forest) • Owen Adams (Hands Off Our Forest) • Tony Williamson (Defra Team Leader, PFE MO) • Simon Hodgson (Forest Enterprise England Chief Executive) • Thomas Fraser (Forest Enterprise England Project Support Officer) • Emma Friend (Defra, Domestic Forestry Policy) 				
Apologies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hen Anderson (Save our Woods) • Rich Daniels (Hands Off Our Forest) • Mark Funnell (Forest Enterprise England Head of Communications) 				

Agenda Item

Woodland Policy Enabling Programme: Cross-Border Functions Project

- This is the project to work out how to treat each function that currently operates across the England-Scotland border in the future. It is at an earlier stage than PFEMO project as it is dependent on the result of the referendum – the project team are currently preparing their thinking which they hope will be acceptable to all parties.
 - There was general agreement that this sounded reasonable. JE raised a concern about strain from Phytophthora Ramorum affecting the Lakes and parts of Scotland.
 - OA asked about arrangements with Wales. TW confirmed that these were in the scope of the project but the general position was already largely settled because of the establishment of NRW to manage forestry in Wales.

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• **Woodland Policy Enabling Programme: Forest Functions**

- There has been no significant change since Ministers announced the conclusions of the Forestry Functions review in January. SH confirmed that Ministers remain fully committed to maintaining forestry expertise within the Forestry Commission
- There has been some movement of responsibilities within FCE.
- The drive for changes is largely from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Programme which goes live next financial year (2015/16).
- Changes to Forest Functions and the implications of CAP delivery involve different agencies across Defra so FCE is not fully in control of the programme.
- IR asked how FS will handle the loss of Admin Staff with knowledge of Forestry.
 - This is an issue that was raised with Natural England early on in the process (2 years ago), especially with regards to how legacy grant schemes will be managed. This has been the subject of long-term debate. The issue is now starting to get more attention with Natural England.
- AM raised concerns that the Woodland Officers are not set to be the first in attendance to sites for grant application and that Natural England Offices will. Natural England Officers then decide whether or not a Woodland Officer needs to attend. AM thinks the decision on who initially attends could be based on the area of woodland to be considered.
 - The nature of the new scheme does imply a different way of working on the ground but **SH will (continue to) advise Forest Services of concerns expressed here.**

Woodland Policy Enabling Programme: Public Forest Estate Management Organisation

- There has been little change in the position since the January meeting. The 4th session Parliamentary programme is being considered by the Cabinet and their decisions will not be made public until the Queens Speech on 3rd June.
- CC pointed out that some members of some of the community groups have been writing to MPs, Ministers, Deputy PM and PM to make their opinions and arguments around PFEMO and the impetus for it known. The letters all seem to be getting bounced to Dan Rogerson (Minister for Water, Forestry, Rural Affairs and Resource Management). CC apologised for this as it was not the intention to increase the burden on him.
 - TW replied that letters are actually reaching him but this doesn't necessarily mean that the messages are not being noticed at higher levels. The well-articulated arguments in the letters are helping to emphasise that there is genuine community interest in forestry, not only 'radicals'. The same can be said of surgeries with local MPs.
 - It would be useful to copy TW into correspondence.
 - There is a correspondence unit which sometimes asks TW for advice on how to reply. On this particular issue TW recommends a reply from the Minister.
- **Timing of legislation** – assuming a decision is made by the Cabinet to proceed with the legislation, a draft for Pre-Legislative Scrutiny (PLS) would be most likely to be published shortly after the return of Parliament in September. After PLS, amendments to the draft legislation will be made, ready for the next Government.
- There was general surprise at the length of the legislative timetable and the gap between Queen's Speech and publishing draft legislation. It was explained that there are many Parliamentary procedures which are beyond the control of civil servants which affect the timetable.
- BT asked why Parliament has to be sitting for the draft legislation to be published.
 - TW replied that he believed that the draft needed to be published by his Secretary of State under a Command Paper, which can only be done when Parliament is sitting.
- IR pointed out there seems to be about a month between the Queen's Speech and Parliamentary Recess. And suggested the Command Paper could be issued then.
 - TW agreed this could theoretically be possible, but noted that the decision was not one that Civil Servants could take.
- CC asked if any current FEE business or new business developments would have to stop or be reined in prior to the formation of a new organisation (assuming it goes ahead).

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- SH confirmed that FEE is continuing to operate business as usual. Defra is not asking FEE to hold back on any of its usual activities, apart from the current suspension of land sales.
- IR commented that, despite the uncertain timescale, the PFE MO process has so far been much better than the NRW process.
- **Business Case** – This is being worked on in parallel with policy work. It went through an important hurdle before Christmas. The date for what should be the final Defra 'go-ahead' is yet to be confirmed. After this the business case will be sent to Treasury for approval (although they have been consulted throughout the process, and seem to have no major issues).
- There is a risk of the content of the business case getting out of date due to the time that it may take to form the PFE MO, however this has to be accepted and it will be updated in due course.
- IR asked when the business case will be made available.
 - It will probably be requested by the EFRA committee for Pre-Legislative Scrutiny. If so, it will be published then.
- BT and several others emphasised that a primary concern for the future of the PFE and the Management Organisation that runs it is that there is sufficient funding both initially in the long term. They would like to see some assurance and commitment to this in the forming of the PFE MO. This led into the discussion on Payments for Ecosystem Services.
- **Payments for Ecosystem Services** – This is an innovative way of formally agreeing with Defra how funding is to be deployed in the organisation. This is in step with Natural Capital Accounting and has been prepared with the input of relevant Defra colleagues. It would replace the current funding model. The new approach is intended to ensure that the funding clearly reflects Defra and wider Government policies. SH confirmed that he hoped to be able to share more details about the proposed model in due course.
- The payment level has not yet been agreed, but SH confirmed that the model is based on £22m. This reflects actual auditable costs incurred by FEE.
- The current Payments for Ecosystem Services model being worked on by FEE and Defra could be a good template for others to adopt.
- AM asked how the legislation drives what will be in the Payments for Ecosystem Services model.
 - Legislation would not address the ecosystems services model. It would set out the legal basis for the activities that would be reflected in a Payments for Ecosystem Services contract. This contract would then sit within the wider framework of the body's long term plans for the estate.
- AM asked how timber profits would be treated under such a model.
 - Market and Non-Market activities will be separated. The Payments for Ecosystem Services model will cover Non-Market activities only.
- JE mentioned that a nearby education centre closed down due to budget cuts and asked if education will be included in the Payments for Ecosystem Services Model.
 - Payments for Ecosystem Services covers 4 category of service: provisioning, regulating, supporting and cultural. In its current state, the model contains educational activities within the cultural category, although payment is only being modelled to cover what is currently done by FEE.

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Community Involvement Projects

- There are 4 projects currently running:
 1. Access to Forest Plans (West District)
 2. Involvement through Digital Media (National)
 3. Harnessing the energy of the Community – district level strategic direction (East District)
 4. Volunteering Initiative (Midlands District)
- There has been a general steer that the Project Officers should try to 'push the boundaries' – i.e. try lots of things that have not been done before, even if they aren't sure they'll work. There is the scope to do these things because the projects are all 'pilots' for FEE to learn from, there is no commitment that they will be continued in the long term if they do not deliver good results.
- **Project 1** – This project aims to make it easier for individuals and organisations to view and input to Forest Design Plans. There have been recruitment difficulties due to the general Civil Service freeze on recruitment. This means the Project Officer has only recently been appointed (about a week ago). As such, the project is in early stages.
- **Project 2** – This project has given rise to the 'Gruffalo' campaign and generally aims to make innovative use of social media. This has generated a significant increase in our list of contacts for electronic communications.
- **Project 3** – The Project Officer, Victoria Tustian, has requested that we plug a questionnaire she's running as part of this project. VT will distribute the link. Anyone can fill this in but it is tailored towards organisations, rather than individuals.
- **Project 4** – there are three new pilots within this project up and running. One has 2 open volunteering sessions on Tuesdays and Sundays at Hazelborough Woods. Composting toilets and common rooms have been established to accommodate the needs of volunteers. A recruitment drive is just beginning as initial work has centred on developing consistent policies and procedures for all FC Districts. This is because FC wants to be highly professional in managing its volunteers, and expects to provide them with consistent: learning, development, training, proper health and safety procedures and personal protective equipment.
- 332 responses have been received to a volunteer questionnaire, answered by those involved in volunteering on the PFE. The responses were overwhelmingly positive.
- There was a discussion around the best approach to managing volunteers. There seem to be various options and preferences ranging from doing it in house, working in partnership with others and working with Friends groups who manage their own volunteers with help and input from FC where its useful. There was a very strong view expressed from all those in the East district that contracting in a third-party volunteer manager (e.g. RSPB) to run volunteering across the District (or a similarly large area) rather than running volunteering internally would be a very bad idea. Everyone was agreed that it's very much a 'horses for courses' approach, with different approaches offering the best benefits in different locations and scenarios.
- MW will pass on specific views expressed on the different projects, and offers of assistance, to the Project Officers.

Close

- AM asked how they get the Minister to visit a Forest. EF and TW are working on this but he's had a very busy start to the job.
- **Action, all: the telephone conference is a new method of communicating for this group. Please send Thomas Fraser any feedback on how you think it went and how you'd prefer to be involved in the future.** There were some issues such as poor quality sound and talking over each other, but it saved a lot of time and expense in travel and accommodation. It also made it easier to fit around other commitments.