

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SEFTON COAST WOODLAND OWNERS GROUP

THURSDAY 21ST SEPTEMBER 2006 AT 2.00 P.M. AT THE NATIONAL
TRUST COUNTRYSIDE OFFICE, BLUNDELL AVENUE, FORMBY

1. **Present:** Nick Roche; Major Bill Hunter; Andrew Brockbank, National Trust; Fiona Whitfield, Lancashire Wildlife Trust/Red Alert N England; Mike Downey, English Nature; Sally Orrit – People & Wildlife Officer Red Alert N. England; John Houston, SCP Biodiversity Project Officer; Ian Kippax, Hesketh Golf Club; Bob Wagstaff, St Lukes Church;

Apologies: Richard Topley, Forestry Commission; Cllr Anne Hibbs, Sefton Council; Rachel Northover, Sefton Coast and Countryside; Chris Whittle, Royal Birkdale Golf Club; Sr Eileen Hooper, St Joseph's Adult Services; Simon Newland, Hillside Golf Club; Ruth Critchley, English Nature.

2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Accepted as a true record

3. **Matters arising**

- Outstanding action - Richard Topley. No progress with appropriate assessment - uncertainty due to changes towards Natural England and staff capacity.
- FW – NR and FW had considered a co-ordinated bid to FC for Red Squirrel. Conservation including monitoring and grey control. FC unwilling to consider this citing no resources even for the refuge areas. This is despite FC publicity declaring support through the England Woodland Grant Scheme. Lobbying required at high level, in FC and possibly through MPs Paul Nolan/Keith Jones as a starting point? Need to clarify whether application is not eligible or whether it is a case of no money available at current time to support application.
Action FW and NR
- Noted that Sefton Woodland plan scored highly in NWDA assessment
- SCP charitable status – decision not to proceed at current time

4. **Fire and the Sefton Coast Woodlands**

Worth remembering that fire-induced regeneration is a valid part of a pine forest ecology – ground storey fires can encourage forest regeneration. MFRS Fire Plan for Sefton – Guy Keen has taken responsibility and is enthusiastic. Owners should respond to promptly to any requests for information. All landowners to make contact with Guy Keen to support him in preparing the Fire Plan. **Action All**
Assistance to be offered by NR in helping draw up fire plan/advise on behalf of woodland owners. **Action NR**

Noted that the stock piling of brash e.g. on controlled burn sites poses a fire risk if not dealt with before the onset of Spring/Summer. All woodland owners encouraged to remove/make safe brash piles. **Action All**

5. Forest Plan Review

Is the review worthwhile? General feeling that the data collection is important as it provides an accurate record, it demonstrates achievement against the objectives and enables accountability.

Expressed a strong concern that if NR to meet with individual land owners, this will be significant extra work for the Mersey Forest Team and this support may not always be available. All landowners encouraged to complete Mersey Forest requests for records and data within reasonable time scales. **Action All**
NR to visit each woodland owner to quality check data capture. **Action NR**

Agreed that the original timescale of completion by December in order to meet Agenda deadline of SCP Board/ Forum is not so critical. Collate and review at the beginning of January 2007.

Issue of the term 'compensatory planting' as used in SC&C account of new planting at Range Lane. Agreed the wording should be discussed with SMBC and not be recorded as 'compensatory'. Noted that the general principle contained within the Forest Plan is to maintain a broadly similar area of woodland as red squirrel habitat. It is accepted that woodland and other habitats will be lost due to coastal erosion and changing dune morphology and this is part of the natural dynamic.

6. Owner Updates

- MD reported on expert opinion with respect to Corsican Pine die back – see copy of the note with these minutes
- Hesketh Golf Club – IK expressed concern that essential felling required for H&S reasons was properly understood. Road-side poplars pose hazard to road users and gradual removal is included within the 20 year plan.
- AB flagged up Gateway study – for consideration on a future agenda.

7. AoB

SQUIRREL POX

FW reported 2 new cases on the NNR, (total now 4 since July – other 2 in residential area of Ainsdale). An action plan has been prepared by LWT/RANE/EN/NT. Other landowners/stakeholders need to be made aware of this protocol. **Action FW**

EN is involving volunteers in a thorough search for lethargic or obviously sick red squirrels in the northern part of the pinewoods (Pinfold Lane area). FW is providing training for volunteers. A rota has been devised for surveillance and alternative welfare arrangements have been arranged whereby any sickly squirrels are taken to Mr Petchy's veterinary surgery in Formby from where

RSPCA will collect as necessary and transfer to specialist facilities at Stapeley Grange in Cheshire.

FW appealed to all landowners to encourage more volunteer involvement and vigilance. **Action All**

Other owners including National Trust are engaging support from dog walkers in reporting any weak squirrels and volunteer training is scheduled for Friday 6th October.

A copy of the protocol is appended with these minutes.

NATURE CONSERVATION STRATEGY

JH provided an update on the developing Nature Conservation Strategy. Recent workshops aimed to achieve a consensus view on the 'features' of nature conservation significance to be included in the strategy. Wet woodlands were identified as an important, although undervalued habitat. Scrub, as a component of woodland and the woodland/dune habitat interface are important considerations. A number of large areas of scrub in open dune areas are not considered as woodland features e.g. Birkdale Hills. More detailed discussions will follow on scrub, including sea buckthorn, etc. The plan is likely to consider major habitat zones along the coast e.g. mobile dunes, fixed dune grassland, dune heath and woodlands and each will be subject to a health check. The Forest Plan and associated Task Group are effectively providing that function for the woodlands.

JH aims to visit individual landowners to discuss site conservation plans in the near future. The plan will be drawn together in December and then go out to wider consultation early in 2007.

TOWN LANE

Planting is proposed on a 26 hectare site at Town Lane, Birkdale. This is part of the Newlands programme involving the Forestry Commission and NWDA and the proposal falls within 'Community Woodlands'. The proposal is at an advanced stage and Newlands have asked the Forest Plan Group to consider whether it can be included within the Sefton Coast Woodlands Forest Plan. Concern was expressed due to the prominent position of this site within the Red Squirrel Refuge Buffer Zone. It was acknowledged that there could be Positive educational and community learning opportunities. However a deep concern was expressed that the Newlands programme intends to plant community woodland where the Local Authority and the Forestry Commission are committed to avoiding planting in accordance with the Buffer Zone designation.

It was agreed that a letter should be sent to Newlands voicing the stated concerns and expressing a partnership view that the proposal sets an unhelpful precedent for further planting within the buffer zone which could favour the ingress of grey squirrels. We recommend that:

- The extent of planting within the site should be limited e.g. 5 hectares
- That only native, small seeded tree species will be used
- That a commitment is made to control grey squirrels on the site
- That RANE will be pleased to assist with community learning and educational work

This will be prepared as a statement under the Sefton Coast Partnership logo, to include the membership of the Task Group and sent under the cover of a letter from the Mersey Forest to the Newlands Group.

Action NR to draft letter and circulate for comment prior to sending to Newlands. Also to seek advice on who else should receive copies e.g. FC, NWDA?

AREA OF THE SEFTON COAST WOODLANDS

MD sought clarification on the official area of the Sefton Coast Forest area. NR confirmed that this was just under 420 hectares and that this includes the broadleaf and pine components. MD asked whether the theoretical model, which was used to inform the role of coupe felling and other intervention for the Sefton Coast Woodlands, could be checked and made more widely available to land managers.

NR pointed out that it is fully checked and contained within the Forest Plan. It is important that the model be understood to be a theoretical representation of effect on prime habitat (taken as the area of more-or-less pure pine of coning age) under different management regimes – the actual area is in fact irrelevant, it could be 10 hectares or 10,000 and the graphs would look the same.

Any inclusion of mixed, broadleaf or scrub woodland in the model will complicate it and rely on some assumptions and not necessarily improve information available to the managers. It will almost certainly be misunderstood by people who do not understand the nature of modelling. However, it was agreed NR would take a further look at the model to see whether it was possible to include areas of mixed, broadleaf and scrub.

Action NR

- 8. Date of Next Meeting, Tuesday 16th January 2007, 2:00pm National Trust Office, Blundell Avenue.**