

Notes for New Forest Consultative Panel presentation – 5 November 2009

Introduction:

The Forestry Commission manages some 26,000ha (over 90%) of the New Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). There is a Public Service Agreement (PSA) set by Government to ensure that a minimum of 95% of all SSSIs in England will be in favourable or unfavourable recovering condition by 2010. This has generated a wave of habitat restoration in SSSIs across the country.

The New Forest SSSI has areas which have previously been assessed as unfavourable by Natural England. The three broad reasons for unfavourable condition are:

- artificial drainage of mires
- presence of non-native trees
- straightening of streams.

So what has the Forestry Commission been doing about habitat restoration since the completion of the LIFE 3 Project?

For context, by the end of the LIFE 3 Project (summer 2006) some 6,000ha of habitats in the New Forest SSSI remained unfavourable.

In order to undertake further, necessary restoration works suitable funding opportunities needed to be secured. These opportunities took the form of the Pathfinder Project and the Final 4,000 Project respectively.

Pathfinder Project

This project ran from summer 2006 to early 2008. This was a National Government initiative to stream-line consents and improve stakeholder engagement – piloted through habitat restoration works here in the New Forest.

In addition to improving consenting and stakeholder engagement, during the period of this project the Forestry Commission restored a further 2000 ha of SSSI through a range of activities including large-scale stream restoration eg. Hawkhill Inclosure, Pitts Wood Inclosure & Markway Lawn.

Final 4,000 Project

Bringing us up to date, the Forestry Commission has been a partner in this project with the National Park Authority (Lead Partner), Natural England and the Environment Agency since its inception in April 2008. The catchy and original title captured the challenge at that time – only 4,000ha of habitat restoration still to complete!! The current target has been reduced further due to fantastic works over the summers of 2008 and 2009, with approximately 3,000ha still to restore at this time. Furthermore, since the end of LIFE 3 these restoration projects have invested approximately £1.5m in the Forest.

Most recent restoration sites include Howen Bottom, Milkham Inclosure and the Warwickslade Cutting.

What have we learnt??

Over the last few years the scale of restoration works has significantly increased, resulting in greater resources to complete fewer sites in any given year. Through this we have been fortunate to work with a range of experienced and professional contractors. They have helped us to deliver quality habitat restoration and overcome some of the logistical challenges of transporting large volumes of material in sensitive environments. The most recent example of the novel approach to material movements is the development of a tramway at Warwickslade, which many members of the Consultative Panel observed on a recent site visit.

We believe that over the last 10-12 years the Forestry Commission has developed a cumulative knowledge and expertise in restoration planning and delivery. This can be seen in our staff and contractors, as well as in our Consultees who place faith in us to delivery these restoration schemes in a sensitive and effective manner.

The future?

At the current rate of progress the Forestry Commission anticipates a further 7-10 years of restoration work to restore the remaining SSSI units that are unfavourable. This will of course be dependent on future funding streams. Currently there is a great deal of optimism about a possible Higher Level Stewardship Scheme for the Forest, which may support some of this necessary restoration works.

Examples of future restoration sites include: Longwater Lawn, Latchmore Brook, Avon Water.

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November 2009