

Forestry England Board Meeting Agenda

10th October 2023 13:45 - 16:50

Central District - Riverside Hotel Branston

Attendees

Forestry England Board: Julia Grant, Amanda Grist, Tristram Hilborn, Peter Latham, Jennie Price, Chris Simpson, Mike Seddon, Richard Stanford, Alex Stewart, Gurch Randhawa, William Worsley (Chair)

In attendance: Mat Maguire via Teams (item 3), PK Khaira Creswell, Kerry Tromanhauser (item 6)

Secretariat: Rachel Mackintosh

Observer: Derrick Osgood

NO. / TIME mins	Start time	ITEM (Materials)	OUTCOME REQUIRED	LEAD
Welcome				
1. 10 mins	13:45	Chair's Welcome and Update		Chair
2. 5 mins	13:55	Declarations of Interest Approval of minutes, matters arising and action log. Matters Arising	For information	Chair
Items for Approval				
3. 15 mins	14:00	Commercial Sensitive		Mat Maguire
4. 15 mins	14:15	M05 Finance Report - mid year update	Discussion & Steer	Amanda Grist
5. 30 mins	14:30	Commercial Sensitive	Discussion & Steer	Amanda Grist and Tristram Hilborn
	15:00 - 15:10	10 min Break		
6. 70 mins (Optional 10 min break)	15:10	Commercial Sensitive	Discussion & Steer	PK Khaira- Creswell & Kerry Tromanhauser
7. 10 mins	16:20	ARAC Chair's Report	Discussion & Steer	Julia Grant



Management Accountability				
8. 15 mins	16:30	CEO report	Discussion & note	Mike Seddon and Tristram Hilborn
Concluding items				
9. 5 mins	16:45	AOB		Chair

Future meetings:	
19 March 2024	Board F2F
29 April - 1 May 2024	Visit and meeting - North District
2 July 2024	Virtual



Forestry England Board Meeting Minutes

18th July 2023 09:30 - 12:30 Virtual Teams meeting

Attendees

Forestry England Board: Julia Grant, Amanda Grist, Tristram Hilborn, Peter Latham, Jennie Price, Chris Simpson, Mike Seddon, Richard Stanford, Alex Stewart, William Worsley (Chair)
In attendance: Hayley Skipper (Item 3) Josephine Lavelle (Items 3 & 4), John Stride (Items 4 & 5) Florence Greenland & David Rose (Item 5)
Secretariat: Nadia Balasco
Apologies: Gurch Randhawa, Rachel Mackintosh

Agenda items

1. Welcome | Item Lead: Sir William Worsley

The Chair welcomed members to the twenty-second full meeting of the Forestry England Board.

There were apologies from Gurch Randhawa and Rachel Mackintosh.

Chair's update

The Chair updated on the following:

- The recent Commissioners meeting at Hovingham centred on the near final draft of FC Strategy and Corporate Plan.
- The recent deep dive discussion with the SOS which was progressive. Very good performance review with Trudy Harrison included discussions about presumption to plant, breeding waders, ministerial direction, ways of working, UKFS and Grown in Britain certification amongst other things.
- The Eustafor conference in Inverness, hosted by Forestry and Land Scotland, was extremely interesting. It was helpful to gain a European perspective on forestry.

Forestry Commission group updates were provided and noted. The successful enforcement action by Forest Services following the felling of 104 poplars at Cotswold Grange, County Park has recently concluded, resulting in a fine of £34,901.

2.1 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations for the meeting.

2.2 Approval of Board minutes

The minutes of the Forestry England Board meeting 11.05.23 and 26.06.23 were agreed as a true record.

2.3 Actions

The updated action log was reviewed and agreed, noting that all actions were closed. An update on the trail hunting action was contained within the CEO report, and to date we have not received a response from the British Hounds Sports Association, so trail hunting remains suspended in the nation's forests.

3. Our Value Proposition Lavelle

| Item Leads: Hayley Skipper & Josephine

Hayley and Josephine led the Board through the paper that asked for feedback to aid the ongoing development of our value proposition. The value proposition encompasses the broad range of opportunities for people to connect with forests including open access sites and community forests, as well as targeted outreach programmes, and paid for facilities and activities.

The discussion that followed noted:

- Helpful to see the numbers on benchmarking and understand costs for families or full cars. Cross referencing to EDI, there is no doubt that there are still some parts of English population not yet being reached.
- It was noted that 83% of sites are not charging for car parking.
- The cost of living crisis is making it harder for income generation but there is a need to continue to be innovative to increase our offer and prices, whilst increasing visits where there is capacity. It was encouraged to listen to people (e.g. new chair of Friends of Westonbirt) from other areas with commercial backgrounds who may have interesting and innovative ideas, as the current financial climate is likely to become harder in terms of income generation.
- The newly appointed Individual Giving Manager's previous experience will be helpful to make our proposition more meaningful to people.
- It was agreed that this was a very interesting and valuable paper. Chris added his personal observations, when visiting Forestry England sites, how valuable the extraordinary and fascinating staff are. This needs to be continually recognised.

4. Forestry England Impact Report

| Item Lead: Josephine Lavelle & John Stride

Josephine updated on the progress of the Impact Report which was still in development and invited the Board for their comments. The discussion that followed noted:

- The report demonstrated the breadth of Forestry England's work and it is aimed at stakeholders and prospective supporters and donors. Further thought as to audience was requested and how the report could also be a 'call to arms'.
- It was noted that whilst it was a brilliant idea and the pictures were excellent, some of the text felt underwhelming and perhaps more emphasis and excitement was needed on things such as; how many trees we have planted; how Forestry England/the nation's forests are exemplifying sustainable forestry and in some instances leading the way.
- It was also observed that there are gaps in content such as apprenticeships and women in forestry.
- It was acknowledged that there is a limit to what can be included, but overall the Board felt the information contained should be more emotive and exciting.

Action Items	Person responsible	Deadline
Impact report to be revised taking account of Board's feedback.	Josephine Lavelle	30/9/23

5. EDI/Forests for Everyone (FfE) | Item Leads: Mike Seddon, John Stride, Florence Greenland, David Rose

Mike noted that this item was being presented to the Board for an internal steer and for the Board to consider the progress so far and the proposed next steps.

- EDI agenda is crucial to Forestry England both in terms of our social impact and trading performance and quite rightly is a central aspiration for Growing the Future. The paper gives information about some of the actions that have been completed, some challenges faced, and work in the pipeline. The Forest for Everyone umbrella is driving the EDI programme and project. The last 18 months have seen significant strides taken to make the approach more cohesive with Active Forests, staff networks, and activities all being embedded across Forestry England.

The discussion that followed noted:

- The phrase ‘embedded’ is really important that this is not something ancillary or additional but that it is absolutely embedded in our culture and across business activities.
- Comments from Gurch welcomed Forestry England becoming an enabler and committed to supporting communities engage with forests and in some cases connect to their heritage.
- It was agreed that the paper was an uplifting read and noted that there were gaps with reference to risk. There is substantial risk to the organisation of not doing EDI well enough and one group not captured are lower social economic groups. Important to draw in people from more rural areas.
- There will never be complete equality, but specific deep dive surveys should clarify why things are happening and what is happening; this knowledge will help to convert the existing insight.
- David Rose informed that a Sikh programme ‘Reconnecting with nature’ will aim to bring the Sikh community back to their cultural heritage. There is a willingness from the Sikh community to work with Forestry England and progress will be shared in the next few months.
- There is a huge amount of resource being fed into volunteering, it was noted that perhaps this is an area that can be scaled up subject to affordability.
- It was noted that the Muslim Council are open to working with Forestry England. This is an opportunity to have discussions with Muslim schools, a group of Muslim ladies from Guildford and start to use this connection to strengthen connections. Relationship building and nurturing is key and will take time. This is not a tick box exercise, but about embedding in our culture, which will make progress for deeper, richer and long lasting.

William thanked colleagues for their deep commitment with the paper and discussion highlighting how crucial making connections with the right people is. There is much that the nations forests can give to people.

The Board agreed with the general principles of the paper.

6. M02 Finance Report

| Item Lead: Amanda Grist

Amanda led the Board through the M02 Finance report. She provided context for the year to date's performance. Currently £6.6 million worse than budget. The principal drivers being factors not within Forestry England control i.e. Inflationary pressures including Government pay award and one-off lump sum for staff.

The discussion noted:

- £800,000 lower profit from Forest Live due to lower ticket sales, decision to put on one less event and subsequent cancellation to one event due to severe weather conditions.
- £400,000 negative variance from other trading; - but relative to our peers performance on recreation and timber, is positive.
- Visitor numbers are holding, spend per head is increasing - ANPR roll out high on agenda and a priority focus.
- Potential timber pressures - unprecedented large parcel on market from Scotland, may impact the timber market in the north.
- Units have been tasked with absorbing the additional inflationary pay increases, so their bottom-line result is no worse than budgeted at the start of the year.
- £1.9 million bid currently with Defra against capital projects to be spent in year.
- Monthly and quarterly forecasting calls in place with unit managers to manage the fast-moving financial environment.
- Investment programme is paused at Haldon until there is funding. Continuing to ensure delivery of funded investment programmes.
- Reserves are sufficient to see the business through next year's business planning round, but the current situation does make it difficult to plan ahead with confidence.
- The October Board meeting will include a report on the considerations for medium and long-term financial actions and proposed strategic interventions.
- The trading structures paper with recommendations will also be presented at the October Board meeting.

6. CEO report

| Item Lead: Mike Seddon

Mike drew attention to the following:

- Currently two-thirds of the way through staff briefings. The mood is very positive across the country, well received, and absolute pragmatism in staff group about issues in wider world and within the organisation. Thanked Board colleagues who had attended.
- Very unusually, there are no outstanding submissions to ministers.
- All woodland creation acquisition requests are being cleared (within a week). Helpful as there is a tight schedule to get bids in.
- Mari and he are meeting with Defra legal on 28/07/23 to discuss decision making for non-forestry development work.
- Commended staff efforts on UKWAS surveillance audit which passed with flying colours and no major actions.
- Cannop Ponds remains quite a sensitive issue. Locally it has become quite personal for a small number in the community's and Kevin Stannard and team were receiving support to handle this.

- White Tailed Eagle is now proud parent to the first white tailed eagle chick for 240 years! Really good news, very exciting species and reintroduction is thriving!
- CITF overnight accommodation is a business focus area this year. Currently working way through tenders and broader strategy of overnight accommodation offer for pods and new camping sites.

Discussion points that followed:

- UKWAS and the Forest Standard. There is one key issue currently still in discussion around single species and the amount that is allowable. Scotland and Wales are content with the proposal, England are not in agreement.
- Jennie commended on a recent perfect visit to Cardinham Woods. The combination of engaged rangers on site, good facilities, the exceptional catering where the quality of the food the café is delivering was drawing a lot of people in.
- Update provided on the comprehensive approach with the engineering solution and timeframe for Cannop Ponds. Agreed immediate actions on upper and lower Cannop and have been discharged, working to spring 2024.
- Response times to health and safety incidents appear poor. It was explained that the time for investigating complaints compared to six months ago has reduced but there is still improvement to do on this. Timings are also linked to the speed for which incidents are being triaged in the system. There is an administrative issue that needs to be addressed.

In summary, William concluded this item and was pleased that Kevin Stannard and West Forest District are receiving the needed support and fully appreciated the challenges of being in that position. These are the real challenges in land management.

Action Items	Person responsible	Deadline
Provide a brief written update on progress with UKWAS v5 approval.	Tris Hilborn	31/8/23

7. A.O.B

| Item Lead: Mike Seddon

Mike updated on the outline plans for publication of the Forestry England sponsored Horizon Scan which is scheduled for late September. Allowing time for circulation and reading, we will explore hosting a discussion event in the New Year, possibly in conjunction with Institute of Chartered Foresters.

The discussion that followed noted:

- Richard asked for consideration to be given to timing of any event relative to any general election.
- Jennie requested Board members and commissioners to be briefed before publication.
- It was discussed that whilst this piece of work was commissioned by Forestry England, it will be presented in a way that combines the whole FC family.

Action Items	Person responsible	Deadline
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Schedule a 45 min, online, briefing session for the Board ahead of publication of the horizon scan academic review.	Rachel	30/9/23
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Meeting ended at: 11:45

10 October 2023

Paper Title: Commercial Sensitive

Under the freedom of information act 2000, exempt information this paper has been withheld from publication as per Section 43(2): Prejudice to commercial interests.

**If you wish to request this paper please contact Rachel Mackintosh at
Rachel.mackintosh@forestryengland.uk**

10 October 2023

Paper Title: Forestry England Finance Report

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