



SUSTAINING ENGLAND'S WOODLANDS

A consultation on Forestry Commission support for
sustainable woodland management in England

CLOSING DATE FOR RESPONSES: 28 JANUARY 2002

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FOREWORD

I believe that the time has come to look again at the way the Forestry Commission supports sustainable woodland management in England. The aspirations of the *England Forestry Strategy* and the *UK Forestry Standard* need to be backed by a well-designed support system, and one tailored to the needs of England.

I am also conscious that the Forestry Commission is only involved with the management of around 30% of privately owned woodlands in England. We need to understand the perspectives of owners with whom we are not currently engaged, and find ways of getting as many woods as possible into sustainable management.

This is not just a grants review, because I recognise that grants are not the only way to support sustainable woodland management. We must deploy the full range of support mechanisms which could achieve our aims and which are valued by woodland owners. And for the first time, this review gives England the opportunity to develop support mechanisms which fit its own woods and its own circumstances.

The Steering Group has put together this consultation paper which seeks your input to the review. I hope that you will put forward your ideas on how we develop the support for private woodland owners in helping them deliver sustainable woodland management and the aims of our *England Forestry Strategy*.

ELLIOT MORLEY MP – ENGLAND'S FORESTRY MINISTER

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "E. A. Morley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping final letter.

OVERVIEW

1. This consultation seeks your views on how the Forestry Commission (FC) should support the sustainable management of woods and forests outside its own estate. This means, for example, woodland in private ownership and woodland owned by voluntary bodies, businesses and public bodies other than the FC.
2. This consultation is aimed at anyone who has an interest in the sustainable management of woodland in England. It applies only to England, and is about the sustainable management of existing woodland. It does not apply to the creation of new woodland.
3. The paper deals with a very wide range of issues and it is, by necessity, a long document. It has been divided into four sections to make it easier to read and to respond:

Engagement and sustainability

The first section looks at how the FC engages with woodland owners, and how the FC could help to ensure that forestry is sustainable in economic, environmental and social terms. This section is likely to be of interest to most of those responding to this consultation.

Support for management

The second section looks at how the FC could remove some of the barriers to woodland management that may be faced by woodland owners. It also looks at current grants and asks for views on them. This section is likely to be of interest mainly to those now involved in woodland management.

Partnership and targeting

The third section looks at how the FC should work with partners and target action to achieve the Government's priorities for forestry. This section is likely to be of most interest to those involved in forestry at a political or organisational level.

Priorities

The fourth section asks about priorities for FC support. All respondents are encouraged to complete the table for this section in the questionnaire.

4. There are 35 questions in the consultation, each preceded by background information. You are invited to respond to any or all of these questions using the questionnaire provided, and your responses are needed by 28 January 2002. *For more information on how to respond, please see Part 2 of this consultation paper (see p.5).*

PART 1 – INTRODUCTION

5. This consultation is your opportunity to suggest how the Forestry Commission (FC) should support sustainable woodland management in England. The Forestry Minister, Elliot Morley MP, announced a review of this support in April 2001, recognising that many woods are currently either undermanaged, or are not managed at all, so may not be delivering their potential range of benefits to their owners or to society. This review is an important step towards modernising the way that the FC works with owners, and your views on the way forward would be of great value.

6. This review is looking at the support given by the Forestry Commission to forest and woodlands other than those managed by Forest Enterprise on behalf of the FC itself – those which are owned by, for example, private individuals, businesses, the voluntary sector and public bodies outside the FC.¹ Support given to creating new woodland is not part of this review. Grant aid for woodland creation in England is being reviewed separately with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

The *UK Forestry Standard* was published in 1998 and sets out the Government's approach to sustainable forestry. It was developed following international work, such as that at the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of European Forests, in Helsinki in 1993, which defined sustainable forest management as:

'The stewardship and use of forests and forest lands in a way, and at a rate, that maintains their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality and their potential to fulfil, now and in the future, relevant ecological, economic and social functions, at local, national and global levels, and that does not cause damage to other ecosystems.'

The *England Forestry Strategy*, published in 1998, sets out the programmes and priorities for the Government's support for forestry.

It recognises that forestry provides particular benefit to society in four major areas:

- Rural Development
- Economic Regeneration
- Recreation, Access & Tourism
- Environment and Conservation

7. The review seeks to develop a framework of support that promotes sustainable forest management. This is concerned with more than sustainable timber production long practised by foresters in this country. It also extends to management which reflects the broader principles outlined in international agreements, such as those at Rio and Helsinki, and described in the *UK Forestry Standard* (see Box). These principles recognise that forest management must not only meet today's needs, but must also protect forest resources for the needs of future generations.

8. Sustainable forest management, indeed, takes into account ecological needs, such as protecting forest ecosystems, and social needs, such as public recreation. To be truly sustainable, however, forest management must also take into account economic needs. Against a background of recent and continuing falls in timber prices, this consultation asks for your suggestions to ensure that all three parts of sustainability are in place, recognising that all three parts are mutually interdependent.

9. Sustainability can sometimes be achieved in the absence of active management, and certainly without the involvement or support of the FC. It follows then that the FC is neither seeking to bring all woods into its sphere of influence, nor to bring all woods into active management. However, there is wide recognition that neglecting woods leaves them vulnerable to deterioration and decline, and that active management can, where appropriate, be extremely beneficial, offering dividends for woodland owners and for society. These benefits are outlined in the *England Forestry Strategy* (see Box). Any framework of FC support needs to engage owners in looking after their woodland in the best way for the wood, for the owner and for society, whether or not this involves active management.

¹ 'The Forestry Commission' refers to the entirety of the organisation, including its agencies, Forest Enterprise and Forest Research, in so far as they can be used more actively to help support the management of non-Forestry-Commission woodland. This review is not about shifting resources (e.g. staff) from Forest Enterprise or Forest Research to the management of woodland outside the Forestry Commission estate.

10. The goal of the FC is to achieve tangible results for woodlands and their owners as soon as possible. It is therefore primarily looking at ways in which the FC can improve the use of its own resources, and those of its partners, in supporting sustainable management. Wider changes, such as adjustments to the tax system, may well be able to play a part in supporting forestry, and you are invited to comment on such matters later in the document. However, while suggestions would be welcome, bear in mind that they are outwith FC powers and could take much longer to reach the implementation stage. Considering them should not distract from tackling issues where real progress can be made in the short term.

The current situation

11. There is just over 1 million hectares of woodland in England, of which approximately 20% is owned or leased by the Forestry Commission. No comprehensive records of the owners of the remaining 800,000 hectares of woodland exist, but the number of individual owners is likely to be of the order of a hundred thousand.
12. The FC has good quantitative information about England's woodlands from the National Inventory, but has little qualitative information. Work is under way to develop national indicators of sustainable forestry, which will give a baseline and permit monitoring of changes over time. Until the results of such monitoring are available, the main measures of sustainable management are involvement in current grant schemes or felling licences operated by the FC, and information from certification. Of the woodland which is not owned by the FC, it emerges that no more than 30% of it can be demonstrated to be in sustainable forest management. It is by no means necessarily the case that the remainder is not being sustainably managed.
13. The FC in England provided £18.6 million of grant and partnership support in the financial year 1999/2000, of which around £8.5 million went to grant aid for existing woods (as opposed to woodland creation). In addition to direct grant support, the FC supports woodland management in other ways, such as providing advice to owners, though sums used in this way are small compared with the grants budget. This, whatever views you may have as to its adequacy, represents the current FC financial support for existing woodland management in England. However, as raised later in this consultation paper, there may be real opportunities to involve additional resources from other agencies.

The future

14. FC support for woodland management outside its own estate has changed greatly over the years. Support is increasingly being targeted toward the provision of public benefits. Forestry is contributing ever more to the wider aims of Government. In addition, numerous other bodies play their part in supporting woodland management.
15. There is a wide range of ways in which the FC might better be able to support sustainable management, and the length of this consultation document reflects the complexity of the issue. However, you may feel that some of the areas suggested are inappropriate for FC support, or are not a high priority. Please answer as many or as few of the questions as you wish.
16. *The review is managed by a Steering Group, whose members are listed in Annexe 1 at the end of this document. Their Terms of Reference can be found in Annexe 2. The responses to this consultation will be used by the Steering Group to inform their recommendations to the Forestry Commissioners in May 2002.*

PART 2 – HOW TO RESPOND

17. This consultation is aimed at anyone who has an interest in the sustainable management of woodland in England. In considering how to take forward this review, the Steering Group would welcome your responses to this consultation paper by 28 January 2002. A questionnaire has been included at the end of this document, and you may wish to use this for your response.
18. If you are responding on behalf of a representative organisation, please state which people and/or organisations you represent. If your response comes from a regional perspective, please tell us which region. The analysis of responses will be made public – if your comments are confidential, please make this clear at the top of the first page of your response.
19. Please send your responses to any or all of the questions raised in this consultation paper, or any questions that you have about the review to:

Jo Ellis
The Forestry Commission Telephone: 01483 838447
National Office for England Facsimile: 01223 460699
Great Eastern House
Tenison Road Email: jo.ellis@forestry.gsi.gov.uk
Cambridge CB1 2DU

20. Additional copies of this consultation paper can be obtained from the address above, in paragraph 19, and it is also available on the Forestry Commission's website at www.forestry.gov.uk/consultations
21. A series of regional consultation meetings has been arranged during November 2001. If you would like to attend any of these meetings, please contact your local Forestry Commission Conservancy office on the number shown. The dates and locations for these meetings are:

North East England	01669 621591	6 November
North West England	01768 776616	
Southern area		8 November
Northern area		22 November
Yorkshire & Humber	01904 448778	14 November
East Midlands	01673 843461	22 November
West Midlands	01905 761220	29 November
East England	01842 815544	21 November
South East England	01420 23337	
Hants, W. Sussex, Surrey		6 November
Kent, East Sussex		8 November
Berks, Bucks, Oxon		22 November
South West England	01626 890666	
Southern area		15 November
Northern area		30 November

22. If you have complaints or comments on the arrangements for consultation, please send them to Barry Sidaway, Policy & Secretariat, (at the above address in paragraph 19), or by email to barry.sidaway@forestry.gsi.gov.uk.

PART 3 – THE CONSULTATION

Section 1: Engagement and sustainability

23. The first section of the consultation looks at how the FC engages with woodland owners, and how the FC could help to ensure that forestry is sustainable in economic, environmental and social terms. This section is likely to be relevant to most of those responding to this consultation.

Developing understanding and engagement

24. If the FC is to encourage sustainable woodland management, those involved need to have an appreciation of the concept, and should wish to be engaged in delivering the economic, environmental and social strands of sustainable management. They must be supported by the wider public – who are often unaware of why woodland is managed, and the potential benefits that can result from active woodland management.
25. The FC at present is only involved with the owners of around 30% of non-FC woodland, mainly through their participation in current grant schemes or felling licences operated by the FC. However, there are numerous woodlands whose owners are not involved with the FC but where the FC would particularly like to see appropriate woodland management. These may include, for example, certain ancient semi-natural woodlands where conservation can be enhanced, or some woodland close to towns which may be able to provide recreational benefits. Later in the consultation is a question about how the FC should identify its priorities for this engagement.

- Q.1 Do woodland owners and the wider public need to know more about what sustainable woodland management means? If so, what should be the FC's role in achieving this?
- Q.2 How can the FC engage with the owners of woodlands where it sees appropriate active management as being a priority for sustainability? What are the main barriers preventing engagement?

Economic sustainability

26. A significant proportion of income from woods is from timber sales. Woodland management and processing directly supports 14,500 jobs in England, many of which are related to the harvesting and processing part of forestry. Sixty per cent of these jobs are located close to the forest, thereby helping to provide rural employment. However, timber is a global commodity and prices for most products are determined on world markets: world timber prices are at an all-time low. Only products with niche markets can avoid this. Woodland owners and managers often cite low timber prices as a reason why woods are not managed.
27. The contribution of timber production to economic sustainability depends on the quality of the raw material, and it may be that measures to improve timber quality could have a part to play in supporting sustainable management. Furthermore, it has been suggested that support could be designed to assist individuals or woodland-related businesses with the harvesting, processing and/or sale of woodland products. There are many ways in which this could be achieved, and your suggestions are welcome. Current mechanisms under consideration include grants towards the capital cost of harvesting machinery or the cost of thinning, support for small woodland enterprises and research into improving working methods. In addition, it may be that Forest Enterprise could play a role in co-operative marketing of produce from woodlands.
28. The economic sustainability of woodland management might be improved by developing the potential of markets for a range of products, services and uses – for example wood as fuel, charcoal, low grade timber, and by encouraging the use of timber grown close to the point of use. This support could be through promotion, technical development, market appraisal studies or other means. The FC has for many years involved itself in such work.
29. Woodlands provide many other products and services besides timber, some of which are readily saleable. Shooting rights have for many years provided an income from woodlands, while new forms of recreation are increasingly seen as commercial opportunities. Many woodland owners have no experience in exploiting their woodlands for commercial gain, and there may be opportunities for the FC to share its extensive experience in providing woodland recreation.

30. Woods provide great benefits to society, and when economists value some of the 'non-market benefits' (such as landscape value, wildlife or public access), it becomes clear that, in many cases, the wider public receives more benefit from woodland management than does the owner who provides those benefits.
31. However, for woodlands to be sustainable, it is essential that the rewards from looking after them outweigh the costs to the owner. In many (but not all) cases, this will mean that management either makes money for the owner or is cost-neutral over time. The sale of products from woodland will generally be the main source of income from woodlands, but, in addition, public support should have a role to play, particularly where public benefits are being put in jeopardy because the costs to the owner of providing those benefits is too high. You may have suggestions as to how a fair share of the wider benefits of forests could be returned to the owners and managers.

- Q. 3 Is there a case for the FC supporting work which enhances the economic value of timber? If so, how should this support be given?
- Q. 4 Should the FC support owners and/or woodland businesses in the harvesting, processing and sale of timber products from their woodlands? If so, why is this necessary and how should this support be given?
- Q. 5 To what extent should the FC (rather than other bodies) involve itself in developing markets for woodland products and services? Which woodland products and services should the FC support?
- Q. 6 Do you see a role for the FC in helping owners to exploit the commercial potential of their woodlands in areas other than timber production? If so, how might the FC help?
- Q. 7 In what situations is direct public support for non-market benefits necessary to ensure the economic sustainability of woodland management?

Environmental sustainability

32. A commitment to maintain and enhance the biodiversity value of woods is central to the *England Forestry Strategy*. The FC is taking the lead on a number of native woodland Habitat Action Plans (as part of the Government's Biodiversity Action Plan) and Species Action Plans (action for priority species within the BAP), and recognises the importance of non-woodland habitats within woodlands. The primary mechanisms used by the FC to further its biodiversity and conservation aims are grants towards the costs of maintenance and improvement works. Some of these grants have produced very positive gains for biodiversity.
33. There are, however, areas other than grants where the FC might be able to do more to secure and enhance the biodiversity of woodlands. Low-impact silvicultural systems such as continuous-cover forestry could be encouraged, and problems in the supply of locally native genetic tree stock could be addressed. As managers of significant areas of woodland, Forest Enterprise could be a valuable partner in large-scale initiatives supporting biodiversity. Your thoughts on other ways of supporting environmental sustainability would be valued.
34. Woods are not environmentally sustainable if their ecological values are constantly under threat, and incentives for larger scale effective action need to be developed to secure ecological integrity. An example of a specific issue that has been identified is the apparent long-term decline in the number of woodland birds.
35. The threats are numerous and range from inappropriate activities (for example intensive public recreation or stock grazing in an ecologically sensitive wood) to more insidious threats from pollution, drainage, acid rain, climate change, disease, invasive plants and the activities of certain animals, particularly deer and grey squirrels.
36. Many of these problems are not unique to forestry, and the FC works in partnership on tackling some of them. The FC currently provides core financial support to the Deer Initiative, helping landowners to set up local Deer Management Groups, and manages deer on its own land. These groups aim to monitor local deer populations and agree deer management plans to ensure that populations are reduced and kept in balance with forestry, conservation, agricultural and other interests.

- Q. 8 Should the FC do more to support the implementation of Habitat Action Plans and/or Species Action Plans in woods? If so, how should this support be provided?
- Q. 9 What other measures are needed from the FC to support woodland biodiversity and conservation?
- Q. 10 Which environmental issues need to be tackled by co-operative working at a scale larger than individual woods? How should the FC help to tackle these issues?
- Q. 11 Should the FC do more to help to reduce the damage caused by deer in woods? If so, how could this help be most effectively delivered?
- Q. 12 Should the FC do more to help to reduce the damage caused by grey squirrels in woods? If so, how could this help be most effectively delivered?

Social sustainability

- 37. The key role that forestry plays in the wider social agenda is reflected in the *England Forest Strategy*, 'Economic regeneration' and 'Recreation, access and tourism' programmes and the work of the Community Forests. The benefits of woodlands for local communities are wide-ranging and diverse. They play an important role in addressing many social objectives and current Government priorities in assisting neighbourhood renewal and tackling social exclusion.
- 38. The contribution to the social agenda that publicly accessible local woodlands can make is increasingly being recognised and understood. The quality of life benefits include raising health standards by providing a green and healthy environment and improving physical and mental well-being through opportunities for quiet enjoyment and peaceful contemplation. A range of recreational opportunities can assist in improving physical fitness and recuperation from disease or ill health. Where woodland is subject to vandalism, evidence demonstrates that, by offering rewarding and motivational employment in woodland and engaging young people in purposeful and meaningful woodland activities, such as sport, recreation or conservation work, environmental awareness is increased and the incidence of such antisocial behaviour is reduced.
- 39. Woodlands in rural areas too can contribute towards issues of exclusion that rural communities face. Woods not only provide direct social benefits to rural communities themselves, but publicly accessible woodland can also act as a focus for tourism, helping to diversify rural economies. Where there are concerns about the impact of number of visitors, woodlands and forests have the capacity to absorb large numbers of visitors with relatively little on the local environment.
- 40. The demand for public recreation in the countryside is likely to be heightened by the recent Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act, which includes among its provisions a 'right to roam' by foot on mountain, moor, heath and common land. Woodland is specifically excluded from this right; however, through the CROW legislation, woodland owners will be given the opportunity to 'dedicate' their land to access in perpetuity. Incentives and support mechanisms for landowners who choose the 'Dedication in Perpetuity' option are being dealt with in a separate review, and are not covered in this consultation.
- 41. Public recreation is an example of a public benefit for which a woodland owner may see little or no private gain, and indeed may incur loss of capital value, costs and inconvenience. It is particularly important, however, that access is provided to meet local demand and to fit alongside other strategic access networks. To achieve this, it is important to consider how woodland owners may best be encouraged to allow public access to their woods, and to improve the quality and range of the access and recreational provision. Furthermore, where owners are reluctant to choose the 'Dedication in Perpetuity' option, consideration should be given to ways of encouraging and securing access provision over the longer term, for example throughout the lifetime of the current owner.
- 42. Currently, the FC supports public access in existing woodlands through grant aiding the provision or maintenance of certain facilities, such as permissive footpaths or picnic areas. However, the work associated with providing a high quality woodland recreation experience can go far beyond the provision of facilities. It may, for example, include liaising with local communities to find out their needs, managing interaction between users, providing a warden for a site or helping urban residents to engage with their local wood. Grant aid may not be the only way of encouraging such work and your suggestions for alternatives are welcome.

43. The FC, through its own estate, is the largest provider of woodland recreation in the country. It has been suggested that Forest Enterprise (the managers of Forestry Commission woods) could contribute expertise and training or could even play a management role where there are challenging public demands on woodland. Your thoughts on such a partnership approach to woodland management would be valued.

- Q. 13 What would encourage more woodland owners to open their woods for public access, especially in areas where there is a demand for woodland recreation or the woodland forms part of a wider countryside recreation and access initiative? In particular, what would encourage the provision of access over a long term, for example the lifetime of the owner?
- Q. 14 What mechanisms could be used to encourage the provision of high quality and a diverse range of recreational opportunities in appropriate woodlands?
- Q. 15 Is there a role for Forest Enterprise in helping owners to manage woods where there may be especially complex public demands?
- Q. 16 Are there other ways in which local communities should be involved in forestry? If so, how can the FC facilitate this involvement?

Section 2: Support for management

44. The second section of the consultation looks at how the FC could remove some of the barriers to woodland management which may be faced by woodland owners. It also looks at current grants and asks for views on them. This section is likely to be of interest mainly to those involved in woodland management.

Management planning

45. A key requirement of the UK Forestry Standard is that management is based on sound long-term planning, as is the case in many other European countries. In recent years, two planning grants have been introduced by the FC to help owners plan management more effectively. Long Term Forest Plans are designed primarily for estates where there are significant programmes of felling and restocking. Estates are funded to produce a ten-year plan of operations, with a further ten years in outline, and to consult with stakeholders on the plan. A ten-year contract guaranteeing restocking grants and licences (but not management grants) for the ten-year period is then set up, minimising subsequent administration costs for both the estate and the FC.
46. A pilot scheme for funding the production of Native Woodland Plans is under way in areas of West Midlands and South West England. This scheme offers a substantial contribution to the cost of carrying out ecological surveys and producing management plans for ancient semi-natural woodlands. The plan is intended to guide subsequent management, and the information is a prerequisite for grant aid and felling licences.

- Q. 17 Are current planning grants an appropriate way to help woodland owners plan management effectively? Are there other ways in which the FC should help owners to plan management?
- Q. 18 Should FC grants be conditional upon long-term planning? If so, is this necessary in all woods, or is it a higher priority in particular kinds of woods?

Support for forestry contractors

47. Owners often require the services of contractors to carry out work. Agents and contracting companies range from large firms working in woodlands in many parts of the country, to individuals with limited access to capital and equipment.
48. It may be that further assistance is needed to support those who provide services to woodland owners. For example, continuity of work can make the difference between success and failure for some businesses, and your suggestions about how to ensure such continuity would be welcome. Some contractors could be more productive if they had access to new machinery or tools. In other cases, those who work in woodlands need help to gain appropriate qualifications and training or help in accessing current guidelines so that safe, efficient and appropriate working practices are adopted.

- Q. 19 Is a lack of suitable contractors preventing sustainable woodland management? If so, should the FC involve itself in supporting the contractor base, and how could it do this most effectively?

Advice and training for owners and managers

49. Advice to woodland owners and managers can take many forms, from direct on-site advice, through to the provision of written guidance or demonstrations of good practice. The FC provides advice relating to grants, licences and woodland management through its network of around 40 Woodland Officers. Forest Research (the FC's research agency) produces a great deal of information of relevance to woodland owners and managers, such as advice about protecting woods from browsing animals, or advice on silvicultural systems.
50. The FC is by no means the only organisation helping woodland owners and managers. There is a plethora of organisations, companies and individuals providing both free and chargeable advice to owners on a range of subjects related to woodland management. However, surveys of owners suggest that, despite this, many owners do not know where to go for impartial advice.

51. In some countries, a publicly funded 'extension service' helps to make practical land management information readily available to landowners and managers. Here, various parts of Government are working towards a system for the better delivery of Government land management advice, and it may be appropriate for the FC to be a part of this. Associated with this, there may be a role for the FC in 'advising the advisors' – offering training to those who work with woodland owners. This could be training in the procedures associated with grants and licences, dissemination of advice from Forest Research, or work to engage advisors in best practice developments or evolving forestry policy.

Q. 20 Do woodland owners and managers need additional advice or training to help them manage woods sustainably? If so, in what areas (subjects) is advice and training particularly needed?

Q. 21 Would a publicly funded 'extension service' be the most appropriate method of providing good quality advice and support to woodland owners and managers? What would be the most effective ways of delivering such advice?

Grant support

52. It is recognised that support through grant aid is a vital element of economic sustainability for many woodland owners. This sub-section refers to the current range of grants and seeks views on the package now on offer to woodland owners. It is likely, therefore, to be of interest mainly to those familiar with FC grants – more details about these grants are available in the applicant's pack, available from the address in Part 2 (see p.5).

53. Grant schemes are more than just funding – they come as part of a package of requirements allowing the FC influence over management. The grants currently given by the FC to support the management of existing woodland total some £8.5 million per year, provided to around 150,000 hectares of woodland. This compares with £10.1 million used in the creation of around 5000 hectares of new woodland. The main grants are:

- Annual Management Grant (£35 per hectare per year for environmental or public access works. Current spending £4.6 million per year)
- Restocking Grants (£525 per hectare for broadleaves, £325 per hectare for conifers. Current spending £1.3 million per year)
- Woodland Improvement Grants (50% of agreed costs, for capital works to improve either public access, undermanaged woods or biodiversity values within woods. Current spending £1.6 million per year)

Further funding goes to Challenge funds, old grants closed to new applicants and planning grants.

54. The FC is able to use Challenge funds for particular works in certain areas. Applicants bid for funds on a competitive tender basis, and if successful can receive 100% funding for the work. You may have experience of this form of funding for woodland creation or, in the past, for the management of existing woodland.

55. Following this review, each grant could remain the same, be altered in some way, or be abandoned. It is recognised that some people will suggest that the FC provides a new suite of grants. It is also realised that the present grant package provides a range of benefits, and that woodland owners and managers have become used to working with them and may not welcome 'change for the sake of change'. The Steering Group would like to hear your views on grants – in the light of responses to this section of the consultation paper, the Group will consider what additional discussions about grants need to take place.

Q. 22 What role should grants play in encouraging sustainable forest management?

Q. 23 Please use the table in the questionnaire to comment on the principles and operational practice of the existing range of grants.

Q. 24 In principle, are Challenge funds effective at encouraging sustainable woodland management in existing woods?

Certification

56. Independent certification against the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) is a way that woodland owners (and therefore governments) can demonstrate that woodland is managed sustainably. Where 'chain of custody' certification is arranged, this gives owners the chance to sell timber into those markets seeking the assurance of sustainably grown timber.
57. Among non-FC woodlands, 57,000 hectares are certified against the UKWAS standard, or around 7% of the total area. The costs of certification are an important factor discouraging woodland owners, particularly owners of small woods, from seeking certification. It has been suggested that the FC could provide financial incentives to encourage uptake or continued participation, or align the requirements of the Woodland Grant Scheme more closely to those of certification to avoid duplication of effort.

Q. 25 Is it appropriate for the FC to support UKWAS certification through grant aid? If so, what would be the best way of providing this support?

Section 3: Partnership and targeting

58. The third section of the consultation looks at how the FC should work with partners and target action to achieve the Government's priorities for forestry. This section is likely to be of most interest to those involved in forestry at a political or organisational level.

Partnership working

59. Forestry cannot be considered in isolation from other land uses, or other agendas. The contribution that forestry can make to the economy and to social and environmental agendas has already been touched upon in this paper. With such contributions come the possibilities of partnership working – of using forestry to help deliver policy across a wide range of areas such as tackling climate change, promoting sustainable use of resources and environmental stability, promoting health and well-being etc.
60. Where forestry could contribute to other agendas at the local, national or international levels, 'ambassadors' for forestry are needed at all these levels to ensure that forestry is given appropriate consideration. Those whom such ambassadors must influence could be in other parts of government or outside government. Not only can contributing to shared agendas achieve more results than can working alone, but involvement in other agendas can give forestry access to additional resources to pass on to woodland owners and managers. Your comments on the role that the FC should play would be welcome.
61. As well as placing forestry on other agendas, the FC can work with others to implement parts of its own agenda. However, with the proliferation of organisations and initiatives supporting woodland management and the forestry sector, it can be difficult to know who is doing what, and this can result in duplication and waste of resources. Perhaps the FC should enhance its role as co-ordinator, acting as a focus for information on initiatives or leading the formation and working of partnerships. However, some may perceive this role as unwarranted interference – your comments would be appreciated.

- Q. 26 Do you think that the FC should increase its role as an ambassador for forestry, doing more to promote forestry as an instrument of policy delivery? If so, please suggest in which areas it should increase its activity.
- Q. 27 Do you think that doing more to support others who are delivering the forestry agenda would be a cost-effective way for the FC to support sustainable forestry? If so, what type of projects or initiatives should it support?
- Q. 28 In what circumstances should the FC take a lead in co-ordinating the formation and working of partnerships?

Flexibility and targeting

62. Woodland cover is distributed very unevenly across the country, and the type of woodland, the use of woodland and the use of the surrounding land all vary enormously from area to area.
63. This variation suggests that resources to support sustainable forest management should be targeted. The advantage of targeting is that it allows action to reflect real priorities, and can therefore be a more effective use of public money. However, with increased flexibility may come increasing complexity and uncertainty – which can be unhelpful for woodland owners or managers wishing to plan management over the long term. Your views on the principle of flexibility and targeting are welcomed.
64. If targeting is to occur, there are various ways it could be achieved, and your suggestions about this are welcome. Certain geographical designations, such as Rural Priority Areas, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, English Nature's Natural Areas, or the Countryside Agency's Countryside Character Areas may be used to help plan action at the landscape level.
65. Alternatively, the FC could target support at regional or sub-regional priorities. Such priorities could be determined at regional level in consultation with regional stakeholders. In recent years, more and more decisions are being taken at the level of the nine Government Regions through bodies such as Government Offices for the Regions and Regional Development Agencies.

Q. 29 Do you support the principle of flexibility and targeting of support for sustainable forest management? If so, how should this support be targeted? If not, why not?

Joined-up government and efficiency of administration

66. Various other government departments and agencies influence the management of woodland, for example English Nature with its responsibility for SSSIs and European Sites, or DEFRA through its role in the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme for woodland creation. Furthermore, land managers often deal with different sections of government through the range of land management support schemes on offer. Programmes and schemes may not be linking as smoothly as they should, and 'joined-up government' may not be being achieved in some areas.
67. There is also the issue of the efficiency of administration. Applications for FC grants or licences go through a consultation process – it is important that other stakeholders know whether an application could affect them. Then there is the approval process – which again takes time, but which is a necessary and proper part of administering public funds.
68. The FC is committed to reducing bureaucracy to the necessary minimum. The current Review of Grants and Licences Administration is addressing this issue in relation to the Woodland Grant Scheme, looking at more electronic processing and improvements in application forms, consultation processes and payment methods.

Q. 30 What steps need to be taken to ensure that FC support for forestry is better integrated with other government support mechanisms?

Q. 31 In your experience, which areas of FC support need most improvement in efficiency? Do you have suggestions for how improvements should be made?

Section 4: Priorities

69. The fourth section of the consultation paper asks about priorities for FC support. All respondents are encouraged to complete the priority table for this section in the questionnaire.

Priorities

70. The FC in England has a grant and partnership budget of approximately £18.6 million, with 45% supporting existing woodland and 55% supporting woodland creation. This is a substantial investment of public money – but would still not allow the FC to do everything mentioned in this consultation document. In order to maximise the effectiveness of this funding, it will be necessary to identify priorities for action.

71. In addition to improving the way in which current resources are used, there may be other ways in which sustainable forest management could be better supported. An important possibility is using a favourable tax regime. Because changes in this would involve higher level consideration, it is likely that any new measures would take a long time to implement.

Q. 32 Please use the table in the questionnaire to rank according to priority the areas for support described in this consultation paper.

Q. 33 Is the current balance (see paragraph 70 above) between support for woodland creation and support for existing woodland management reasonable?

Q. 34 Could changes to the tax regime make an important contribution to supporting sustainable forest management in existing woods? If so, what changes would you like to see, and why?

Q. 35 Are there any other means of support that the FC should provide to ensure the sustainable management of existing woodland, which are not covered in your responses to the questions above? Please be specific.

ANNEXE 1 – MEMBERS OF THE STEERING GROUP

72. The review is managed by a Steering Group, chaired by Anthony Bosanquet, Forestry Commissioner.

The members of the Steering Group represent:

Association of Professional Foresters	Phil Webb
Countryside Agency	Richard Lloyd
Country Land and Business Association	Mark Thomasin-Foster
Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs	Andrew Perrins
English Nature	Keith Kirby
Forest Industries Development Council	Peter Wilson
Forestry Commission	Sandy Greig
Institute of Chartered Foresters	Dougal Driver
National Farmers Union	Andrew Clark
Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors	John Lockhart
Small Woods Association	John Morris
Timber Growers Association	Richard Smith
Wildlife and Countryside Link	
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	Richard Johnstone
Woodland Trust	John Tucker

ANNEXE 2 – TERMS OF REFERENCE AND SCOPE

73. *'To review Forestry Commission support for the sustainable management of existing woodland and forests in accordance with the priorities of the Government's England Forestry Strategy, and in the light of the UK Forestry Standard, and to make recommendations to the Forestry Commissioners.'*
74. 'The Forestry Commission' refers to the entirety of the organisation, including its agencies, Forest Enterprise and Forest Research, in so far as they can be used more actively to help support the management of non-Forestry-Commission woodland. This review is not about shifting resources (e.g. staff) from Forest Enterprise or Forest Research to the management of woodland outside the Forestry Commission estate.
75. 'Support' refers to the full range of potential support mechanisms, including grants, partnerships, research, advice, training, market development and any other appropriate mechanism. In relation to grants, the targeting and delivery mechanisms as well as the level of grant are within the scope of the review.
76. 'Existing woodland and forests' refers to all existing woodland in England which is not owned or managed by the Forestry Commission. In addition, the requirements of non-woodland habitats and species found in association with woodland will be considered as part of this review. The review does not relate to woodland creation.
77. There is no particular emphasis on a particular type of woodland or owner. Woods range from the largest commercial plantations, right through to the smallest ancient woodlands, and include woodland owned by private owners, business owners, farmers, public bodies (excluding Forestry Commission) and voluntary organisations.
78. The key policy documents driving the review are the *England Forestry Strategy* and the *UK Forestry Standard*. In addition, the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, European Rural Development Programme and the Rural White Paper are important elements of the policy environment within which this review will operate.
79. The review recognises the need to link Forestry Commission support with other government and non-governmental organisations' agendas and initiatives, including those areas not traditionally considered to be within the remit of forestry.
80. Concurrent reviews which may influence this review, but which are not specifically linked to it, include:
 - Review of Woodland Grant Scheme Administration, looking at the application procedure and processing of grant schemes and payments
 - Scotland Woodland Grant Scheme/ Farm Woodland Premium Scheme Review (grants in Scotland only)
 - Review of FC support for woodland management in Wales (Wales only)
 - The FC/DEFRA evaluation of woodland creation under the Woodland Grant Scheme and the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme in England, which relates only to woodland creation and not to existing woodland
 - Mid-term review of the England Rural Development Programme
 - Work on access dedication with the Countryside Agency
 - General review of the Forestry Commission
81. The review is not constrained to produce recommendations which can be funded under current budgets. However, recognising that budgets are always limited, the review will need to identify priorities for expenditure.
82. The review is expected to take 12 months, with a report being presented to the Forestry Commissioners in May 2002. The Forestry Commissioners will, in turn, make their recommendations to the Forestry Minister.

