



Response to RELU consultation - Rising to the land-use challenge: issues for policy-makers a discussion paper

The Woodland Trust welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. We are the UK's leading woodland conservation charity. We have four main aims: no further loss of ancient woodland; restoring and improving woodland biodiversity; increasing new native woodland and; increasing people's understanding and enjoyment of woodland. We own over 1,000 sites across the UK, covering around 20,000 hectares (50,000 acres) and we have 300,000 members and supporters.

1. How do we achieve multiple objectives from land and water?

a. How do we get the balance of services right?

There is no simple answer to this question. Adoption of an ecosystem or systems approach should foster decision making which is locally responsive, cross sectoral and iterative or heuristic. What is right in the water catchment of the Severn Valley will be different from that which is appropriate to the Cambridge Fens. A range of policy interventions might be available not all of which would be applicable in each situation. For instance in the upper Severn Valley consideration of the positive effects of native woodland afforestation on water catchment management – specifically water quality and flood flow – might be appropriate. Whereas in the Cambridge fens adjustment of farming practices to reduce diffuse pollution and effects on ground water might be more suitable.

The key consideration is that the systems methodology is fully embraced to allow for a continual process of learning and adjustment at a local level. Local in this context is represented by that which has some definable ecological rationale e.g. a water catchment.

b. What more do we need to understand about behaviours?

As with all people, landowners make decisions which seek to satisfy their own needs. As the consultation document suggests these needs may be complex, and not solely based on a notion of economic rationality. Various typologies have sought to understand landowner's motivations and behaviours

Research by University of Gloucestershire¹ University of Reading² on landowner typology identified a predisposition to act in particular ways as a product of characteristics which represent the individual's history, culture, belief system etc. This predisposition - or 'habitus' – can be seen as durable, although not unchanging. Farmers are recognised as having particularly stable habitus.

¹ Slee, B. et al (2006) *Habitus and style of farming in explaining the adoption of environmental sustainability-enhancing behaviour*, report for DEFRA, University of Gloucester, Countryside and Community Research Unit.

² Garforth, C and Rehman, T. (2007) *Behavioural Typology of Farmers in England*, University of Reading, School of Agriculture, Policy and Development



Habitus interacts with 'style of farming'. This refers to the values and insights of a particular group of farmers concerning the way farming ought to be conducted. It interrelates with external issues such as markets and technology but produces a coherent view across the group about what constitutes good and proper farming practice. Styles of farming are the physical manifestation of bundles of knowledge and values held by farmers.

Habitus and styles of farming are important in limiting or enabling change. Their perceived standing or 'symbolic capital' amongst their peers and within the community is founded on adoption of the style of farming of their group.

Regulatory controls to internalize negative externalities will be necessary, but attempts to affect behaviour must find ways to build, or at least not undermine, the symbolic capital which defines the farmer as a social being. They want to be seen as good farmers, and in a largely productivist industry this means good food producers.

More positively interventions might also be considered which increases the sum total of public goods and again work with the grain of landowner motivations. Addressing positive action as part of good stewardship and husbandry is more likely to have positive outcomes. For instance support for woodland creation which could help mitigate flood flows, could also contribute to wood fuel and form part of the creation of habitat networks for biodiversity.

We believe that society must be prepared to subsidise for the provision of public goods. By definition their will be market failure in the provision of public goods by individual private landowners. For instance in developing a woodland resource to meet the needs for water management, renewable energy and the creation of habitat networks, intervention through subsidy and government support will be essential.

c. How should we value and trade-off different ecosystem services?

As with the decisions around the balance of services, valuation and comparison will be a combination of discursive decision making and the use of economic valuation tools to inform the debate. Without discussing at length the merits of specific valuation techniques for non-market benefits, it is clear that all have their failings. They should inform but not determine decisions of valuation. An 'appropriate value' then becomes that which brings about the desired behavioral change.

It is very likely that many current land use practices are, in the medium to long term, unsustainable – most for instance are predicated on the supply of relatively cheap and abundant oil. Both in terms of supply of ecosystem services, but also from the viewpoint of food security, both existing and new land uses should be subject to sustainability appraisal.

We need to find new metaphors for sustainable development. The notion of the 'three legged stools' or the 'three pillars of SD' assumes that each have an equal weighting and importance. Only the natural environment has an enduring physical reality. Society is constructed and exists within the natural environment, and economics is a pure construct of society. To weigh them equally is to make a category error. It is vital to secure a healthy natural environment in order to sustain society – not to manage the natural environment in a way which conforms to the constructs of the current economic model.

d. Who decides what ecosystem services we need and where?

In order for a systems approach to be properly adopted and to work effectively it must include local involvement and discussion. We believe that voluntary bodies can play an important role in this. Part of their function is to represent views and interests which are not



always represented in government, at all levels. Voluntary bodies have experience of local involvement and are non-partisan in party political terms and are often trusted.

Evidence is important in formulating policy, but will always be viewed as being in deficit. We need to make decisions based on the best available evidence but accept that in complex systems evidence is always include and unstable – each decision changes the systems and requires new evidence.

e. What mix of mechanisms do we need to tackle market failure?

In order to address market failure, it is first important to determine a vision for what is to be achieved and then address the elements of the system in different ways. Market failure affects all society – including landowners. A healthy natural environment is important to sustain agriculture and forestry. Environmental measures need to be seen as part of the agricultural system as much as other elements of husbandry, not as a sop to nature conservationists (see response to question 1b above). Where there is market failure we need to be willing to impose regulation, but we should also be willing to use subsidy – framing landowners as the ‘villain’ or the ‘recipient of handouts’ misses the point about the importance of land husbandry in achieving public goods – not just avoiding public harms.

Current policy interventions remain too linear – that is they fail to identify and respond to unforeseen consequences. We would support a more to a more creative approach based on wider involvement in policy formulation and the mix of regulation, incentive and advice outlined. In particular we believe that the last of these – advice – is inadequate to support landowners understanding of the issues. There is some evidence to suggest that a lack of advice and explanation is a key consideration in behavioral change amongst landowners.

f. What supporting models and indicators are needed?

Modelling is a tool not a solution. It is vital participants understand its limitations and weaknesses, as well as its strengths. We support the view that modelling is primarily about trying to understand uncertainty.

As with other tools modelling needs to be integrated at all levels in decisions making. We would support the use of modelling help learning and decision; in particular the interactive use of model with stakeholders as part of the discursive decision making process to explore possible outcomes and futures. The use of the BEETLE model by Forestry Commission Scotland in developing an interactive tool for use by landowners in developing forest habitat networks reflects a successful use of modelling at a local level.

2. How do we achieve more democratic and accountable decisions?

a. Who should we engage in new conversations and how?

In our view stakeholder involvement through active participation in environmental decision making, as well as being increasingly regarded as a democratic right, is also important in developing sustainable solutions to problems, engendering behavioral change and avoiding or reducing unforeseen outcomes.

We have evidence from our work on the restoration of planted ancient woodland sites which support that of the RELU *Livestock Wastes* project, that landowners respond well to aerial maps and the ability to annotate or develop plans from these maps. Involving landowners directly in the development of solutions seems likely to lead to more sustainable outcomes,



with fewer unforeseen consequences and the benefit of landowners themselves monitoring and evaluating success as part of their husbandry.

We believe that all participants to the process should make clear the range of views which support their position. The strength of non-governmental organisation (both from the voluntary and the commercial sectors) is that they are able to represent particular views which can then be weighed in the deliberation of solutions. It is important that it is clear from which position these views emanate.

b. What can we learn from international perspectives?

There would seem little to lose and much to gain from understanding how other countries have met similar challenges.

c. How do we learn from local stakeholders and help them to learn?

This is covered by responses to the questions above.

d. How do we build confidence and capacity in stakeholder engagement?

This is covered by responses to the questions above.

e. Are long-standing assumptions about land managers still appropriate?

This is partly covered by the answer to the questions above – in particular question 1b. Landowner behaviours are more complex than long-standing assumptions suggest, and rarely based on economic rationality alone.

3. How can our use of land and water help tackle climate change?

a. The carbon challenge: what role for land?

We believe that land management can make a contribution to the ‘carbon challenge’ by adapting land management practices to reduce carbon emissions and to increase carbon stored within terrestrial systems – most notable in soils, including forest soils.

Whilst we believe that the key issue in tackling climate change is the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, we feel that woodland has an important role to play in both adaptation³ and mitigation. Creation of new woodland offers multiple benefits for adaptation and mitigation of which carbon sequestration and storage through afforestation are an important part.

We believe it is crucial to cut emissions as a priority through other means and offsets should only be used to compensate for residual emissions. It is also important to be clear that offsets do not in themselves help to reduce emissions, merely compensate for them. Nonetheless we believe they have an important role in raising public and business awareness of climate change, the costs to society and to prompt examination of areas of business practice where real reductions can be made⁴.

b. Can modelling scenarios help future decision-making?

³ *Adapt or die?*: Climate change and woodland, Woodland Trust <http://www.woodland-trust.org.uk/publications/publicationsmore/adaptordie.pdf>

⁴ Woodland Trust position Statement on Climate change, downloaded at: <http://www.woodland-trust.org.uk/campaigns/briefingsmore/climatechangeeps2008.pdf>



Carbon should always be a consideration in modelling as a factor in climate proofing land use change.

c. Can we move away from resource-hungry crops?

Whilst we would support the development of crops and livestock which lower resource use we have concerns about the use of GMO technology. We are opposed to commercial release unless and until there is clear evidence that GMOs⁵:

- will not hybridise with other species (we accept development of sterile crops may be a way of avoiding this threat)
- will not harm ecological food webs
- will not spread in an uncontrolled way across the countryside; and

In our view such evidence should be derived from controlled, enclosed experiments over timescales governed by scientific necessity and which do not allow the possibility of accidental cross-pollination and risks to the environment. If evidence supports use of GMOs we would argue for legislation and tight regulation of crops and the farming systems under which they are grown to promote delivery of environmental benefits e.g. genuine reductions in use of agrochemicals.

In any event GMOs should be just part of a wider consideration around plant and animal breeding programmes, farming systems which support lower inputs e.g. mixed rotational farming, other elements of the food production process such as packaging, storage and distribution, and reducing food waste and how these contribute to overall resource and energy use in the system.

Too little emphasis is put on managing demand as a way of affecting production. Changes to farming systems might also be brought about by changing societal eating practices e.g. the reduction in dairy and meat consumption suggested by the chairman of IPCC⁶.

d. How do we put climate change at the heart of policy?

Some policy measures will be intended to directly address issues of climate change e.g. land use change to aid to adaptation to increased flood flows. Aside from those policies for land use directly intended to address issues related to climate change, all policy should be climate proofed to assess impacts on climate change mitigation and adaptation. Does a policy contribute to or detract from mitigation? Is it adaptable to climate change? Can it increase adaptation of the system to climate change?

e. What policy adjustments are needed at the tactical level?

The ability of policy to be adapted locally to meet specific circumstances would increase the likelihood of developing appropriate and acceptable tactical measures.

We believe it would be helpful to address how the landlord-tenant legislation addresses environmental issues, including those relating to land-based carbon management.

⁵ Woodland Trust position statement on GMOs, downloaded at: <http://www.woodland-trust.org.uk/campaigns/briefingsmore/gmo.htm>

⁶ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/sep/07/food.foodanddrink>



The Woodland Trust, Autumn Park, Grantham, LINCOLNSHIRE NG31 6LL

www.woodland-trust.org.uk/campaigns

www.woodsunderthreat.info

For more information, please contact:

Mike Townsend email : miketownsend@woodlandtrust.org.uk or tel 01432 356144