

Natural England Board



Minutes of the seventh Natural England Board meeting - 10 October 2007

<u>Members attending</u>	<u>Executives:</u>
Martin Doughty (Chair)	Adrian Belton
Peter Allen	Andrew Wood
Melinda Appleby	Dave Webster
Sarah Burton	David Young
Poul Christensen (Deputy Chair)	Guy Thompson
Roger Clarke	Tom Tew
Lynn Crowe	
Merrick Denton-Thompson	<u>Secretariat:</u>
Michael Depledge	
Tony Hams	Becky Jones
David Hill	Roy Hymas
Doug Hulyer	
David Macdonald	
Christopher Pennell	
Helen Phillips (CEO)	
Pam Warhurst	

Prior to the Board meeting, a Board briefing session was held at which Board members were updated on Natural England's work in the following areas:

- Strategic Direction Refresh;
- Transition Programme;
- CAP Reform and Environmental Stewardship Targeting and Delivery;
- Defra Land Use Project;
- Government Inquiries into Flooding;
- Annual Report And Accounts.

1) Welcome from the Chair

- a) There were no apologies.
- b) There were no additions to the Register of Interests.

2) Stakeholder Engagements

a) The Board:

- i) noted the steps being taken to secure stakeholder engagement in the delivery of

Natural England's Strategic Direction and the engagements carried out/planned by Chair and Deputy Chair between 6 June and 10 December 2007.

3) Chief Executive's Report

The Board:

a) noted the summary of the current strategic issues:

- i) following the Secretary of State's decision not to implement regulatory measures to secure the environmental benefits of set-aside, we will continue our communications and engagement with the farming industry to promote voluntary measures and make arrangement with Defra to monitor the impact of his decision;
- ii) the August outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease provided an opportunity to test Natural England's preparedness for such incidents. We have conducted a lessons learnt exercise and will implement its findings accordingly;
- iii) following negotiations with Treasury and Defra, we will announce a new pay and harmonisation package to staff in November and provide details at a series of roadshows before Christmas;
- iv) the Strategic Direction Refresh will be developed in light of the budget negotiations with Defra over the coming months;
- v) Natural England is a member of the Climate Change Bill Adaptation Programme Board which is expected to consider the package of amendments agreed by the Secretary of State;
- vi) Genesis continues to be stable and consequently there have been no delays to payment resulting from systems issues. We have agreed a detailed set of acceptance criteria with Defra for taking over ownership of Genesis.

b) Reviewed and discussed performance of delivery against our Strategic Direction, and discussed:

- i) the joint submission with the Environment Agency to Defra and expressed disappointment with the set-aside decision by the Secretary of State;
- ii) the success of the ISS project and feedback from staff that Genesis is now working well for ELS applications;
- iii) the unsatisfactory performance of Defra Shared Services and the need to explore alternative options;
- iv) the success of the work we are doing in the regions to influence Regional Spatial Strategies and deliver development control advice;
- v) the need to consider alternative options to the current proposals for a Severn Barrage and the role of the Regional Spatial Strategy to guide its development.

c) noted the financial position for Natural England as at the end of August and forecast for 2007/8.

d) noted that approval was given by the Chair on 8 August 2007, under delegation from the Board, to sign the Part 8 Amending Agreement.

ACTION: Board Services to circulate the Chief Executive's presentation to the Board

ACTION: Board Services to circulate summary of our involvement in the development of Regional Spatial Strategies

4) The Audit Committee's first Annual Report to the Board

The Board:

- a) noted the Audit Committee's first annual report;
- b) in particular noted the Committee's exercise on 18 June, and by the Chair of Audit subsequently, of its specific delegated authority to recommend the signing off of the Board's Annual Report and Accounts for 2006/7 and the circumstances which had led to the subsequent delay in laying those documents before Parliament until after the Recess;
- c) welcomed the fact that the Accounts for a complicated first year covering the last 6 months of the founding bodies' existence, as well as Natural England's post-Vesting first 6 months, were unqualified by NAO who had provided a very reasonable Management Letter;
- (d) noted the confirmed minutes of the Audit Committee's meeting on 18 June 2007 and the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting on 10 September 2007; and
- (e) thanked the Audit Committee for its assiduous work.

5) Memorandum of Understanding between Natural England, The Environment Agency and The Forestry Commission

The Board:

- a) Noted the terms of the MoU and authorised the Chair to sign the agreement, subject to the following amendments discussed and agreed by the Board:
 - i) that the MoU should refer to joint Board meetings as part of the governance section.
 - b) Discussed and agreed that Natural England should explore opportunities to formalise our relationship and working arrangements with English Heritage.

Action: Executive Board

6) Natural England's Policy Position on housing growth and green infrastructure: pre scoping paper on principles

The Board:

- a) considered the potential scope of Natural England's policy position in relation to housing growth and green infrastructure.
- b) discussed the key principles underlying the potential scope of our policy position and made the following points:
 - Natural England has a role to ensure optimum environmental benefit from land use and connecting it with where people live;
 - there is an opportunity to enhance the environmental quality of greenbelt and work with the private sector to deliver sustainable development;
 - there is also an opportunity to take a more sustainable approach to the design and location of housing development;

- our policy scoping paper should have regard to the Government's Sustainable Communities agenda, and in particular, the role of green infrastructure in new housing development;
- there is a need to contextualise the debate to ensure that housing growth policies promote wider environmental and social benefits, in particular flood mitigation, climate change adaptation, and provision of high quality greenspace in towns and cities.

Christopher Pennell dissented from the paper and stated his view that "Natural England's stated position on the greenbelt could easily, and unhelpfully to our reputation, be misinterpreted."

The Board agreed that a policy scoping paper on housing growth and green infrastructure shall be discussed by the Board at its December meeting.

7) Natural England's Policy Position on Flooding: pre scoping paper on principles

The Board:

- a) considered the potential scope of Natural England's policy position in relation to flooding and flood risk management;
- b) discussed and agreed the key principles underlying the potential scope of our policy position, and noted that:
 - i) a policy scoping paper will be considered by the Board at a future meeting.