

INTERNAL NOTE OF LINK meeting with David Howat FCS, 2 May 2012

Attending: David Howat, Deborah Long & Angus Yarwood (trustees), Jen Anderson (CO)

Intros

This was an introductory meeting as part of LINK's round of liaison with agencies and others. We outlined who LINK is, structures, what it does and how (TFs mainly), current strategic and policy priorities (GM, scrutiny, environment in time of cuts, TF focusses), providing list of members and TF convenor contacts and indicating recent publications.

Changes to FCGB and FCS governance

DH explained FCS covered all 4 parts of UK till 1922 establishment of NI Forest Service, since when FC (covering E, S, W) liaised closely with NIFS. Wales is converting to single statutory body from April 2013 when FC will become a 2-country body for E&S. NI and W may buy into services such as research at own discretion from that point. FC(E&S) will operate along similar lines as now, slightly slimmer (without the Wales 15% share in current size).

Further change ahead of 2014 referendum unlikely; independence would mean separation; the alt will likely to lead to more devolution. Devolution is increasingly the direction of travel, except wrt. synergies on research and on challenges of pests and diseases. FC Research arm will be E&S in this period. International policy is led by Defra and DFID, with input from DEC on reducing emissions and sustainable forest management (esp re developing countries' mgt systems).

FCS is increasingly close to Scottish Government; Scottish Ministers look for briefing in relation to Forests Europe (was MCPFE) – European discussions covering Russia where work aims to develop legally binding agreement on sustainable mngt of forests across EU and Russia; FCS are expected to know enough to brief Ministers for Env Cncil meetings.

SFS and implementation

SFS published 5-6 years ago included idea of review after 5 years, however soundings showed little appetite for full review; key tension was woodland expansion on which a separate group exists.

Therefore implementation of SFS is proceeding. An implementation plan is produced each year on the 7 strategic themes across 5 conservancies with reference groups to inform next round of plan, and regional forest forums in each conservancy to inform action plans. Implementation plan has smart objectives for each coming year (with actions for FCS, universities, NGOs, business, other agencies) and outline progress objectives for two years beyond that. Workstreams, job objectives relate. Model works well.

Overlaps with LINK interest areas noted

Climate – FC working on SG's programme (for forestry element) with eye on UKCCRA. FC website will be clearer on specific strands of work relating to this, better structure and signage.

NPs - discussion of branding is afoot among agencies involved, to de-clutter and identify common thread; throws up alternatives eg. forest as brand with NP as subset.

Deer – FCS involved in Deer Roundtable and Lowland grouping. Differences in mgt priorities among various owner/managers make for difficulties.

Access – big task in coming year in wake of presentation to National Access Forum is mangemetn of forest operations wrt. public access. LR |Act gives powers to close off areas for rallies etc. General need to update guidance on what is 'reasonable grounds' for closures eg in relation to access during harvesting. Revision of 90s document on safety is planned. Loch Lochy situation is very steep sides, effort at diversionary path to allow cable crane to operate safely, side too steep for safe access so convoy system introduced. Private landowners would struggle with the H&S regs. LINK could feed in to the review via NAF (for whose next meeting a draft revision will be ready).

CSGN – big priority and large geographic scope; Helen Zealley on partnership board. Close work with Las to have policies in development plans relating to green networks; development fund for catalyst projects is going well; FE involved in one (Cuningar Loop) opp. Commonwealth games village in which FC has 'piecrust' lease to manage only for recreational purposes. John Muir Trail from Dunbar to LLT is one aspiration and likely, though current discussion more around title than substance, and future notions to link to Helensburgh and via Glasgow to Greenock would be more difficult (SNH doing feasibility work).

LS Ecological Restoration initiative - CSGN is from NPF2 – a national priority, could see it as landscape scale though in fact larger. Assynt Landscapes a better example with sympathetic landowners. In CSGN Carrifran could be one (dep Beeftub inclusion), Cumbernauld idea (SWT's) a possibility. FC drawing together information on exemplars and supporting wider consultation through CSGN; working with others to articulate a vision and how it could be taken forward on the ground.

CAP & SRDP – FCS in close with with SG groups in which LINK is represented, feeding in to consultation paper. Long haul, must not peak too soon. Interested in what 'greening pillar 1' means and financial terms. Concerns around talk of dropping annual payments, esp hard hit if this were in addition to dropping single payments. Balance between spending on woodland expansion and existing woodlands will be a concern within the total figures (£8m for existing, balance to expansion), budget constrains scope to respond to creative ideas. Noted joining up of agri, woodland and SLU work in LINK. WEAG – last meeting soon and first draft report will follow; defence against farmer concerns at implications for livestock just published (FCS website/WEAG section). WRT the overall 25% target, Cab Sec has now confirmed target as 10000ha for time being and DH feels we will achieve 7500ha for 2011/12 (70-75% native, 20-25% productive, stats due in June).

Windfarm development / National Forest Land Scheme – FCS doing lot of work in this area. Target on FC estate is 2GW by 2020. Have a small group (SCVO, CES, Community Trust Assoc, CWA) helping on community issues. FC is more proactive of late; has 'lots' available for lease, competitive tendering process for developers, opportunity to negotiate terms with development partners for wind and hydro. Is Partnership for Renewables in SW Scotland, and other partnerships in other parts. Sites in FC estate now identified and if there is interest normal planning consent conditions apply, in which FC have stepped back to leave the process to LAs – though conservators will input on removals policy. DH thanked us for alerting that SNH's decision to step back from casework unless in designated sites, had implications in this area. Development partners with permission must:

- Pay local communities £5000 per MW pa index linked (lot of detail to be tweaked on this one)
- Give opportunity for local communities to invest in the wind farm
- Give opportunity for FC to invest in the wind farm
 - o Up to 4% for FC and communities together

Sites not being taken forward by development partners are listed for local communities to acquire by lease for wind or hydro (eg Strathgryre). Basic principle applies of planning consent, in liaison with SNH, SEPA, MoD (for radar and lowflying), Phone network (microwaves) and seismological interests.

Developers are now filtering a long list to come up with shorter one on which to apply for consents.

Are FC doing more to help communities? FC must be careful re giving advice, say FSA. There is some guidance and intent is to use CES for next stage as context for advice giving.

Rental rates? FC under instruction to charge market rates (as well as under pressure from communities not to); outcome unknown and Loc Comm Empowerment Bill could be vehicle to address.

Trojan horse here? Want genuine community projects and not developers in by back doors. There are communities interested in leasing and the discussion now is about how to set the rent. Did international experience offer any solutions – DH was aware of colonial practice which didn't. For any leasor a plan will be required, and its delivery.

Structures and timescales for reform

LINK indicated interest in contributing thoughts. DH indicated there would be consultation: the Public Services Reform Act gives power to transfer functions from UK to Scottish Government, by Affirmative Resolution Orders which must go through Scottish Parliament.

Areas where LINK could help in airing / influencing via policy advocacy

DH made no suggestions. He referred to expectation of the usual pushing of boundaries directed at Government.

Liaison

DH felt current liaison (this meeting, LINK's intended meeting with Bob Macintosh, ongoing policy contribution and dialogue with FC staff) was sufficient.

He noted our upcoming meeting with the Minister and wishes us well (agenda includes LUS and WEAG).

A previous ministerial (with Roseanna) had involved Galloway Fisheries Trust as part of RAFTS, on acidification issues which they couldn't resolve with FCS; DH was perhaps saying to us that whilst Roseanna had as a result of the discussion pushed FCS to offer more, the jury's out on who is right/wrong about the causes and solutions on this issue.

Draft/ja/LINK