

**Minutes of National Forest Company Board meeting held 18 January 2007
(Meeting postponed from 12 December 2006)**

NFC09/07

Present: Dinah Nichols (Chair) - Present for agenda items 6 – 9
Sophie Churchill (Chief Executive)
Russ Canning
Martin Glynn
Oliver Johnson
Valerie Owen
John Perry
Jean Tallantire
Fiona Tilley - Present for agenda items 6 – 9

Staff present: Mike Dewsnap, Simon Evans, Clive Keble and Glenis Johnson. Hugh Williams attended for agenda items 6 and 9

Action

1 Apologies for absence

- 1.1 Dinah Nichols and Fiona Tilley were delayed due to travel problems caused by the adverse weather conditions.
- 1.2 It was agreed that Jean Tallantire would chair the meeting until Dinah Nichols arrived.

2 Declarations of interest

- 2.1 There were none.

3 Minutes of last meeting

- 3.1 Minutes of the last meeting held 27 September 2006 were agreed as a correct record.

4 Matters arising

Paragraph 4 – Public Benefit Recording System (PBRs) – This had been considered by the Land Acquisition Group (LAG) that had agreed the system relates to the specific assessment of sites and is not widely applicable for The National Forest. More strategic value for money issues had, however, been raised that need to be considered corporately.

CAG

Paragraph 5.4 – Tender Scheme – It was necessary to establish whether many of the promotional leaflets for the Tender Scheme 2007/08 had been distributed. If this was the case, then it was agreed that copies should be sent to Directors for information.

CK

Paragraph 9.1 – Terms of Reference – It is necessary for any revisions to the terms of

reference of Committees and Working Groups to be agreed by these Groups before they can be submitted to the Board for approval. It is proposed that these will be re-presented to the May meeting of the Board when consideration will also be given to Directors' responsibilities, including the chairing and composition of Committees and Working Groups, following changes in Board personnel.

MD

Paragraph 13.2 – National Big Lottery Bid – The Board enquired as to why the Bid had failed. Feedback had been that the Bid was considered to be high risk being dependent upon the resolution of various issues e.g. the acquisition of land and matters associated with the Ashby Canal restoration.

Paragraph 13.5 – National Forest Wood Fair – A review of the 2006 Wood Fair had been undertaken with Leicestershire County Council (LCC). The event had been considered a great success and it had been decided to hold the third National Forest Wood Fair on August Bank Holiday Monday 2007. The event would be further considered at the March meeting of the Woodland Economy Working Group.

WEWG

Paragraph 15.1 – National Memorial Arboretum (NMA) – It is proposed that one of the 2007 NFC Board meetings will be held at the NMA.

The Board agreed to re-order the agenda

5 Chief Executive's Update (Paper NFC04/07)

- 5.1 Paragraph 1.7 – Ambassadors – It was suggested that it would be beneficial for Directors to have the opportunity to meet annually with Ambassadors. Consideration could be given to inviting Directors to the London reception on 5 March. SC/GJ /DN
- 5.2 Paragraph 1.9 – Heart of the National Forest Foundation (HNFF) – The Board acknowledged the importance of the relationship between the NFC and the HNFF. This would be relevant when considering the recommendations in the Brakeley's Report on the NFC's fundraising capabilities which would feature later on the agenda.
- 5.3 Paragraph 4.1 – England Forestry Strategy – Disappointment was expressed that no reference was made to The National Forest in the draft Strategy. Efforts would continue to rectify this omission. SE
- 5.4 Paragraph 4.19 – Provision of Public Access on Tender Scheme sites – Whilst concern was expressed at the possible loss of public access on Tender Scheme sites once contracts expired, it was reported that there was a good track record of retaining this public benefit.
- 5.5 Paragraph 4.24 – Nature Conservation Working Group (NCWG) – It was reported that there had been a good first meeting of this reconvened Working Group that had been chaired by Russ Canning.
- 5.6 Paragraph 4.26 – Deer Initiative (DI) – The Board enquired as to whether deer

browsing is a problem in the Forest. The deer population is growing and is resulting in some localised problems. The DI has been commissioned to monitor numbers, undertake surveys and run the Deer Management Group. Consideration has also been given to other deer related issues e.g. deer involved in road accidents and the economic benefits to be derived from venison. Reference was made to work being undertaken to assess the state of the Forest in relation to pests and diseases which would inform the mid-Forest Strategy Review.

- 5.7 Paragraph 4.37 – Growing Places – The report published by the Forestry Commission and Forest Research was made available to Directors.
- 5.8 Paragraph 5.4 – Land Acquisition – The Board was given an update on the current state of affairs with the various potential land acquisition opportunities as listed in the report. With reference to the land at Coalfield North, adjoining Sence Valley Country Park, indication was given that this may, at some future time, come forward to the Tender Scheme. In the meantime there had been no indication from the new landowner that he may be prepared to sell any of the land to the NFC.
- 5.9 Paragraph 5.24 and 5.25 – Land at Botany Bay and Melbourne – The Board commended Alan Leather for his partnership working in relation to the development of these two sites.
- 5.10 Paragraph 5.38 and 5.39 – External Working – The Board extended its congratulations to Hugh Williams on his appointment to the Forestry Commission's (East Midlands) Regional Advisory Committee and on his nomination to become a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Foresters.

6 Finance Report (NFC08/07)

- 6.1 The Board noted the contents of the Finance Report for the period ended 31 December 2006.

7 Progress Report against Corporate Plan Targets for 2006/07 (NFC06/07)

- 7.1 An updated figure of 283ha was provided for new Forest Creation. Subject to the completion of pending land acquisitions, there was an expectation that eventual Forest Creation for the year would be within the lower end of the revised target range for the year of 340 - 360ha. The new/planned public access figure was updated to 267ha but there remained the possibility that the revised target of 325ha for the year may not be achieved.

Dinah Nichols joined the meeting and thanked Jean Tallantire for chairing the meeting in her absence.

8 Review of NFC's income generation and fundraising capabilities (Paper NFC05/07)

- 8.1 Sophie Churchill set the context for the Paper. The Board would be invited to consider the recommendations made in the Brakeley's Report determining priorities

and an action plan.

- 8.2 Robin Thomas, the Consultant with Brakeley's was invited to join the meeting and introduce his report. He indicated that he had found the assignment both interesting and a challenge. The scope for the exercise centred around establishing whether there is:
- a case worthy of support given the issues relating to Government funding for the Forest
 - voluntary support in existence
 - scope for major donors, either individuals or grant-making trusts
 - scope for a long-term successful fundraising programme
- 8.3 Through interviews Robin had established that there were positive responses to the above points. There was real enthusiasm to assist expressed by those Ambassadors interviewed and there had been widespread agreement that the time was now right to consider diversifying income streams. The challenges faced related mainly to the infrastructure. The lack of charitable status needs to be addressed; the Company lacks fundraising management resources and there are brand identify problems associated with other charitable organisations already in existence within the Forest. Robin expressed the view that there was scope to develop a programme of activity that could result in income to the Forest by as early as September 2007.
- 8.4 The Board welcomed the Brakeley Report. It had been established that there were opportunities to pursue in relation to other income streams whilst acknowledging that, in the short term, this was not to replace core Government funding. The encouraging response from Ambassadors interviewed, that they would be willing to act in a fundraising capacity, was welcomed, although it was acknowledged that this would not be the case with all Ambassadors, many of whom would not be comfortable with this. It may, however, be the case that some would be able to facilitate introductions to potential donors.
- 8.5 The Board was informed that the normal situation was that wealthy investors sought to be listened to, rather than exercise great influence over the way that donations were used. A key role is that of donor stewardship where it was expected that the NFC Chief Executive would have a key role to play.
- 8.6 The Brakeley Report highlighted the importance of the role of the Chief Executive and Senior Management if real progress is to be made in progressing the Report's recommendations. The Board acknowledged that there were capacity issues but agreed the importance of building a structure with the necessary capacity.
- 8.7 A view was expressed that the recommendations made were not ambitious enough and that what was needed was activity geared towards securing major supporters and sponsors. Reference was made to the successes of other fundraising appeals undertaken by environmental organisations. The Board was reminded of the demands on the NFC of meeting the needs of existing sponsors, particularly in

having sufficient delivery capacity to meet demands for tree planting. Businesses would need to be encouraged to support activity in addition to tree planting.

- 8.8 Thanks were extended to Robin Thomas for attending the meeting and he was asked to leave.
- 8.9 The Board agreed that the time was right to take action but on a gradual basis as opposed to at the pace recommended in the report. It was suggested that a small group involving some Directors be established to further consider an appropriate action plan. Volunteers were invited.
- 8.10 In the meantime it was agreed that there was scope for the issue of Charitable Status to be revisited and for discussions to be held with the HNFF about the prospects for closer working between the two organisations. The Board also agreed that the existing organisation structure lacked a co-ordinating function for fundraising and professional fundraising skills that would need to be addressed.

9 The National Forest Tender Scheme and Forest activities 2007/08 (Paper NFC02/07)

- 9.1 Sophie Churchill introduced the Paper followed by Clive Keble who provided a fuller explanation to the thought processes behind the proposals outlined. The Board was reminded that the costs quoted in paragraph 4.6 were only indicative.
- 9.2 The Board commended the inventiveness of the ideas put forward. The aim is to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the restoration of grant in aid to £3.7m in 2007/08 when the Board agreed that there would be no Tender Scheme round. The Board welcomed the intention to set a challenging forest creation target for 2007/08, the level of which would be determined when setting Corporate Plan Targets for the year.
- 9.3 The Board acknowledged that there was a risk in devising a short-term programme dependent on partnerships and where there may be a demand for them to continue at a time when there would be a further Tender Scheme round. The Board agreed in principle with the proposed range of measures and activity for 2007/08 as set out in paragraph 4.5 of the report. These are to be further developed for the Board's next meeting in March. CK/H
W
- 9.4 The decision not to run a Tender Scheme in 2007/08 needed to be communicated to all those who would be affected by the decision. The intention was to send a letter to all of these people on Friday 19 January 2007 with an appropriate statement being placed on the website. This would make reference to the reasons for the decision with consideration needing to be given to whether any reference should be made to the State Aid issue. SC/H
W

10 Urban Areas – Forest-related initiatives (Paper NFC03/07)

- 10.1 Clive Keble introduced the Paper.

- 10.2 The Board agreed that this was a timely paper, setting out a sensible action plan. It was acknowledged that delivery of the plan was dependent upon the engagement of the many partners listed in paragraph 7.1. There were also resource implications for the NFC which would also need to provide a proactive leadership role.
- 10.3 The Board endorsed the approaches set out to urban forestry and agreed to the consultation exercise with potential partner organisations. The action plan, as set out in paragraph 6.1, was agreed.

11 Sustainable Development National Exemplar update (Paper NFC07/07)

- 11.1 Sophie Churchill introduced the update confirming that the aim was for the final Report to be completed by April/May. Thanks were extended to Dinah Nichols, Valerie Owen and Fiona Tilley for their much valued assistance.
- 11.2 Paragraph 4.2 outlined thoughts on dissemination of the plan. It was suggested that consideration should also be given to international audiences and to the launch event. An earlier suggestion had been made that the Secretary of State be invited to launch the plan. **SC**

12 Any other business

- 12.1 The Board was informed of Linda Moseley's decision to leave the NFC's employment. Linda, an Administration Officer, has been with the Company for over 11 years and is to leave in the summer.
- 12.2 Interviews for up to 3 new Directors are to be held on 6/7 February.

13 Date of next meeting

- 13.1 The next meeting will be held 6 March 2007 at 10.30 am.