

Forestry England Board Meeting Agenda

18th July 2023 09:30 - 12:30

Virtual Teams Mtg

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: Rachel Mackintosh, Gurch Randhawa

NO. / TIME mins	Start time	ITEM (Materials)	OUTCOME REQUIRED	LEAD
Welcome				
1. 10 mins	09:30	Chair's Welcome and Update		Chair
2. 10 mins	09:40	Declarations of Interest Approval of minutes, matters arising and action log. Matters Arising	For information	Chair
Items for Approval				
3. 30 mins	09:50	Our Value Proposition	Discussion & Steer	Hayley Skipper and Josephine Lavelle
4. 15 mins	10:20	Forestry England Impact Report	Discussion & Steer	Josephine Lavelle and John Stride
5. 35 mins	10:35	EDI / Forests for Everyone	Discussion & Steer	Mike Seddon, John Stride, Florence Greenland and David Rose
	11:10 - 11:25	15 min Break		

Management Accountability				
6. 15 mins	11:25	M02 Finance Report	Approval	Amanda Grist
7. 30 mins	11:40	CEO report	Discussion & note	Mike Seddon and Tristram Hilborn
Concluding items				
8. 5 mins	12:10	AOB - Horizon Scan		Chair

Future meetings:	
9 - 11 October 2023	Visit and meeting - North District
6 December 2023	Virtual



Forestry England board meeting minutes

11th May 2023 09:00 - 14:00 The Ickworth Hotel, Horringer, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP29 5QE

Attendees

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

In attendance: Mari Sibley (Item 3,4), James Simpson (Item 5), PK Khaira-Creswell (Item 6) John Stride (Item 6)

Secretariat: Rachel Mackintosh

Agenda items

1. Welcome

| Item Lead: Sir William Worsley

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

There were no apologies.

Chair's update

The Chair noted:

- The Landowner's Roundtable enabled valuable engagement with customers.
- Parliamentary reception helpful for engaging with MPs.
- The decision of the Commissioners on a disputed case was with the minister for comment following a useful site visit with Commissioners and EB.
- Media profile has included the FC CEO on Today and Mail on Sunday, Chair on Sky Climate Show and a podcast to be published in June.
- Chair has given evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee on timber.
- Continuing to meet variously with Secretary of State, Minister Harrison, Natural England and Environment Agency.

Forestry Commission family updates noted:

- Forest Services: pushing to reduce time for tree planting submissions. Also noted the recent publicity around felling in Plymouth, these did not fall into FC remit as in a permitted development.
- Forest Research: Centre for Forest Protection launched with Kew.

Richard noted recent discussion with Secretary of State, the joint paper being developed with Natural England on Woodland Creation and the review of UKFS.

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 01.03.23 were agreed as a true record.

2.3 Actions

The updated action log was reviewed and agreed, noting that all actions were closed and those that requested items for future meetings were now in the forward look.

3. Defra-funded programmes

| Item Lead: James Simpson

James noted that this item was to update the Board on progress of four projects that were allocated £52m grant funding from Defra: Forestry England Woodland Partnership, Plant and Seed Supply Development, Bio-diversity and Forest Wilding, Access for All. In addition to be noted that further funds had been requested for Woodland Creation post 2025, to be confirmed. James noted that all programmes were innovative and ambitious with mitigation of risk in place. The biggest risk being to have enough people to deliver the programmes for which both upskilling of internal staff and looking to bring in external skills were taking place.

The discussion that followed noted:

- There is a great story to tell that ministers, not just Defra, should be hearing. It was noted that the focus is on delivery with a cautious approach to talking about the work until delivery was certain, and so some projects don't include a bespoke communication plan. However, the Growing the Future impact report will report on some of this in, in addition some projects eg Woodland creation and White tailed eagles do have engagement / communication posts. It was recognised that increased communication and engagement point is something to be considered going forward.
- Choice of wilding sites are from across the estate, not short of potential sites where districts want to introduce more natural processes.
- There are strategic decisions to be made between balance of interests: wilding commercial timber, people, and long term revenue costs, where some conifers will need to be removed, replaced with broadleaf or open space which will increase quality and resilience of the forests.
- Question asked to what extent was there flexibility to move between leasehold and freehold targets for woodland creation. Currently this is fixed as agreed with Defra, but there are regular reviews.
- The minimum size of acquisitions at 50ha+ noted, with a comment that smaller sites that link with exiting estate would be ok, but if isolated it would be much harder to manage. In addition, benefits of scale in the acquisition process noted.

4. Official Sensitive: Commercial item

5. Principles for Managing Forestry England's residential Portfolio

| Item Lead: Mari Sibley

Mari noted that this item was coming to the Board for an internal steer on a possible management approach and strategic principles for the future management of the residential property portfolio. She noted that internal drivers were looking for a better return on investment, whilst the external drivers were coming from legislative changes. As a result we are undertaking a condition survey of all properties, results in to date indicate that the optimal return against objectives would come from diversification of the portfolio to include some leisure letting alongside residential. The Board's steer on this approach was requested.

The discussion that followed noted:

- Board supported diversification of use of the residential portfolio, informed by national policy and objectives, local area need, and location, and agreed need for long term approach and strategy over 20-25 years recommended. It will need to consider on a property by property basis.
- Residential property is a challenge for all estates, noting additional challenge of EPC, that although we have the benefit of crown immunity, we aspire to meet the spirit of Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard.
- Holiday lets are location dependant, but in prime location should be doing this. Mari gave example of successful holiday let in Lake District.
- It was noted that there are properties in a location where we want to retain ownership but to consider if best case is to demolish existing building and rebuild on site or potentially elsewhere.
- Noted there will be net cost and to consider setting aside money each year for the investment.
- The link to reputation important to note.

The Board agreed with the general principle to diversify the property portfolio. The Board agreed it wished to view a business case modelling the diversified portfolio.

6. Growing the Future Annual report

| Item Lead: PK Khaira-Creswell / John Stride

PK introduced the item asking the Board to provide a steer on the proposed reporting of the progress made with Growing the Future objectives. She noted that we are in a good place with all areas moving forward whilst operating in a challenging external environment. John outlined the proposal for two reports: one internal facing that would be more detailed with information for senior leaders to inform decision-making. The second would be a short colourful externally facing impact report aiming for publication aligned with the publication of the Annual report and accounts.

The discussion that followed indicated there was agreement with the approach of two reports aimed at different audiences. General agreement that the external report is about sharing the story of our work. The following steers provided for the internal report to help in finding the balance of success and challenges, encouraging honest conversations with teams:

- Look at whole as sum of parts as there are numerous cross-overs - eg sustainable finance. We should be confident in telling our story.
- In the internal facing report don't miss the opportunity for a judgement piece pulling out learning and experience of the past two years to inform review of strategy. Consider including risks in internal report.
- Important to take staff on the journey, so good to have the positives but also need to consider constraints in a difficult year. There is a lot of culture change and this is an opportunity to share experiences.

7. M12 Finance report

| Item Lead: Amanda Grist

Amanda led the Board through the M12 Finance report. She provided context for the year's performance. The year was ending £7.5m in deficit, which was £6.4m better than budget with the benefit of the Forest Holidays sale. There had also been an additional £10.5m funding from Defra and the Forestry Commission in support of Plant health and capital projects of which £3.8m was finalised in M12. Costs were noted, including the 41% increase in civils driven by external factors.

The discussion noted:

- The successful action to control debtors.
- Clarification was sought on the £1.4m partnership lease. Amanda to follow up.
- It was noted the FTE v budget gap was expected to narrow but was remaining static, so this needed to be taken into account in the budget which was noted and already being progressed.
- Noted that looking forward the concern was recreation being able to deliver its plans. It's known to be tough condition and SLT are working more closely to monitor and respond to change.
- The performance on Christmas lights was queried, Tris noted the market changes and a new partnership is in process for this, but the programme is being considered carefully to be able to prioritise where to place resource and consider new offers e.g nets.

Action Items	Person responsible	Deadline
Clarify the 1.4m partnership lease in the Cash Flow statement	Amanda	18.07.23

8. CEO report

| Item Lead: Mike Seddon

Mike drew attention to the following:

- Woodland creation. The move to include freehold in the targets provided greater confidence in reaching targets. It had involved a huge amount of effort from the team to achieve.
- Submissions to the minister. A change in guidance means that where we used to go direct to minister submissions now have to go through policy and legal teams in Defra, with the accounting officer unsighted on the legal advice going to ministers from Defra. The current handling arrangements for non-forestry developments is also in question by the legal team. This is posing a huge challenge and risk to us.
- There is a challenging situation in the New Forest, with a threat of judicial review which could curtail our ability to act. Legal advice is being sought and Mike is engaged in meetings to see if a resolution can be found.
- Mari Sibley Director of Estates and Legal, is leaving Forestry England at the end of July.

The discussion that followed included:

- Further detail to understand the position with Defra legal and steps being taken to resolve it.
- The departure of the Head of PSS, and impact on the programme work. Tris provided an update on recruitment of replacement and assurance of the management measures being taken to minimise impact on the development.
- Update on the proposed pay settlement discussed and progress of Your Offer.
- The partnership with Sport England and successful application for Access for All funds welcomed.
- There was concern raised about a new corporate partnership and potential greenwashing, and that we need to be prepared for potential publicity on this. Mike confirmed that the team had been through the due diligence assessment and felt this could be managed.
- The successful multi-faith multi-generational tree planting at Wing Wood noted and thanks passed on. It was noted that with an increasing % of population from different ethnic backgrounds there were different relationships with trees that would need to be considered in future plans.



- Mike confirmed there was no update to report on the Board's request for information in regard to trail hunting. He would pick this up with Mari.
- Update on Cannop dams - had been through consultation stage with public engagement. It is now at a sensitive stage and the Board to be aware there was a small group with a personal campaign against individuals which may need to be escalated internally, and the individuals supported.

Tris led the Board through the Health and Safety report and noted the training the board had received with the consultant on the Look Out and Look after project on this visit and requested any feedback on the discussion.

Action Items	Person responsible	Deadline
Follow up with Mari latest position on trail hunting	Mike	18.07.23
Provide reflections on the H&S session to Tris, as appropriate	All	18.07.23

AOB

Mike noted the successful Horizon Scan event that had been held in April in partnership with Cambridge University in Cambridge. There had been huge engagement from 50 expert contributors who had given their time. The timeline was for publication in a journal in Sept / Oct and results were embargoed until then. There would be various opportunities for the Board to engage with the result and discussions emerging from it to which they will be sent invites. A launch event is also being planned with more information on that in due course.

The meeting ended at 11:50

BOARD PAPER

Paper Title: Forestry England's Visitor Value Proposition

Author/Presenter: Josephine Lavelle, Director of Marketing and Engagement
Hayley Skipper, Director of Operations - Commercial Visitor Development

Paper Requirement:

Decision Required	For Approval	For Steer	OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE- Commercial-Until published
		X	

Content

1. Purpose and context

To provide information to the Board about Forestry England's visitor value proposition within the context of challenging economic conditions and conditions within the wider outdoor leisure sector.

2. Recommendations

The Board is asked to note the information in this paper about Forestry England's value proposition to visitors to the nation's forests. The Board is asked to discuss and provide feedback to aid the ongoing development of our value proposition.

3. Our value proposition to visitors

Forestry England provides health and wellbeing for all through connection with nature in our nation's forests.

Forestry England provides safe access to greenspace, woodlands and forests close to where people live. We offer a broad range of opportunities for people to connect with forests including open access sites and community forests, as well as targeted outreach programmes, including those demonstrated in the 'Equality and Diversity and Inclusion' paper presented at this meeting.

These are in addition to the charged activities and facilities that help generate the commercial income that enables Forestry England to deliver our social purpose.

Forest centres provide an affordable day out for families and our target audiences.

Forestry England provides a superb offer, resilient infrastructure and outstanding customer service to ensure recreation experiences are accessible, enjoyable and memorable.

Forestry England's Visitor Access:

83% of sites provide non charged access

17% charge for car parking

Income is reinvested in the forest to maintain the facilities, however the majority of sites with car parking charges do not currently produce a surplus.

4. Current consumer climate

We are operating in an uncertain economic and political environment. Many new opportunities and threats are presenting as a result of the country emerging from the Covid pandemic, the ongoing war in Ukraine, rising inflation and interest rates impacting household costs, including food, energy and mortgages. Households are facing the biggest squeeze on their income in a generation.

Improving mental and physical well-being continues to be increasingly important to the nation and many more people discovered the benefits of being in nature during the pandemic and post lockdown. Forestry England saw record numbers of people using our forests to enhance their wellbeing during the pandemic. From a post-pandemic year high of 363m, visits to the nation's forests have reduced back to 291m last year. Through our new Visitor Marketing Strategy we are seeking to ensure visits to our nation's forests are optimised during peak and off peak periods.

Decision House research on leisure activities 2023

The cost of living crisis means that I will ...

- 66% do fewer paid for leisure activities
- 67% look for more free activities
- 67% stay closer to home for leisure

Sector stats from the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions members, including Forestry England

- Over 1/3 of members have been working with pricing agencies and are introducing premium pricing.
- 50% of members plan to put up entry prices, ranging between 2 - 20%. People continue to prioritise spending on experiences before goods and still want memorable, special experiences, with special people, in special places.

How competitive and affordable is our provision?

We benchmark our pricing through tariff optimisation reviews and sector wide. We provide exceptional value for money, quality of facilities and range of outdoor recreation offering.

Forestry England charges for entry through car parking. There is no charge for anyone visiting on foot, by public transport or by bicycle.

Westonbirt, The National Arboretum is our only paid for entry site. Westonbirt runs an access scheme to ensure affordable access for local community groups who would not otherwise be able to afford access.

Comparable organisations in our sector charge entry fees. For example, the sites with similar facilities at a RSPB reserve is £4-9 per adult, often in addition to parking charges, or £13.59- £17.50 per adult for Wildfowl and Wetland Trust visitor centre sites. National Trust paid for entry sites also have additional car park charging for non-members and will typically charge a minimum of £3 per day for small rural locations at their coast and countryside sites.

The visitor experience survey results for 2022 show that 89% of our visitors would recommend/promote our sites to others and 96% responding that the sites are either excellent or very good safe, welcome and enjoyable places to visit.

Forestry England's Visitor Value Proposition

The environment is the most liked aspect of their visit with relation to scenery, trees, paths and tracks, peace and quiet and the space.

Encouraging low-cost repeat visits

We have well established local memberships schemes at 33 sites in England. The annual cost ranges from at £25 to £77 per year.

In June 2023 we launched Forestry England's first ever national membership offering. This allows a car full of people to visit any Forestry England forest, and a family ticket to Westonbirt. Competitively priced at £94 for 12 months it is only £7.84 per month and represents exceptional value for money. It is currently only available as an annual payment, but we are working at establishing a monthly direct debit option.

Family memberships, inc. two adults, at comparable organisations are priced at £120 for English Heritage, £146.40 National Trust and £127 at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

We also provide a range of free educational self-led activities to print at home at no cost to the individual. These help achieve learning targets and also encourage repeat visits.

Our Sport England supported Active Forests programme has been highly successful in broadening the range of activities available on site. 6.3million active visits were achieved in the last phase, increasing repeat visits and dwell time, whilst reaching a wider demographic of visitors and increasing physical activity.

2023 -26 Visitor Marketing Strategy

In June we launched our new Visitor Marketing Strategy.

Key objectives

- Raise awareness of Forestry England as leading organisation providing destinations for leisure visits.
- Drive visits all year round to generate income.
- Signpost visitors to other ways they can support us such as membership, donations and merchandise.

The main changes from the previous 3 year Strategy are:

- 1) A focus on both peak and off-peak visits, the previous strategy focussed on off peak, to increase volume year round.
- 2) In addition to our 'Den Builder' and 'Activity Hunter' segments, we will shift our focus from the older 'Easy Pacer' audience to 'Hipster followers'. This is as a result of the changes we saw in our audience in the pandemic and will help to increase the diversity of our visitors and encourage a focus on a more urban audience who may not have accessed the countryside in the past.

Messaging themes are

- Value for money: Showcasing that we offer good value for money through the provision of low cost activities and signposting to membership:
 - Stretch the day - cross promote activities, both ours and our on-site partners', and develop messaging about 'spending the whole day'
 - Develop low cost itineraries for all key audiences
- Forests are good for your wellbeing: Highlighting the wellbeing benefits of spending time in forests:
 - Develop more wellbeing themed resources and products

Forestry England's Visitor Value Proposition

- Use case studies and insights to tell the story of the wellbeing benefits of forests
- Putting forests first: Showcasing the beauty of our special places and the reason why activities are better in the forest:
 - Update and improve use of imagery
 - Use case studies and insights to showcase why forests are better for activity

The strategy will be monitored and evaluated regularly with real time improvements to ensure it is as effective as possible.

Media strategy

We have been successful in developing positive relationships with key journalists across a broad range of media outlets. A notable example being 'The Sun' who regularly feature our children's trails as examples of low cost or free family activities.

Increasing Dwell Time and Secondary Spend

Introducing new products, activities or services at sites that align to our organisational objectives and recreation model, generates increased visitor dwell time and secondary spend on site, and ultimately resulting in improved visitor offer and increased revenue to Forestry England to ensure that we can deliver quality experiences for all.

For example, after a successfully trial of Forest Nets at Sherwood Pines and Moors Valley Country Park and Forest that generated an annual income value of £125,000 per site, direct income to Forestry England through rent and additional car parking charges and value of Adventure Forest Limited (AFL) investment. The first nationally run, 'Pay to Play' tender for Tree Based Nets was completed in March 2023. 15 offered sites, to be rolled out over the next 7 years, were awarded to AFL, with the public facing name, Go Ape.

Tenders for new commercial experiences are now being planned, which will meet the following criteria;

- Be commercially viable, securing long-term additional revenue to Forestry England.
- Align with the needs and requirements of our target audiences, market segmentation profiles and Visitor Marketing Strategy.
- Demonstrate a core objective to connect people with trees and nature while providing products, activities or services that people want to experience and enjoy in the forest environment and landscapes; ensuring we create a distinctive offering that maximises the uniqueness of our distinctive forest landscapes.
- Compliment our existing offers and experiences, creating a balanced approach that does not detrimentally affect the potential for current or new partners through overt levels of competition in relation to onsite customer secondary spend; new businesses will share data and proactively work Forestry England to explore joint marketing opportunities.
- Ensure commitment to delivering new products, activities and services that assist Forestry England in achieve our equality, diversity and inclusion goals and will exemplify best practice in accessibility to ensure they cater for all audiences and communities.
- Spatially fit with our forest design plans and masterplans while not distracting from the special qualities of the forest, and the reasons that people visit.
- Provide high profile, flagship destination products, activities, or services at a limited number of locations e.g., forest coaster, big zips, viewing towers, or less bespoke and lower capital investment opportunities with an ability to be scalable across a wider number of sites delivered by one or multiple partners e.g, tree/structure climbing, bouldering or on the ground games.

Conclusion

Forestry England have a broad portfolio of opportunities for the public to engage at different price points, including a large proportion of non-charged sites and activities and a broad range of offerings and secondary spend opportunities. Benchmarking and evidence ensures that our proposition presents excellent value for money and will result in the ability to reach a wide demographic.

5. Resource implications

There are no additional resource implications associated with this paper.

6. Risk management

The key risk is the balance between the ability to maintain income levels to invest in keeping Forestry England's offer fresh, relevant and competitive, whilst providing low-cost experiences to ensure the broadest possible demographic are able to access Forestry England forests.

7. Equalities analysis

Programmes or individual campaigns produce individual EQIAs relevant to the work area.

8. Communication

Excellent communications are an intrinsic part of ensuring visitor value and awareness as noted earlier in the paper.

Please list any documents attached as appendices here.

Author Josephine Lavelle and Hayley Skipper

Title Director of Marketing and Engagement and Director of Operations - Commercial Visitor Development

Date 11/07/2023

BOARD PAPER**Paper Title:** Forestry England Impact Report**Author/Presenter:** Josephine Lavelle**Paper Requirement:** For Steer

Decision Required	For Approval	For Steer	OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE- Commercial-Until published
		x	

Executive Summary of key points and action required

The Board previously agreed the proposal to publish a Forestry England Impact Report. A draft Impact Report is available for Board perusal and comment prior to publication.

Core messages for the non-executives to promote

Forestry England's work across 2022-23 generated significant, positive social and environmental impact throughout England. This work is summarised in our Impact Report.

Content

1. Purpose and context

The Board previously agreed the proposal to publish a Forestry England Impact Report. A draft Impact Report is available for Board perusal.

2. Discussion

This is the first time Forestry England will publish an Impact Report. The aspiration is that it is a highly accessible and easily readable summary of our main achievements during the previous financial year, linked to the publication of our formal Annual Report and Accounts.

We aspire it is an upbeat and honest reflection and hence the inclusion of some of the challenges faced. It aims to positively influence readers and engage them with Forestry England's work, engendering support.

The draft version of the Impact Report, attached, is undergoing final design adjustments but is a close representation of what we anticipate publishing.

3. Recommendations

The Board is asked to review the draft Impact Report, provide any comment, and approve its progression to publication on Forestry England website and distribution to key stakeholders and supporters.

4. Resource implications

The Impact Report has been created and can be disseminated using existing resource.

5. Risk management

There are no major risks associated with the content or recommendation of this paper. The Impact Report is a factual summary of our work during 2022-23 and in case of adverse comment can be rationalised in that context.

6. Equalities analysis

Not applicable.

7. Communications

The Impact Report will be published on ROOTS and Forestry England website and distributed to key stakeholders and supporters.

8. Attachments

Please list any documents attached as appendices here.

Draft Forestry England Impact Report.

Josephine Lavelle

Director of Marketing

11 July 2023

Agenda Item 5 Forestry England Board 18 July 2022 Paper 5.1/Jul23**BOARD PAPER**

Paper Title: Equality, Diversity & Inclusion across Forestry England

Author/Presenter: Florence Greenland, David Rose and Jacob Waller, PK Khaira-Creswell (SRO)

Paper Requirement:

Decision Required	For Approval	For Steer	OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE- Commercial-Until published
		X	

Executive Summary of key points and action required.

The Board set the strong challenge for Forestry England to step up and fully embrace the mission of connecting everyone with the nation's forests; to better understand who we are engaging with now and who we are not and take the action necessary to be a fully inclusive organisation, more representative of the communities we serve.

Across the spectrum of stretch ambitions within Growing the Future, this is among the most challenging, with the potential to be the most societally impactful.

We understand the potential of this aspiration, including for our business sustainability and growth, our accountability, our brand and our achievements of all other Growing the Future outcomes for wildlife, for the climate and for increasing the natural capital value of the nation's forests.

We have fully taken on this challenge. We have put in place the structures needed to have cross-functional, impactful change that is embedded in our culture and our systems. We are investing in our understanding to inform decision-making and where to focus our actions. We are acting now to make changes and try innovative ways of engaging and connecting to start this change now and gain momentum.

Over the past 2 years, since the launch of Growing the Future, we have delivered a lot, we have learned a lot and we have identified challenges we need to overcome to succeed.

This paper provides an overview of our action to increase the diversity of visitors and staff, to more fully reflect the communities we serve.

The Board is asked to consider the work being done along with the supporting data analysis appendix. We ask for your reflections on our approach; progress so far; and for your advice on any obvious gaps or next steps in our approach.

Content

1. Purpose and context

Forestry England is on a transformative journey to strengthen Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) across the organisation, building on and consolidating the many successful diverse activities that already take place across the organisation.

EDI is both ethically vital and a strategic advantage for a successful, high-performing organisation. It is intrinsic to the success of our aim to connect everyone with the nation's forests and our goal of increasing the natural capital value of the nation's forests, contributing to Forestry England's long-term sustainability and success including employee engagement, strong community relationships and greater innovation to forest and land management.

Staffing falls under the broader Forestry Commission approach, and Forestry England has contributed to this important area through recruitment improvements and participating in staff networks to foster an inclusive culture. Through Forests for Everyone critical steps have been taken, and by leveraging projects and improving connections between programmes, we can amplify our impact. In this endeavour, having the Forestry Commission Diversity and Wellbeing manager as part of the Forests for Everyone steering group ensures collaboration across the FC, with their expertise and guidance contributing to shaping an inclusive future for Forestry England.

Ask of the Board:

We value the experience and advocacy of the Board. Can you identify blind spots and areas that would benefit from more attention or connection? By leveraging the Board's expertise, we can maintain an effective and impactful approach to our goals.

2. Examples of EDI action across Forestry England

Here we illustrate the broad range of actions being taken across Forestry England to respond to this challenge. Whilst we have had programmes and projects aimed at achieving some improvement for EDI throughout our history, over the last couple of years we have been able to bring greater cohesion to our approach. Forests for Everyone acts as a values-led umbrella, clearly stating our intention to be a fully inclusive organisation. Through this initiative we have established networks where teams and individuals can share best practice and learning. We have provided accountability and governance to projects to help them achieve objectives and we have commissioned new action to fill gaps identified in the 2020 Forests for Everyone report.

While some activity happens outside of the governance structure of Forests for Everyone, the projects remain aligned with the Forests for Everyone values and are a part of our journey to connect everyone with the nation's forests.

Access for All: Supported by funding from Defra, this aims to improve accessibility across Forestry England's sites, ensuring that individuals of all abilities can enjoy and benefit from experiences in the nation's forests. By implementing accessible pathways, facilities such as changing places, and services such as the acquisition and provision of welfare facilities for volunteers with mobility challenges. Forestry England is actively removing barriers and promoting inclusivity. Highlighting the impact of Access for All through testimonials and success stories will provide compelling evidence of positive change.

Active Forests: Provides opportunities for communities to engage in physical activity and well-being practices in forest settings. As Active Forests moves into its next phase, 'Removing Barriers', it focuses on promoting physical health and offering opportunities for social interaction and connection with nature, benefiting mental well-being. The ongoing work with Sport England, a partnership that has been running since 2014, and sharing of the positive impact on individuals' lives through personal accounts and testimonials are further reinforcing the impact of this targeted work. One project in this series, Inclusive

Photo removed

Forests, aims to improve the inclusivity and accessibility of our forests that are closer to underserved communities. Forest Runner also improved gender inclusivity this year by including a non-binary gender in the signup process to acknowledge and accommodate diverse gender identities. It was fantastic to see Forestry England's Inclusivity work recognised as the winner in the Favourite Trail Race category in the Women's Running

Magazine 2022 Reader Awards, and our 'highly commended' status in the Favourite 10k Race category.

This mum runs: We've teamed up with This Mum Runs, the world's largest running community for women, to inspire people to '*find a group of girls and run with the girls*'. This inspiring video ([video link](#)) tells the story of how this impacts people.

Forest Live: Forestry England's outdoor concert series has improved accessibility and inclusivity for customers. Tickets for all events offer an option for individuals with a disability to enjoy the events from accessibility platforms and carer's tickets can be obtained for free to ensure those with such needs can enjoy the events safely. Our Forest Live Access Statement can be seen [here](#).

Community Woodlands: Wing Wood, Pleasant Forest, and York Community Woodland exemplify the power of collaborative working in the development of new woodlands, involving partnerships with communities and various stakeholders. These projects provide opportunities for local people to actively participate in volunteer planting days, where they contribute to tree planting and gain a deeper understanding of the woodland design and plans. Through the acquisition appraisal process as well as the planning and design of our newly created woodlands, we are undertaking natural capital assessments which help

us to understand the relative scale of various benefits delivered including biodiversity, timber and for people. By using such tools, we can ensure our new woodlands optimise value to the local communities they serve, through their location, accessibility and design.

[**Pictured:** Over 50 people from different faiths ranging from 8-70 years attended the Wing Wood event.]

Photo removed

Website Accessibility: Forestry England is currently improving its website to enhance accessibility for users with physical disabilities. This ongoing three-phase development project includes various enhancements such as improving colour contrast, adding lines and boxes to show links, providing clear guidelines to editors for using headings, ensuring keyboard navigation usability, and implementing user-friendly filters.

Design guides: Forestry England, in collaboration with The Sensory Trust, has introduced a design guide for inclusive woodlands as part of its holistic approach to site development.

Photo removed

This practical guide has been created by the Landscape Services team and aims to support Forestry England staff involved in enhancing the accessibility of sites for individuals of all ages, backgrounds, and circumstances. It specifically benefits site managers, landscape architects, civil engineers, and other staff responsible for site infrastructure audits, equality impact assessments, or securing external funding. In applying this principle to our sites, our aim is not to ensure that everyone has access to high quality experiences in the nation's forests.

Influencer Marketing Strategy: The national Digital Team is developing a standardised Influencer Marketing Strategy to ensure consistency across all business activities. This strategy aims to mitigate potential issues such as pay disparity, ad hoc contract agreements, legal paperwork mismatches, bias in selection, and insufficient due diligence. The strategy also focuses on amplifying underrepresented voices and utilising platforms like Basecamp and TweetDeck to monitor influencer activity. Forestry England has engaged with 12 internal stakeholder groups and is embarking on a 12-month pilot period that will include several innovative influencer activations. Currently, there are 145 contacts in the influencer database, 22% of which actively talk about diversity in their output. This piece of work will positively impact EDI as all influencers will have the same brand experience with Forestry England, despite their background or identity.

Earth Photo 2023: Forestry England facilitates and leads the annual Earth Photo competition, an international exhibition and award program showcasing captivating photography and moving images that tell stories about life on our planet. This event features exhibitions at prestigious venues like the Royal Geographical Society and a national tour of Forestry England sites. The program includes awards such as the Forest

Ecosystem Award and the We the Forest Publication Award which specifically promote the participation of diverse practitioners.

Flock Together Partnership: In collaboration with Flock Together, a birdwatching collective for people of colour, we organise events focused on walking, birdwatching, and artists' interventions. This interdisciplinary collaboration involved the Arts, Media, and Active Forests teams and showcased the importance of diverse representation in creative endeavours. The partnership has produced films, images, and a blog capturing the experience and inspiring others to join in.

[Flock together Partnership video.](#)

We The Forest Book: Forestry England is producing an internationally significant book that explores the contemporary art and science of forests. This book, co-produced with Cultureshock, features diverse artists from around the world and includes scientific perspectives. It serves as a communication tool for Forestry England's Growing the Future vision and Forests for Everyone value, fostering engagement and acting as a legacy.

Jason Allan-Paisant Writing Workshop: In collaboration with Radar, the University of Loughborough, and wireworks artists, Forestry England Arts is organising a writing workshop led by Jason Allan-Paisant. The workshop, taking place in Shining Cliff Woods between Sheffield and Derby, aims to break down barriers in accessing forest spaces and encourages creativity among participants, particularly writers from diverse backgrounds.

The Community Access Scheme at Westonbirt Arboretum: Demonstrates the diverse range of actions being taken within and outside of Forestry England. The scheme allows visitors who would otherwise face barriers to visiting the arboretum independently, to come and enjoy all the well-being and mental health benefits that this special place has to offer.

<https://www.forestryengland.uk/community-access-scheme> <https://www.forestryengland.uk/westonbirt/community-programmes>

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Forestry England's career offer: a review is currently underway of the career pages on Forestry England's external website. This will look at how information on a variety of ways to start a career in forestry can be featured alongside specific roles advertised on the civil service jobs website and the Forestry England Graduate leadership programme. Featuring the full range of career entry points at Forestry England will convey that our recruitment process is based on ability rather than specific qualifications or experience and will signpost candidates accordingly. By increasing the diversity of candidates that we appeal to, we are increasing the chances of having the skills and talent Forestry England needs to succeed, now and in the future.

Engaging Young People: Forestry England is actively engaging young people with forestry-related careers through various materials and resources. These include banners, posters, postcards, and interactive displays for career fairs and events. The materials highlight

different job roles and provide detailed information on career pathways, emphasising the link between subjects studied in school and forestry careers.

Reviewing EDI training for volunteers: Forestry England is undertaking a review of the current EDI training provided to volunteers to ensure its effectiveness and relevance.

Workplace practices: Forestry England is actively working on enhancing workplace practices to promote diversity and inclusion. This includes the development of a toolkit for meetings and events that considers various aspects such as timing, catering, and social aspects, considering diverse dietary requirements and religious observances. These initiatives aim to foster an inclusive environment where all employees feel valued and accommodated, regardless of their backgrounds or personal preferences.

Staff Networks: Forestry England's commitment to inclusivity extends beyond external projects, as evidenced by the relaunch and refresh of our staff network groups. These groups, including the Rainbow Canopy, REACH (Race, Equality and Cultural Heritage), Disability, Neurodiversity and Carers, and the Women's Network, promote open and honest conversations and foster a welcoming culture within Forestry England. By actively engaging with staff, we demonstrate our dedication to creating inclusive environments, breaking down barriers, and providing equal access to nature and well-being opportunities for all individuals.

Forests for Everyone Network: We have established an active and open space for people from across Forestry England to share their experiences, their work, learning and

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challenges when it comes to EDI actions and initiatives. The success of the network is helping to foster the Forestry England-wide culture of togetherness and cohesion in this work. In June we held our first in-person meeting, including colleagues from across Forestry England as well as Forestry Commission and Forest Research. This event was met with huge enthusiasm. The connections made between people and the visible and authentic leadership shown gave people the confidence to keep pushing and keep striving for change.

Forging cross-government collaboration: Starting within the Defra Group, we are talking to Natural England to explore ways to engage and support them with the successful deployment of their new posts specifically resourced to increase the diversity of people engaging with nature.

A systems approach: Alongside the direct action highlighted above, we are also working on our core supporting structures to evolve a fully inclusive approach to systems such as complaints handling, risk management and knowledge and information management through our data strategy. This systems approach will further embed the cultural change needed to make impactful improvements for the long term.

3. Learning and Challenges

As we can see, the action being taken so far is very broad; across many different parts of our business, targeting change in different ways, funded through various streams. All this great work illustrates the growing momentum, enthusiasm, will and desire felt by everyone across Forestry England to make this a success.

This scale of action has highlighted further challenges and the governance structure of Forests for Everyone allows us to track our response to these challenges, and identify further actions needed to make us accountable for the effectiveness of our mitigating actions.

Here we describe the key challenges identified:

Capacity of expertise

Our goal is to ensure that EDI is integrated into a comprehensive approach that becomes an inherent and sustainable aspect of the entire organisation. To achieve this, we have taken steps to enhance our work and increase available resources. We have brought in individuals with extensive expertise, including David Rose, Forests for Everyone Community Programme Manager, Lucy Fox, Community Outreach Ranger in Central District, and Wali Rahman as the Forestry Commission Diversity and Inclusion Manager, supporting Forests for Everyone in pan-FC work. Their contributions have made a significant impact on our progress. However, it is important to recognise that even the most knowledgeable individuals have limitations in terms of what they can deliver. While their expertise has been invaluable, there is still a great deal of work to be done. Given the amount of work ahead, we must prioritise our engagement and activities based on the availability of resources.

Communications

Changing the perception that forests and the outdoors are exclusive spaces that are most relevant for the white middle class is a significant challenge. The culture of change within Forestry England is now gaining momentum with Forests for Everyone helping with confidence in promoting inclusivity. However, there is a need to effectively bring together local initiatives to tell the story that our work has a national impact and build the understanding that the nation's forests truly are for everyone. We need to take a more campaigns-based approach nationally, using the local delivery activities.

The realistic pace of change

We must avoid time-limited, programme thinking, and rather develop sustainable ways of working and lasting partnerships. Developing partnerships with communities requires time, understanding, and a genuine approach that avoids superficial timelines and program-driven approaches. Instead, our approach is focused on real change, authentic partnership and collaboration. Forests for Everyone provides an effective platform to drive change, shift cultural thinking, and be bold in our approach. While this opportunity to make a significant difference is challenging, the initial conversations with communities have been positive, with volunteer groups expressing willingness to explore and develop opportunities with Forestry England. We anticipate seeing further results in the next 6-9

months as momentum builds, in the form of growing examples of doing things differently, working with new people in new ways and learning more about how we evolve to succeed.

Data and insight

Robust data management systems and addressing data management challenges are both needed to ensure leaders can make informed choices and track the impact of their initiatives accurately. Our data will be gathered into a coherent Diversity Dashboard, reporting annually to better understand the quantifiable impact of our work to supplement the qualitative feedback and case study evidence we are also collecting. As we gain experience from the actions we take and the networks we develop we will learn new ways of quantifying impact. Ensuring we are able to grow the scale and scope of our diversity data in response to this learning whilst being able to show an evidential and coherent picture of progress will be an ongoing challenge. Achieving this will provide valuable insights for informed choices and help drive learning and understanding in collaboration with external partners and communities.

Learning from the Forests for Everyone Network Workshop

During the Forests for Everyone Network Workshop held in June, Forestry England colleagues shared the challenges and obstacles encountered on their EDI journeys (as well as best practice and successes of the last year). The workshop identified various challenges, including improving work/life balance, promoting collaboration, empowering staff, and sharing EDI experiences through partnerships. Additionally, addressing non-visible disabilities and incorporating lived experiences into decision-making processes were identified.

To tackle these challenges, effective strategies were identified, including clear communication with line managers, dedicated behavioural skills trainers, and support networks for learning. Building relationships and fostering a common understanding of barriers between national and local experiences require concerted efforts. The participants agreed on the importance of representation, acknowledging cultural challenges, embracing learning from mistakes and promoting workplace innovation as key drivers of cultural change in Forestry England. EDI is perceived as a shared responsibility across the entire organisation, emphasising the need for a balanced approach that considers both local relevance and national amplification of messages. The workshop has highlighted a mix of short, mid and long-term changes, improvements and key issues that will inform the next phase of Forests for Everyone.

Next steps

- Implement the next phase of Forests for Everyone, drawing on the best practice and wider learning from completed projects.
- Develop a toolkit for meetings to ensure diversity and inclusion is considered in relation to timing, catering and social aspects of meetings including diet and religious observance.
- Understanding our current offer for youth (volunteering, events, learning, partnerships, career pathways) and considering what we mean by youth engagement, looking at how we develop a strategic and impactful approach in the context of EDI.

- Continue to develop new national and regional partnerships to help inform and deliver customer and volunteer-focused programmes.
- Deliver specific projects as determined through collaboration with religious groups, specifically Sikh Channel cultural activities, the Muslim Council of Britain, and the Association of Muslim Schools' education projects.
- Develop a programme of delivery that builds on current and recent partnerships (such as Muslim Hikers, Wonderers of Colour, Black Train Runners, Flock Together) where Forestry England plays a key role in bringing likeminded groups together through our programmes.
- Develop co-educational projects where religious groups are welcomed and educated in forestry and staff are provided with learning about a particular group's culture and experience.
- Use social media more effectively to engage with diverse audiences and ensure that our platforms are fit for purpose and accessible. This project will consist of six subareas: social media management, digital advertising, email marketing, influencer marketing, videography, and photography.
- Introduce a reverse mentoring scheme for colleagues with senior leaders and managers.
- Increase the number of facilitators to deliver 'Equally Yours' training, adding new open sessions and advertised across the FC.
- Develop our approach to gathering and using data, as outlined in the annexe to this document and the creation of a diversity dashboard.

4. Recommendations

Forestry England has made significant strides in strengthening Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) across the organisation. We believe we are making an impact, but we know we are at the start of this journey and there is much more to be done, especially in respect to diversity.

The Board is asked to consider the progress and approach along with the supporting data analysis appendix. We ask for your reflections on the activity so far and your steer on any obvious gaps or opportunities in our approach.

5. Resource implications

There are no additional resource implications associated with the recommendations of this paper.

Forestry England's EDI initiatives require adequate resources to ensure their success and sustainability. We have increased staff resources towards Forests for Everyone in recent business plans and will seek to increase resources as self-generated or externally sourced finances allow. Potential areas for increased resource include, training, outreach, communications, partnership development and data management.

6. Risk management

In implementing the EDI initiatives, Forestry England must adopt a proactive approach to risk management and put in place mitigation to ensure the success of various initiatives.

These risks may include:

- resistance to change
- inadequate resources, limiting capacity to carry out events or projects
- insufficient buy-in from stakeholders
- potential backlash from staff, volunteers or the public (online or in person)
- failure to meet the diverse needs of the communities
- failure to fully understand the needs of communities

7. Equalities analysis

Projects and Programmes complete an EqlA individually.

8. Communications

There are no new communication recommendations associated with this paper. The various communication platforms and groups within Forests for Everyone demonstrates a commitment to effective communication, engagement, and collaboration of EDI programs and projects. Here are the key elements and benefits of these ongoing communication strategies:

Forests for Everyone Network Group: With representation from all Staff Networks and those leading EDI projects and wider, this network promotes inclusivity and diversity within Forestry England. It serves as a platform for staff members to connect, share experiences and learning, and collectively work towards the shared values and purpose of the organisation.

Programme Leads Group: This group, comprising members from various external and internal-facing programs, facilitates collaboration and coordination across different functions. It ensures that EDI efforts are integrated into all relevant programs and strategies, enhancing our integrated approach to inclusivity and diversity.

EDI Communication Group: This cross-cutting group which has members from the whole of the Forestry Commission focuses specifically on communication strategies, events and campaigns related to EDI. It ensures that our messaging is consistent, impactful, and reaches the intended audiences effectively.

Everyone Belongs Panel: This panel, spanning the entire Forestry Commission, provides a platform for diverse voices and perspectives to contribute to the EDI initiatives. It fosters collaboration, ensures representation, and facilitates the sharing of ideas and feedback across the organization.

Dedicated Webpages and SharePoint Site: By providing dedicated webpages on the staff intranet and using the Forests for Everyone SharePoint site, Forestry England can share best practices, lessons learned, and specific project progress. This enables staff members

to access valuable resources, stay informed, and understand what successful EDI implementation looks like.

Social Media Engagement and Events: Engaging with communities through social media platforms and hosting virtual or in-person events fosters open dialogue, encourages participation, and allows for feedback and experiences to be shared. This helps create a safe and inclusive environment where individuals feel valued and heard.

Cross-government EDI Forum: Quarterly engage in meetings with cross-government colleagues and have also made links with a Defra-based EDI Unit. We now want to strengthen these relationships as we move into the next phase of Forests for Everyone to share learning and best practice as well as influence and demonstrate the role the nation's forests are playing.

9. Attachments

1. Paper 5.2 EDI [Data analysis - Annex 1](#)

Author: Florence Greenland
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Date: 19th June 2023

18 July 2023

Paper Title: Forestry England Finance Report

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**

18 July 2023

Paper Title: CEO Report

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**