

**NOTES OF OUR FORESTS MEETING held on 6 February 2012
at Forum for the Future, London**

Present: Hen Anderson, Richard Daniels, Gabriel Hemery, Tony Juniper,
Rod Leslie, Robin Maynard, Jonathon Porritt

- **How's it looking out there?**

Everything pretty quiet on the forest front at the moment! The Government has pretty much succeeded in sucking a lot of the energy out of this area of concern, through the establishment of the Independent Panel, and everybody is just waiting to see what the fruits of the Panel will be. But nobody has forgotten the Government's grotesque bungling of this time last year!

- **Our Forests Vision**

This has been well-received, with very positive feedback from many sources.

The very helpful comments from Imogen Radford (Save Sandling Forest) have led to a good exchange with Hen; Robin is pursuing a meeting with FCTU; other meetings now in the pipeline.

Our priority here is to get the 1,000 printed copies out the door as soon as possible. Robin to circulate his list, and Jonathon to draft up a version of the letter for Mrs Spelman which might be useful for others.

- **Environmental Information Requests**

We reflected on the latest response from DEFRA, summarised as follows: "Sorry we've been so tardy in our responses; sorry we suggested that the reason for not releasing any information was that you're all too stupid to handle it; but sorry to say that we're still not going to accede to your request because this is an ongoing policy process which we don't want to jeopardise".
Unbelievable!

Robin is going to draft a summary account of this sorry saga for us to send to the NGOs with a gentle request for them to sort out any residual confusion. We won't make a big song & dance about this, but with the anniversary of the withdrawal of the sell-off proposals upon us (17.2.11) there may well be some journalists who will be interested.

JP to circulate response from Fiona Reynolds at the National Trust, and send Robin a note on why we're not letting go on this whole EIR story. We will then work out how best to pursue the formal process, after further consultations with Peter Roderick.

- **38Degrees**

We agreed that we would now start working with 38Degrees to test the level of enthusiasm for the OF Vision. In consultation with Hannah at 38Degrees, Gabriel and Robin will work up an appropriate questionnaire to be circulated to core of members who campaigned so vigorously against the sell-off proposals this time last year. Gabriel will simultaneously explore this whole idea with colleagues in Oxford to see how best to process the resulting responses.

38Degrees also wants to make a short film which Hen and Rich will help with, and to jointly organise a series of local meetings. We decided to prioritise that idea as follows:

Tony	Thetford
Rod	Cannock and Haldon
Rich	Forest of Dean (perhaps with Gabriel?)
Robin	Grizedale

- **Final Report for the Independent Panel**

We will be making a further submission to the Independent Panel, which we will need to have with them by early April. This will comprise the following elements:

- Principal findings from our engagement with 38Degrees members
- A more comprehensive version of the ‘economic case’ that we outlined in our Vision.
- Our final thoughts on the future of the Forestry Commission (see below)
- Our thoughts on the ‘minimum success criteria’ for the Panel’s final report to Government – now scheduled for June.

As regards the economic case, we will commission further work on this over the next 10 days, with Robin and Rod overseeing the resulting work.

- **Structure and Governance issues**

Protecting (and expanding) the Public Forest Estate is all about finance and governance: how can the role of the Forestry Commission be enhanced to take on the very challenging remit that we mapped out in our Vision?

We looked at some options in that Vision document: an equivalent of the new Waterways body; an equivalent of the new government body for Kew Gardens; an equivalent of the Dutch conservation and forestry body Staatsbosbeheer. None of these seem appropriate to us.

We will therefore present our account of what we think the best governance arrangements would be for the Forestry Commission (and other interested parties), including some consideration of the degree to which the current Forestry Act is or isn’t ‘fit for purpose’.

Robin and Rod will lead on this. We will meet again before early April to agree on our recommendations.

- **The Future of Our Forests**

We confirmed that we still see ourselves as a ‘time-limited ginger group’ – ie we will wind ourselves up as soon as our job is done. But we agreed that that will not come at the point where the Independent Panel publishes its final Report, but when the Government announces its conclusions in the light of the Panel’s recommendations.

In our opinion, there is little likelihood of this Government ‘doing the right thing’ by way of the Public Forest Estate unless it is strenuously encouraged so to do by all and sundry – raising the very real possibility that the campaign to protect the Public Forest Estate (and indeed the Forestry Commission itself) will need to be re-ignited if they fall short on that score.