

## Q & A for the Study of the Forestry Commission Estate in England

### Why is this needed now?

The study is directly in response to ETWF and the launch of its Delivery Plan that is expected soon. The Delivery Plan identifies a central role for the Forestry Commission Estate in England (FCE-E) both now and into the future.

### Hasn't this been done before and therefore isn't this just an expensive waste of time and money?

This has not been done in England before, although a similar study was undertaken in Scotland in 2003. In England the Forestry Commission's estate has evolved considerably in response to public policy. In June 2007 the Government's new Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests was published and the Delivery Plan will be published shortly. It is, therefore, timely that we take a strategic look at the estate in order to set out a distinctive and sustainable role for it in the context of ETWF.

### Does it cover other central or local government owned woods - e.g. MoD, Natural England, Local Authorities?

No, it only covers those woods that the Forestry Commission manages in England.

### Does this mean that public access to the FCE-E is under consideration again?

No, the vast majority of freehold woodlands of the FCE-E are dedicated under CROW Act 'in perpetuity', regardless of any changes of management or ownership.

### Will the study look at examples from abroad?

Yes, if appropriate, it will. There are a number of examples of state owned/managed woodlands from which we can draw comparisons that may inform our thinking.

### Will the Forestry Commission's Regional Advisory Committees be involved? If so, how?

Yes. RACs and their chairs will be fully briefed as the study progresses and they will be engaged through the consultation process. We gave them an oral update at the Chairs Meeting in November and we will be seeking the views of the Chairs on how they would like to be involved soon.

### Regional Forestry Frameworks (RFF) contain references to the role of the public forest estate. Will there be an RFF connection in the study?

The regional dimension is not directly covered by the Terms of Reference for the study. However, we would expect the outcomes of this study to be reflected as our regional working extends for example as we develop Forestry Commission regional strategic plans and as we facilitate the updating of RFFs.

### Does this mean the estate could be sold off?

This study is not being driven by the need to sell woodlands. It will be looking at the appropriateness of changing the nature of the estate we manage in light of new policy areas. This will include the balance of acquisitions and disposals. We manage the estate on behalf of the wider public and the Government, and it is appropriate that we consider how the estate, which reflects past policy, should evolve in light of current policy and future drivers for change.

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Will the FCE-E continue to focus on timber production as a major source of income or will it diversify into other areas, such as providing woodfuel to help achieve the Woodfuel Strategy for England?

Timber continues to be an important source of income to the Forestry Commission. However, the current spread of income is already much wider than traditional timber markets. The timber produced from our woodlands and forests is important to the processing sector and this importance will need to be captured in the study. As to woodfuel it is highly likely to be considered by the study – renewables have a particular emphasis in public policy, for example the recent consultation on the Renewable Energy Strategy but we cannot pre-empt the study to suggest what it might recommend.

Won't this just be a long list of new things to do with no new money?

A key element of this study is financial sustainability. Financial sustainability will, therefore have to be a test for any recommendations made. This does not mean finances are likely to get any easier as the drive for continuing efficiency is one that is happening across the public sector. It is important, however, to stress that financial sustainability will be a core part of this process.

How will the PAWS restoration and open ground habitats be addressed?

The study will not engage in the detail of response to the Keepers of Time Policy nor the developing Open Habitats policy. However, it is likely that they will be included in considerations of the strategic direction of the estate.

Who is in charge of this study and how will recommendations be made?

The Forestry Commission's England National Committee is in charge of this study and they will be very much keeping in touch with it. If you want to know who is on the Committee use this link <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-6p2j62>. It is this committee that will receive recommendations from the working group and then it, in turn, will make recommendations to Ministers. The Working Group will make its recommendations based upon the research work, other data and the response to the public consultation, including a series of events and their own discussions and deliberations.

Will this study be seen to have credibility by others, and achieve its aim, if the Forestry Commission is doing it?

It is true that the Forestry Commission is facilitating the process but there are a number of elements that are being built into the process to bring demonstrable rigour and objectivity. We will be forming a high-level and independent working/reference group to support the study and to be outward facing. This group will include a wide cross section of interests including Defra, the industry, biodiversity and social interests. In addition we will be commissioning independent research as well as data collection. There will also be a public consultation.

Will the existing staff working on the FCE-E be involved in the study?

Yes, we are developing plans through which the existing staff will be involved. These will include sharing information on the Internet at [www.forestry.gov.uk/england-estatestudy](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-estatestudy), by regular communication through Cost Centre Managers and directly through local discussions. In addition we are establishing an internal advisory group to support the study. The membership of this group will be broad and we will let you know who is in it. This group will help us capture all relevant information, to improve the way we work and to communicate better internally. Finally we have established an Intranet site [http://alpacorn.forestry.gov.uk:7777/portal/page?\\_pageid=33,1327098&\\_dad=portal&\\_sch\\_ema=PORTAL](http://alpacorn.forestry.gov.uk:7777/portal/page?_pageid=33,1327098&_dad=portal&_sch_ema=PORTAL) to hold Q&A information (as it is now and as we update it) and other items

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that are specifically internal – e.g. membership of the Internal Advisory Group when it is confirmed.

### How are we represented on the Working Group?

Laura Jones, national Forestry Commission lead for the study, who is seconded from her Regional Director SW position, will be on the Working Group as will Brian Mahony, Head of Sustainable Forestry & Land Management.

### How long will it take?

We hope that the study itself will take around 12 months, leading to the England National Committee then making recommendations to the Minister.

### How will I be kept informed of what is happening?

We have started an Internet page ([www.forestry.gov.uk/england-estatestudy](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-estatestudy)) which will note the key milestones in the process and where we have got to at a given time. In addition we will be working through the Cost Centre Managers and other team leaders to keep you informed. If you are part of the Cambridge, Bristol or York national office teams we will ensure you are also kept in touch with the process.

### How does this relate to the consultation taking place in Scotland?

There is no direct link between the two pieces of work. The Study in England has been under discussion with Ministers for a number of months and was included in the corporate plan and the Our Plans version of our corporate plan that you will have received <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-corporateplans>. The work taking place in Scotland is entirely separate and the details can be viewed at [http://alpacorn.forestry.gov.uk:7777/portal/page?\\_pageid=33,1343182&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://alpacorn.forestry.gov.uk:7777/portal/page?_pageid=33,1343182&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL).

### Q. What is the Pre-Budget Report?

A. The Pre-Budget Report is an annual part of the Government's Budget Cycle. It has occurred since (1997). The Pre-Budget Report sets out some of the intentions for the subsequent year's budget.

### Q. Why is the FC included in the PBR? Is it normal?

A. The Forestry Commission is not normally referred to specifically in the Pre-Budget Report although the strategic matters in previous reports have had an impact on us. A recent example is when new Public Service Agreements were set out in the Pre-Budget Report which we have subsequently referred to in the England Trees, Woods and Forests Delivery Plan (to be published shortly).

The Treasury refers to the Forestry Commission in this Pre-Budget report in the context of the Operational Efficiency Programme (OEP). This Treasury-led process was launched at the beginning of July. It is relevant to all public services including the Forestry Commission and is part of the Government's strategy for delivering improved value for public money.

### Q. What is the Operational Efficiency Programme?

A. The Operational Efficiency Programme is part of the Government's ongoing strategy to deliver better value for public money. It is the next step in a series of cross – public sector reforms which started with the Gershon Review in 2004.

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The Operational Efficiency Programme has 5 strands of which one is looking at Asset Management. The other strands cover: back office and IT; collaborative purchasing; property (office based); and local incentives and empowerment. If you want to know more then look at this website [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/vfm\\_operational\\_efficiency.htm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/vfm_operational_efficiency.htm)

**Q. Is the Study of the Forestry Commission Estate being done *because* of the Operational Efficiency Programme?**

A. Plans for a study of the Public Forest Estate in England, made in response to the publication of the new forestry strategy last year, pre-date the launch of the Operational Efficiency Programme and appeared in our Corporate Plan published in June 2007. The Public Forest Estate Study will contribute evidence to the Operational Efficiency Programme as findings emerge.

**Q. How will the Study of the Forestry Commission Estate relate to the Operational Efficiency Programme?**

A. The Study follows on from the publication of the new forest strategy last year and was planned before the launch of the Operation Efficiency Programme. A strand of the Study will contribute evidence to the Operational Efficiency Programme as findings emerge.

**Q. Does the Operational Efficiency Programme apply to the Forestry Commission in Scotland and Wales**

A. No, forestry is a devolved matter.