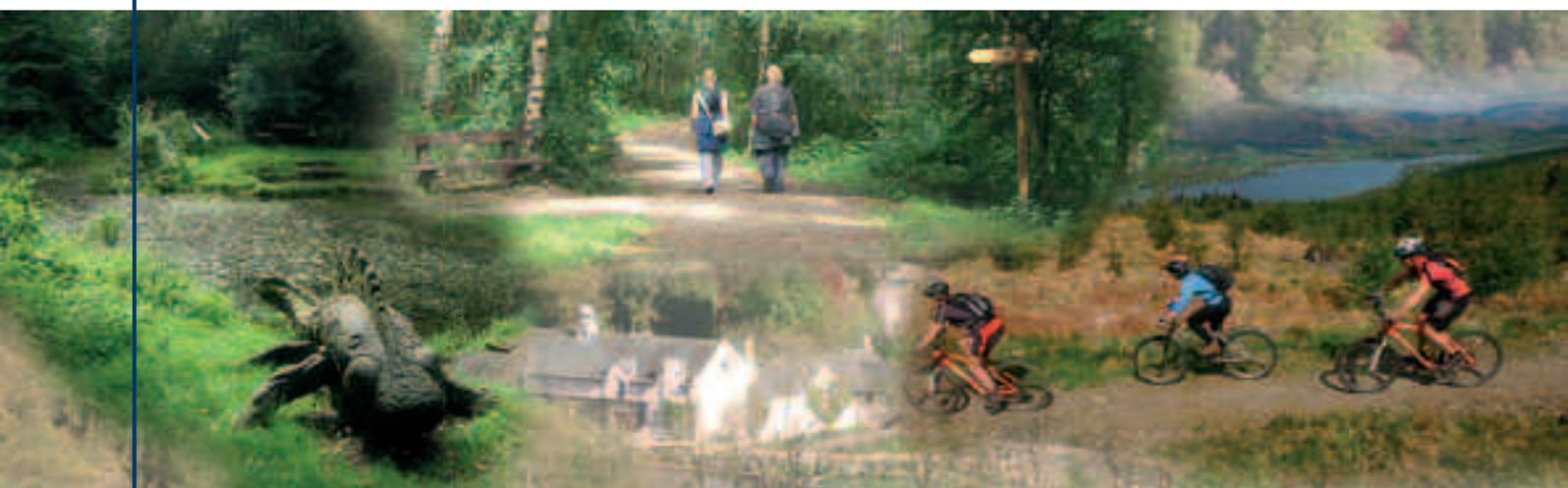


# Social Science in Forestry



**Public participation and partnership:**  
a review of Forestry Commission practice and governance  
in a changing political and economic context



**Forestry Commission**

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**Sue Weldon**

in collaboration with Paul Tabbush

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Enquiries relating to this publication should be addressed to:

Marcus Sangster  
Forestry Commission  
231 Corstorphine Road  
Edinburgh  
EH12 7AT  
Tel: 0131 334 0303  
Fax: 0131 316 4344

The author can be contacted at:

Sue Weldon  
Institute for Environment Philosophy and Public Policy  
Lancaster University  
Bailrigg  
Lancaster  
LA1 4YW  
Tel: 01524 65201

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## Preface

Sustainable forestry practice is at the core of the forestry strategies for each of the three countries of Great Britain, and this implies public participation in decision-making. The term 'governance' refers in this context to the many informal processes through which decisions are made, and which accompany and complement the more formal processes of government. It is a subject area of increasing importance, and this reflects both social change and change in political thinking. It has particular relevance in the area of environmental decision-making; an understanding of environmental governance is a prerequisite for an understanding of the need to include communities of place and of interest in decision-making processes, and for the evaluation of these processes.

As part of an investigation of this, and to indicate possible research directions, Forestry Commission researchers discussed the implications with the staff of the Institute for Environment, Philosophy & Public Policy (IEPPP) at Lancaster University, and in particular with Professor Robin Grove-White and Dr Sue Weldon. IEPPP has an excellent track-record of academic achievement in studies of science and society, and in environmental governance. One result of these discussions is the review reported here, funded by the Forestry Commission. It was designed to apply this current knowledge to the evaluation of contrasting forest management processes, and to highlight areas for further research.

The qualitative research methods employed are particularly appropriate for the close investigation of processes involving people, especially those driven by attitudes and beliefs. I believe this review offers a fine example of the use of these methods, and of the insights they can provide.

**Paul Tabbush**

Head of Social Science

Forest Research

## Summary

In recent years the Forestry Commission in Great Britain has been undergoing a period of rapid change due to political and administrative devolution and changing demands on forestry. These changes require new ways of working, particularly in respect of requirements for new partnerships and more participatory approaches to governance.

This study was commissioned by Forest Research and undertaken by the Centre for the Study of Environmental Change (CSEC) to review the Forestry Commission's changing emphasis towards participatory governance. The research methods used included interviews with key informants throughout the Forestry Commission. In addition, several case studies were undertaken in two areas of northwest England, Grizedale Forest and the Mersey Forest. The study reviewed changing patterns of use and governance within UK forestry and asked how this changing context has affected the way policy is formulated and practiced. Current approaches to participation and engagement have been reviewed within the context of case study evidence from the two areas.

The main issues emerging from this study are:

- Changes in the way forestry is practiced have arisen partly as a result of changes in the levels of governance. Questions of scale now emerge as a key issue in negotiations about policy outcomes.
- Power relationships are being re-defined in new structures of governance and within partnerships. It is becoming increasingly difficult to identify where the power lies.
- The actual practice of governance is necessarily constrained by who can, or is entitled to participate, at what level and to what effect. These new arrangements should not diminish the need to engage fully with all relevant stakeholders.
- The question of how to build relationships based on trust has emerged as a key issue in the evaluation of new local partnerships. If partnerships are to gain and maintain the trust of their local communities (and their funders) partners will need to develop new skills to handle the complexities of this new style of governance.
- Sustainable development is an over-arching theme and a key issue is the need for a basis for indicating or evaluating this. It is argued that indicators need to be based on a range of broader, more sensitive and more inclusive qualitative outcomes, such as increased levels of community involvement and health benefits, rather than narrow quantitative outputs.

It is suggested that further research is targeted to the following areas:

- exploration of ways to negotiate the relationship between decisions at different scales or levels of governance.
- creation of a capacity to move towards more qualitative and sustainable outcomes, in addition to quantitative outputs.
- finding new opportunities and new ways of engaging with other areas of expertise.
- responding to the needs of a wider range of stakeholders.
- embracing and encouraging changes in thinking about, and understanding of, governance and styles of management.



## Introduction

The Forestry Commission in Great Britain has been going through a period of rapid change due to constitutional reform, deriving from political devolution and changing demands on forestry. Within its newly devolved structure there is a trend towards decisions being made at local levels and with greater account being taken of local contexts.

It is argued that these changes, from centralised and top-down 'government' to de-centralised power sharing 'governance', require new ways of working, particularly in respect of requirements for new partnerships and more participatory approaches to governance (Bills, 2002). This is a trend that is also reflected in changing power relationships and in the political climate at international, national and local government level, where there has been a similar move towards de-centralisation, devolution and a stated commitment to more participative and sustainable practices.

With this background, this study, commissioned by Forest Research, reviewed the changing emphasis by the Forestry Commission on participatory governance, and gave particular attention to the role of partnership working and public engagement in forest practice. The study, which also included interviews with policy advisors, took the northwest region of England as a case study area. Two areas within this region have provided insights into a range of contrasting participatory practices and modes of governance:

- a rural area within a national park where mainly commercial forestry is being transformed to provide a range of leisure and recreational facilities (Grizedale Forest).
- an urban area, designated as economically deprived, where community forestry has become well established in the past decade through community development practices and has now begun to take on new challenges in the regeneration of derelict and under-used land (Mersey Forest).

The reason for looking at these areas in detail is to balance insights from the complex realities of practice against the rhetoric and theory of participatory governance, and thus is to gain a better understanding of the key issues relating to public participation and partnership within Forestry Commission practice.

It is expected that the changes will bring about very real benefits, but there are still unresolved questions about where the power now lies; also it should be understood that the benefits would not be realised without some inevitable 'costs' in respect of additional demands and pressures on forest managers. For instance, a 'forest renaissance' requires resolution of tensions within Forest Enterprise, which is an organisation that, whilst still maintaining a commercial remit, has responded to a new vision of itself as a 'not-for-profit enterprise' delivering wider public benefits (Garforth and Dudley, 2003). The implication for policy and practice is a shift from management of a primary sector service serving a well-defined range of stakeholders to governance of a public/private sector partnership serving a more diverse public.

This study took a critically engaged approach to the topics and issues as they unfolded within the specific local contexts. Points at which practitioners engaged were many and varied. The purpose of this review is to comment overall on these engagement practices and to highlight issues relating to their purpose and effectiveness. The issues are complex but, from a policy level and based on insights from northwest England, a clear picture is emerging: there is much to learn from these varied practices and from recently developed practice guidelines, particularly from the innovative work in urban areas. On the other hand, initial insights, based on practical experience and the 'reality' of public engagement, reveal a number of unresolved questions and tensions. It is important to

understand that these new ways of working, with multiple partners and involvement of communities, requires a new style of governance and institutional arrangement which involves organisational re-arrangement and re-evaluation of resource allocation and a change of 'mind set'. For example, new expert systems that offer practice guidelines and 'tool-kits' for public engagement cannot be superimposed on practice cultures and organisational structures that have been designed around existing styles of governance.

This report aims to give clarification of the issues around new approaches to participatory governance, a discussion about the realities and problems of pursuing this approach, and some pointers for further research. These insights can provide 'intelligence' for policy makers and managers at a time when institutional arrangements are in a state of change and policy frameworks are being re-defined. Promises made at policy level and commitments entered into by forest managers tend to define the parameters for assessment of their success (or failure) – the price of failure being not only the continued loss of well-managed woodlands and forest, but also a loss of trust in the forestry agencies.

## The review process

In May 2003 Forest Research commissioned a two-month project to review the role of wider community involvement and participatory practices within the rapidly devolving organisation of the Forestry Commission. Sue Weldon at the Institute for Environment, Philosophy and Public Policy (IEPPP) Lancaster University undertook the research, in collaboration with Robin Grove-White (IEPPP), Paul Tabbush, Forest Research and Marcus Sangster, Forestry Commission.

This is a wide ranging overview of the changing relationship between participatory practices and governance, but it is not a specific review of all the public engagement practices within UK forestry. Insights were obtained from people in key policy positions and from practitioners in northwest England, and who were available for interview. Responses were therefore obtained from those who were the most 'visible' in this field of public engagement. People in various positions and locations within, and associated with, the practice, management and governance of forestry were asked about their experience of public engagement and how it related to their own activities and understanding of forestry (see Appendix 1). The review is based on these interviews and includes observation of public engagement as it is practiced in two specific areas within northwest England. This report is primarily an interpretation of those findings.



## Changing patterns of use and governance in UK forestry

Forests in the UK are not 'natural' in the sense that they have not remained wild and free from human intervention. Forestry embodies the connectedness of nature and society and the ways in which environmental, social and political processes are interlinked in production and governance. Every aspect reflects human intervention and constant change. Forest management illustrates how human needs and aspirations have changed over time, and the history of forestry is one of changing practice and use.

### Changing patterns of use

Changing patterns of use and governance in British forests and woodlands have arisen as a direct result of cultural changes. Since its formation in 1919, or principal goal of the Forestry Commission has been reforestation to the extent that by 2000, in what Rollinson (2003) describes as: *"the biggest change in land use in the UK in modern times"*, over 1.5 million hectares of new forests had been created to transform the percentage of land area with woodland cover of 5% to 12%. Most of those transformations have been made in specific areas of the rural uplands and in the form of conifer plantation forests because, until the late 1980s, reforestation was directed towards the commercial production of timber. In fact the achievement of new planting is considerably greater, because at the same time as the uplands were being planted, in the lowland farming areas there was a continuing trend to convert woods to agriculture and to remove hedges.

In recent years, for various reasons, these timber production goals have changed significantly. Although many of the plantation forests have always provided some public access, forest managers are now taking initiatives to provide for a wider range of leisure activities. Where once forests were discrete sites of production, public access tolerated rather than encouraged, and limited to well-defined footpaths, the scope for public use and engagement has widened. Now, in those same plantations people venture into the forest, not only to walk, but to learn about nature, encounter art, ride mountain bikes, drive four-wheel drive vehicles, take part in adventure sports (such as tree top aerial rope assault courses) and to picnic and enjoy. Forest managers now engage with a much wider range of interests beyond the forest industry.

Moreover, an increasing involvement in community forests has brought the Forestry Commission and their managing agents Forest Enterprise into closer proximity with urban communities, and with the places where people live and work. The boundary between urban social space and forestry is now less well defined. The range and scope of activities in these areas can be anything from dog walking and cycling to building dens (or anti-social activities like 'joy-riding' stolen cars or drug and alcohol misuse). The level of engagement or involvement for local communities can extend from a welcome view from a window to becoming involved in the actual ownership and management of the woodland.

### Factors influencing change of use

A number of factors are driving these changes. In the first place the Forestry Commission, one of a number of UK countryside policy bodies, has learned to adapt and take account of a wider environmental and 'social' reality. It has also realised that it cannot continue to operate in isolation. Research has shown that most people value woods and trees for a range of reasons over and above a commercial or economic value, including for their intrinsic value (see for instance the work done by

Macnaghten *et al.*, 1998). Continuing pressure to adapt to these new realisations of the wider appreciation of the relationship between trees and the landscape has led to the more participatory approach to Forest Design Plans. Another factor that has had a significant effect on forest practice is the economic reality of international timber markets, which have caused a decrease in timber prices and thus in forestry income, forcing an inevitable move to find new reasons for managing forests. Finally, after ten years in operation, the influence of the community forests is now affecting policy and practice in other areas.

In 1919, British reforestation policies were developed as part of a strategy to become self-sufficient in timber production, but particularly since the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the 'Earth Summit', forest policy has moved towards principles of sustainable forest management, and in 2003, the UK National Forest Programme was entitled 'Sustainable Forestry in the UK'.

A further new set of changes is about to be experienced as a result of political and constitutional 'devolution' in the UK. Political devolution has brought with it inevitable policy changes, with four devolved forestry strategies for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Overall, the four devolved strategies are brought together (quite literally without adjustment) in *Sustainable forestry in the UK: the UK's national forest programme* (Forestry Commission, 2003). However, a key element of the overall, devolved strategy is 'to practice high standards of sustainable forest management' and, as all the documents indicate, there is a commitment to the expansion of Britain's woodlands and to 'sustainable forest management'.

Although the four devolved strategies are very different in their emphasis on specific contexts (Scotland's, for instance still has a strong emphasis on commercial wood production), they all refer to the need for partnership working and for those partners to include all sectors of society (including the general public). For example, in the *England forest strategy* (Forestry Commission, 1998), the 'strategic priorities and programmes for forestry' are set out under four themes that outline the range of areas within which the Forestry Commission is actively involved in creating new roles for itself in addition to commercial timber production. These objectives which are to be achieved in tandem if possible, rather than as mutually exclusive categories, are as follows:

Firstly 'forestry for rural development' suggests the more traditional timber production objective, but with the added objective of creating new economic opportunities and wider social benefits. The objective of 'managing forestry for environment and conservation' embraces the wider remit of contributing to the Government's nature conservation and biodiversity targets. Thirdly, alongside these conservation objectives 'forestry for recreation, access and tourism' is a relatively new and expanding agenda for recreation uses of forestry in both rural and urban areas. Finally, in outlining the objective of restoring and re-creating 'forestry for economic regeneration', the English forest strategy outlines a bold approach to the greening and restoration of derelict and under-used (DUN) land.

The *Forestry Devolution Review* (Cabinet Office, 2002) announced the new administration arrangements for the, now devolved, UK Forestry Commission. The review recommends an early resolution to the uneasy policy relationship and potential conflicts of interest between the Forestry Commission, as the regulating authority, and Forest Enterprise, the managing agents and the largest operator in the marketplace.

## Changes in the way forestry is managed

How might this changing context affect the ways in which policy is formulated and forestry is managed and practiced in the UK? In other words, how is the changing context affecting patterns of governance? A shift from the command and control forms of government to the newly devolved and localised administration and management suggests a change in the relationship between state and civil society and a new set of power relationships. Although it would be incorrect to consider the demise of the state in the wake of newly devolved structures, these new hybrid configurations mark a change in chains of accountability and responsibility. The concept of scale is an important aspect of

these changes. For instance, one issue raised by the devolution review was about how the scaled-down devolved structures should respond to scaled-up European and international policy issues. Another key issue is the ability of forest managers to work with a wider range of partners, including public services, private companies and community groups, to secure greater integration, higher efficiency and more 'joined-up' service provision. Finally, in relation to good governance, service provision and the aim of securing public benefit, there is the issue of stakeholder participation and the requirement to respond to the needs of a wider range of users.

A factor accompanying the changes is the requirement for foresters at every level of forest practice, from forest worker to manager and policy maker, to have an understanding of the requirements of multi-purpose forestry. At forest ranger level this requires a knowledge about woodland management and also additional facilitation skills to consult with local communities and diverse interest groups. At management level the requirement to work with a wide range of partners means that diplomatic skills are needed for both negotiating policy outcomes and also in securing the funds to deliver and maintain sustainable projects.



## From government to governance: a national trend?

The following chapter highlights the changing power relationships and the context within which this apparent move from centralised 'government' to a wider and more participatory style of 'governance' has arisen. There is now a commonly held assumption that in all areas of UK public policy concepts of active citizenship and public participation are taking over from the traditional representative mode of government (Marinetto, 2003) and that partnership working is a key to facilitating that process (Lowndes, 2001). These changing relationships can be seen at a number of levels, outlined below. At all levels, including the international level, wider participation is a feature of and intrinsic to a sustainable form of governance. At government level it is an aspect of a stated political commitment to a more participatory and devolved local government. Finally, public participation is a key feature of the Forestry Commission's new approach to devolved governance and policy, all of which, it is anticipated, will lead to a 'forest renaissance' (see Garforth and Dudley, 2003).

The preface to the England Forestry Strategy states: 'It firmly closes the door on single-purpose plantations' and opens up the possibility to create new benefits for society. This policy document, designed to frame the governance of forestry in England for 5–10 years, arises out of collaboration with ten other partner agencies and focuses discussion on how the Government can work with partners to provide benefits for the people. Keith Jones (personal communication, 2003), Conservator for North West England, puts forward that the policy process is a move away from the old style ('decide, announce, defend' – DAD) way of doing things based on 'predict and provide', top down, expert-led styles of government. The *England forestry strategy*, on the other hand is a MUM ('meet, understand and manage') and is presented as a more negotiated and iterative style of governance that puts the emphasis on steering (fitting the management and governance of forestry to identified needs) a more participatory approach.

### Sustainable development

A commitment to sustainable forest management is now written into the UK's National Forest Programme, and is based on the three integrated elements of sustainable development (economy, environment and society), although it also emphasises that sustainable forest management is 'a dynamic concept that will change over time'. Significantly, this concept of dynamic change raises a question about how these inevitable changes can be governed to achieve the desired outcome.

A recent report for the Environment Agency (EA), has addressed a similar question in relation the EA's own commitment to sustainable development. Although there are many different approaches, based on different concepts of sustainable development, Burgess *et al.* (2000) point to an emerging political emphasis on the 'social welfare dimensions of sustainability' and involvement of the public in the processes of decision making about these dimensions. They contrast this with an earlier (and still dominant) approach that is guided by expert knowledge about economic and environmental end products (outputs), rather than on the social (governance) issues about how to organise society to reach certain desired outcomes. The report argues that, although there is still no consensus about how to conceptualise sustainable development as a 'thing', it is still possible to encourage particular modes of behaviour and processes of change. At issue therefore are questions about 'governance' and the report draws on insights from Dobson's (1996) analysis of sustainable development in the following way:

*"if we are to move in the direction of SD [Sustainable development], we cannot take for granted the fact that existing decision-making structures and practices place social justice values at their centre. It is for these reasons that in attempting to offer a model of SD we position 'governance – those formal and informal structures and practices through which society is seen to 'work' – as an arena or dimension of SD in its own right."*

## New Labour Party modernisation

It has been suggested that participation has 'co-evolved' as a key element of the New Labour Party modernisation strategy, alongside 'joined up' partnerships with other agencies, for a fully integrated approach to democratic local governance (Lowndes, 2001). For many local authorities and agencies the concept of 'added value' forms the basis for policies requiring public engagement. This should include a review of how public engagement is entering into policy agendas and more participatory styles of governance. For example, in land-use planning there is increasing emphasis on public engagement in negotiating options rather than consultation to authenticate pre-framed policy agendas. Also, in an attempt to address the declining interest in local politics, illustrated by increasingly low turn-out for local elections, there has been an interest in more innovative forms of public engagement and a move towards addressing the 'democratic deficit' by targeting consultation exercises towards the 'citizen' (e.g. citizen juries and 'planning for real'). In the context of forestry, Bills (2002) describes the changes thus:

*"there is a growing movement towards regional and local government and increasing emphasis on participation." [In a representative democracy in which fewer and fewer of the citizens turn up to vote at elections] '[p]erhaps this can be interpreted very simply as an attempt by Government to remain relevant to the lives led by its citizens."*

## Devolution

For the Forestry Commission public participation is the ultimate end of a fully devolved administration i.e. to tailor forest management to the regional, sub-regional and local contexts. In addition to the formation of new partnerships the vision is that:

*"People play a more central role in decisions about their local forests ... State forest managers' expertise and remit have changed; they are expected to listen more and liaise with local people, to ensure that necessary trade-offs between different forest functions are understood and properly debated." (Garforth and Dudley, 2003)*

## Forest Renaissance

The vision of a 'forest renaissance', arising out of the changing contexts of use and governance mentioned above, is a vision of multi-purpose and sustainably managed forestry. The changing economic and political climate has meant that forestry 'users' are a much wider constituency than the traditional customer for timber. There is an increasing emphasis on a wider range of forest users and public interest and an expectation that forests will be able to deliver a wider range of public benefits, thus bringing about a 'forest renaissance' (Garforth and Dudley, 2003). This envisaged trend is endorsed at international level, by the Director of UK Forest Policy, Tim Rollinson, who outlined the changing policy objectives as follows:

*"The key lesson we have learnt is the need to be responsive and flexible. Through being responsive we find that our forests are valued and are relevant to modern society – and that we too are valued and relevant." (Rollinson, 2003)*

## Approaches to public participation and engagement

This chapter looks more closely at current approaches to participation and engagement and takes case study evidence from the northwest England to illustrate the range of approaches to public participation currently being used. The modes of governance observed appear to be beginning to put partnership working and public engagement at the centre of current strategy. However, a link between sustainable development and public engagement was already on the policy agenda of the Forest Commission, two years before the publication of the England Forest Strategy. Bills (1996) states:

*“There is an exciting economic future for the forest industry in Britain, but it will only be realised in a sustainable sense if it is supported by appropriate policies and strategies which recognise the interests the community has in forests – beyond the production of wood.”*

Bills (1996) introduces the concept of community participation and argues that:

*“if community woodlands are to fulfil their potential, managers must be as much concerned with the needs of people using the woodland as with the needs of the trees”.*

In 2000, the Forest Enterprise strategy on community involvement explained how this would contribute to the Government’s commitments on sustainable forest management (Forest Enterprise, 2000b). They also published guidelines on ‘how to get involved’ (Forest Enterprise, 2000a). Since then there have been a wide range of other guidance tools to help managers understand the terms of engagement (see Hislop and Twery, 2001; Groundwork, 2002).

### Approaches to public consultation

There are a number of methods of public engagement, ranging from simple consultation about changes to service provision (for which methods such as quantitative surveys are usually used) to more involved and complex forms of community involvement. In government services much has been written about ‘user’ or ‘stakeholder’ involvement and there are numerous guidelines and ‘tool-kits’ offering advice. It is important to understand the relationship between different methodologies in terms of the process used to obtain the public view.

There are various ways of classifying these approaches. In the context of forest management, Hislop and Twery (2001) take aspects such as the level of interest by the user/stakeholder and the number of stakeholders involved (see Table 5.1), whereas, in the context of health services, Dowsell *et al.* (1997) take a different perspective by looking at the extent to which deliberation and interaction takes place against the amount of information supplied and taken account of in each approach (see Table 5.2). These are subtle distinctions; a broader distinction divides quantitative survey methods from qualitative engagement. It is often argued that quantitative methods, involving greater numbers

**Table 5.1** Correspondence of public involvement tools with the level of stakeholders interest and numbers of people in each stakeholder group.

	Low level of stakeholder interest	High level of stakeholder interest
Low number of stakeholders	Intensive consultation tools (e.g. ‘Planning for Real’, 1:1 meetings)	Extensive participative tools (e.g. working groups, consensus building)
High number of stakeholders	Representative consultative tools (e.g. Focus groups, targeted surveys)	Representative participative tools (e.g. citizen juries, forums).

(Source: Hislop and Twery, 2001)

**Table 5.2** *Approaches to Public Consultation.*

	Informed	Uni-informed
Deliberated	Citizens' Juries Deliberative Panels	Focus groups
Undeliberated	Questionnaire with written information	Large scale postal surveys

(Source: Dowswell *et al.*, 1997)

of people, are more representative (and therefore more scientifically valid), whereas qualitative methods (such as focus groups and citizen juries), which are by their very nature more deliberative and more information-rich, have no such authority. This is a misleading distinction because different methods are designed to engage in entirely different ways.

In planning a process of public engagement it is important to understand the level of participation required, the quality and amount of information to be considered, and the context. For instance, large sample quantitative surveys are an invaluable tool for consultations which require simple answers (yes/no) to closed questions; whereas citizen juries (typically involving no more than a dozen members of the public) are designed to address more complex policy issues. These methods address people in entirely different capacities: for instance, as consumers of services, as members of local communities, or as members of the general public (citizens). Key issues therefore include the quality and quantity of the information, the nature of the public to be engaged with, and the level of participation.

## Which publics?

Publics can be selected to be representative in a range of different ways. As analysts of public consultation models point out, it would be a mistake to imagine that there is a homogeneous entity 'the general public' and any claim to be engaging with the public in any method of consultation is open to challenge (see Renn *et al.*, 1995). Since the concept of the public is intrinsically heterogeneous and multi-faceted, claims to be representative, whether statistical or otherwise, must be qualified by an explanation which answers the question: "representative of whom/which groups?" Another crucial question to ask is: "in what capacity are they being addressed?". For example, in a guide to effective community consultation, the Audit Commission (1999) suggests that members of the public can be consulted in three main capacities: as 'consumers', as 'citizens' and as 'tax payers', and any number of other related categories such as 'nature lover', tourist or 'student' could be added. The important point is the level of reflection required in unpacking the concept of the public.

## Levels of participation

Arnstein's (1969) now classic model of a 'ladder of participation' is often offered to define the various degrees of citizen participation. The ladder was designed to help people understand how progress, from 'agency control' to 'community control', is related to concepts such as consultation, participation and involvement. Arnstein's ladder is about the stages whereby power can be delegated to wider participants and local communities. It was also a normative tool that invites managers to reflect on how their consultation and participation practices are located on the ladder and, if they wished to demonstrate good practice, to 'move up the ladder'. This is an over-simplification if it is applied judgements to all levels of decision-making in all contexts. In the first place it is not always possible or necessary to delegate complete ownership and responsibility to participants and, where delegation happens without the necessary support, funding or follow-up, people can feel misled. A serious consequence of this can be loss of trust. So it is important to look beyond the rhetoric and to ask whether the promises can be realised and to be aware of the different levels of participation. Consultation and engagement can happen at a number of levels, using many different techniques and participatory practices and Arnstein's model has been found to be a useful heuristic device and a way of illustrating the wide variety of citizen involvement within consultation strategies. It is necessary to be aware that different consultation devices 'construct' and address different aspects of the public. In effect, different techniques are developed to elicit a specific kind of response. For example, market

research surveys, with well-chosen closed questions, address people as consumers of public goods and services. On the other hand, more participatory and informed processes such as focus groups and 'planning for real' activities are designed to involve people as citizens with interests wider than personal interests in a deliberative and negotiated process. Much has been written about different approaches to public engagement and participation and many cases offer useful guidelines and 'tool-kits', but the information is valuable, only in so far as any set of tools is useful, if it is used skilfully and reflexively.

## Power to influence decisions

As well as an understanding of process and level of participation, there is also an important issue about the commitment of managers and policy makers to final outcomes, and the power of public engagement in influencing the way things are done. For instance, in a review of democratic practice within local government, Stewart (1996) concluded that while there was evidence of democratic practice around public engagement in isolated pockets, a commitment was required to 'plug in' the results of these processes to the policy processes and management decisions they affect. In other words, information obtained through consultations needs to be acted upon. Similarly, the Audit Commission (1999) suggests that much of the consultation and many of the public engagement activities carried out by agencies are not used effectively or sustained. The long-term consequence is erosion of trust in the managing agents. Communities may also feel that they have been manipulated. For instance, many forest managers with experience of community involvement have reflected on the issue of power when considering the most appropriate level of engagement and the need to undertake community development, not just community consultation and then stop. It appears that at times there has been an uneasy dialogue with communities in the past, who have felt manipulated by unequal power relationships between the researchers and the communities. In Scotland, for example, it has been suggested that communities are often over-researched and that this can result in a feeling of being manipulated by consultations that raise false expectations or result in no feedback or gain to the community (Sangster, personal communication). This is referred to as 'consultation fatigue' and one outcome can be that communities then begin to respond tactically to consultations, or even to demand fees from the consultants for being consulted. This would be an understandable reaction of a disenchanted community where public consultation had failed to build trust or to establish any meaningful level of engagement.

## Areas of forest practice: case studies in northwest England

The four themes outlined in the *England forest strategy* give well defined, but not mutually exclusive, areas within which the Forestry Commission sees itself as actively creating new roles and new governance arrangements within a devolved structure. The following case studies of Grizedale Forest and Mersey Forest (see Figure 5.1) give an insight into how participatory practices are being deployed, and changing within a range of areas of forest practice. The timber production role has been a feature of some rural communities for the past 80 years (particularly in Scotland and northern England), but that role has declined in many of these areas and has been replaced by other areas of interest such as recreation and nature conservation.

The changing patterns of use and governance around Grizedale Forest, Cumbria provides an illustration of this general trend towards a more engaged approach to the involvement of wider stakeholders in the future development of plantation forestry. In Grizedale Forest, access is afforded to 'communities of interest' (such as the commercial timber interests, the aesthetic landscape interests of the national park authority, the tourist recreational interests and nature conservation interests) – and effectively denied to others. In three further case studies an alternative focus, on community woodland management, and on new modes of governance proposed for urban regeneration projects reveals a very different approach being adopted in the same region and by the same group of regional managers.

**Figure 5.1**

*Location map of the case study areas.*

## Grizedale Forest Park

Grizedale Forest Park is the largest Forestry Commission forest in the Lake District National Park, an area designated for its landscape qualities. The woodland planting reflects the traditional commercial function of plantation forestry which was planted and maintained within specific bounded areas in isolation from the surrounding land. Until recently forest workers and tenant farmers have lived and worked within the boundaries of the forest estate. However, Grizedale Forest has been experiencing changing patterns of use for many years. The Forestry Commission estate has been open to walkers since the 1960s and the conifer plantations now provide tracks for off-road cyclists. Recently an area has been adapted for an aerial treetop assault course. The forest is also internationally famous as a sculpture park. A refurbished and updated visitor's centre is planned to incorporate inter-active educational facilities.

The northwest regional office of Forest Enterprise (FE) is located in the Grizedale Forest. Management teams are organised to meet the designated functions of the forest i.e. timber harvesting, recreation and wildlife conservation. The FE teams engage as professional experts in these areas with interest groups in similar areas i.e. timber growers and timber merchants, with tourist and recreational associations, and with wildlife and nature conservation groups. They are thus able to work within well-defined areas of professional expertise and management responsibility. It appears that each team is involved in consulting their own 'user group'. Although it was not possible in this review to study the types of participatory practice in detail, nor the actual level of consultation, it appears that, due to the high visitor usage of the Grizedale Centre for recreation, the recreation team are probably more 'advanced' in the type and amount of consultation they undertake.

The governing authority for the Lake District National Park (LDNP) is the Lake District National Park Authority. National park status is a landscape designation, so this is an organisation with an over-riding national policy objective i.e. to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Park. In terms of governance, the LDNP has jurisdiction over anything the Forest Enterprise does that requires planning permission. Although the relationship between the Park Authority and the Forestry Commission is good, this has not always been the case. At one time there was hostility between the two agencies and, in areas where the interests of the two organisations (on the one hand based on landscape aesthetics and on the other on timber production) have differed, compromise was not always possible. However, in recent years negotiations about landscape

design plans have been possible and they provide a tool to enable the Forestry Commission to consult people. It is felt that devolution and separation from Scottish emphasis on timber production will create positive opportunities to develop more locally responsive agendas.

The overall impression, from interviews with representatives of key interest groups, was that forest managers are becoming more receptive of other interests. This was described as a change during the 1990s: *“from an arrogant group of professionals to people who are prepared to listen and take on board the interests of others”*. It has also been suggested that this approach has only taken power sharing so far, in providing a forum for negotiation of pre-existing policies and plans, rather than a ‘true’ partnership. The approach was described as: *“this is what we are going to do, what colour and size would you like it to be?”* There are claims made by some members of the local community around Grizedale that the views and concerns of local people (including local farmers) have never been part of any public consultation or community engagement process. For instance, recent moves towards expanding the recreational and leisure aspects of Grizedale Forest have had an inevitable impact on traffic flows around the narrow lanes in the area. In addition, the impact of mountain biking and off-road vehicles is being felt in surrounding countryside areas not within the boundaries of the forest. A similar concern, about lack of communication by Forest Enterprise’s managers with the local community, was expressed. It was suggested that although FE now manages forests for a new set of ‘customers’, it would be interesting to find out who they think their customers are: timber merchants, naturalists, tourists or their local communities. Other key concerns, such as nature conservation are negotiated within a twice-yearly forum and this was viewed as a marked improvement. However, in relation to local community needs, the National Park Authority is well aware of a source of tension in their own structure of governance. The unique character of a national park means that it is governed to serve national policy, sometimes at the expense of local need. Thus the ladder of participation cannot extend to the upper level – community development solely for the needs of the local community.

The Grizedale Forest case study provides an example of changing practice towards a more participatory mode of governance in a situation where community development is still relatively constrained. It appears to be constrained in two ways. Firstly, by existing institutional arrangements of separate forest functions. Secondly, it is constrained by an over-riding national policy agenda that imposes a top-down imperative to protect the landscape features of the National Park for the general public within the whole nation.

However, Grizedale Forest is not wholly representative of the northwest region which, in terms of the management of environmental, economic and demographic features, presents an extremely diverse situation. There is a contrast between the sparsely populated high quality environment of the Lake District National Park area and the densely populated, low quality urban environment of the Merseyside region. As a means of highlighting a range of emerging issues around participatory governance and partnership working, these two areas provide an interesting comparative case study. The alternative perspective on participatory governance comes from work being carried out in a community forest, Mersey Forest.

Most of the innovation in public engagement is to be found in these urban areas but it is significant that the Director of the Mersey Forest believes that much of the practical experience of engaging with communities has come originally from the community forests and that the practical experience of doing community forestry has been instrumental in changing the overall perspective and policy on social forestry.

## The Mersey Forest

The Mersey Forest is the largest of the UK's Community Forests (CF) covering 110 000 hectares across Merseyside and North Cheshire. It was set up ten years ago, funded by the Countryside Agency (CA) and nine local authorities, to develop a network of woodland and open space, owned privately and by the local authorities, to meet a range of social objectives including: social deprivation, health, leisure and employment. The Mersey Forest team has always worked in partnership with other organisations (over 100 are directly or indirectly involved in the network of partners). They see community involvement at various levels in planning and managing the forest as an integral part of their approach to sustainable development.

The Director of Mersey Forest described the partnership aspect of the project as a major departure from traditional Forestry Commission practice: a mind-set change in which the community forest team are 'brokers' for a functioning community forest. Aspects of partnership working include constant networking, information exchange and negotiation with other partners to secure continued financial and practical support. None of the community forests are state owned so the enrolment of local authorities and private landowners is a major aspect of the management function.

In addition to woodland planting targets (create 8000 hectares of additional woodland), the Mersey Forest team are also required to demonstrate social benefit outcomes (for example health benefits) that are difficult to quantify, although this type of accountability is often required by funders to demonstrate that the Forest is a 'sound investment'. Partnerships with local authorities have required community forests to take their responsibility as public service agents and to measure their performance for 'best value' in exactly the same way as other public service agencies do. Where the project team see themselves as brokers for a functioning Community Forests, they also see community involvement as a way of doing it which produces more sustainable outcomes. Consequently, over the past ten years, the community forest team have accumulated experience of engaging with this wider constituency of users and citizens in planning and managing the forest.

Mersey Forest practitioners make a very clear distinction between levels of 'consultation' and 'community involvement', which are approached in entirely different ways. The majority of the key professional interests are represented by the 100 partners, and their views (on subjects as diverse as nature conservation and health) are taken into account through routine consultations (such as questionnaires and surveys) and negotiations within meetings although this results in a lot of meetings. However, although 'the wider community' is listed as one of the Mersey Forest partners, they were mostly represented by community leaders, school teachers, business people and local councillors. The Mersey Forest managers realised that this was not a satisfactory level of participation for full community involvement and their appointment of a community development officer was to address this deficit.

The Community Contracting Initiative (CCI) was set up to enrol members of local communities who wanted to get involved in long-term stewardship and management of their local woods and, as the following case study illustrates, this has necessitated an entirely different form of public engagement.

## Community Contracting Initiative

The Community Contracting Initiative began as a three year project and was set up by the Mersey Forest team in partnership with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV), and several other funders to provide a means of 'managing woodlands sustainably with social, environmental benefits for the groups, local communities and partner organisations involved' (Carding and Sayers, 2003). A steering group comprises representatives of a number of key professional stakeholders: the Countryside Agency, BTCV, Icarus (a community development organisation) and representatives from the local communities.

A published guide (Carding and Sayers, 2003), explains how the project set up and supported a number of local community groups to become active in and develop the potential of the management of local woodlands. It stresses how important it is for local communities to become active in this way. Site managers and landowners (usually local authorities) often depend on community groups to take 'ownership' and act as guardians in regulating misuse and abuses such as vandalism and fly tipping.

For one of the CCI projects is the 'Woolton Woods Project' Carding and Sayers (2003) explain how the 'Friends of Woolton Woods' took action to stop unwanted and unsociable activities in their local woods:

*"[members of the community adjacent to] Woolton Woods were experiencing problems with drug and alcohol misuse...Dangerous litter, broken glass, used needles and syringes made the woods unsafe for people and wildlife...The Friends of Woolton Woods adopted a [woodland] management strategy coupled with...installation of miniature CCTV cameras hidden in bird nest boxes so that behaviour could be monitored and those responsible could be identified".*

The initiative to use CCTV surveillance was undertaken in close co-operation with Liverpool City Council and police, and the group developed a formal and acceptable protocol to govern the use of the CCTV cameras. As a result they found that law-abiding members of the community who had previously avoided the area increasingly used Woolton Woods. The Woolton Woods project illustrates how community groups can be encouraged to take initiatives and to work with agencies such as the police and local councils in negotiating their own protocols to govern the safe use of the site. There is no doubt that surveillance techniques would not have been acceptable if they had been suggested and initiated by the police.

In another CCI project the local group were helped to secure a robust boundary fence around an area that had been used for stripping down stolen cars and for other acts of vandalism. The Community Development Officer for Mersey Forest describes how the community participated in helping to clean the site with the aid of some heavy lifting gear, and how this was co-ordinated to secure the boundary fencing around the wood:

*"If you keep it dragging on for too long, or if it is too intense, the community will run out of steam. Short bursts of activity, I would say, work out the best. With the burnt out cars [100 over the period of a year], and because the level of crime on that site was so great, we had real problems with the boundary – there was no point in removing the cars unless you could secure the boundary because they would be back within a matter of days..."*

The exercise has been successful in preventing the continuance of anti-social activities.

The Community Contracting Initiative is an example of public participation at the most local level of engagement, community development, and illustrates work being carried out at what is deemed to be the highest level of Arnstein's ladder of participation. This is the level at which local people are given the support and encouragement, not only to engage with professionals in designing and

facilitating new schemes for their own benefit, but also to take ownership of the problems associated with managing their local woodland. The project builds on the fundamental ethos within community forests that the community should be encouraged whenever possible to participate at all stages in planning, developing and managing their local forest network. As the case studies show, the social benefit outcomes that have arisen from different areas are very different and could not have been predicted beforehand.

In the ten years since its inception the Mersey Forest has been working to further develop the promise of sustainable outcomes. They believe that the best way to do this is by engaging with partners and by utilising a wide range of consultation and community development techniques. However, the ultimate product, in terms of public benefit outcomes, is difficult to predict in terms of quantifiable indicators. This difficulty raises the issue of how to account for these important social benefits in a situation where there are many partners (including nine local authorities) and where multiple sources of funding are being accessed. Crucially, the argument is that the 'value-added' aspects of the development of the Mersey Forest can be demonstrated by moving from quantifiable 'outputs' to more qualitatively measurable outcomes. These qualitative outcomes include estimates of increased levels of community involvement, educational outcomes, increases in biodiversity and estimated health benefits.

There is now no doubt about the value of community development work in this area, and following on directly from the insights and innovative practices developed by the community forests, a key initiative for the Forestry Commission in northwest England has been a move towards regeneration of derelict and brown field sites and restoration to community woodland in urban areas.

### Newlands (New Economic Environments via Woodlands)

Newlands, launched in 2003, is a restoration or regeneration programme for 'greening' derelict and under-used (DUN) land across northwest England. The programme to regenerate up to 1,000 hectares of DUN land in the northwest is a prime example of the new aspirations for economic regeneration and social benefit set out in the England Forestry Strategy. This project builds on the development work in the community forests and on the Forestry Commission's Land Regeneration Unit's Capital Modernisation Programme. It is being managed by the Forestry Commission with Forest Enterprise and the North West Development Agency (NWDA) and other partners: in the first instance, in Merseyside (including both the Mersey and Red Rose Forests) the Countryside Agency and Groundwork Trust.

Newlands claims to be more than a restoration programme. In an area containing over 25% of England's derelict land, the aim is to improve the living and working environments and to contribute towards making the northwest a more exciting and viable choice for economic investment. To this end the Government, through the development agency, is investing an initial £10 million, with a further £20 million committed. Given a successful outcome in the Merseyside region, the Newlands project is expected to be further developed in other parts of the northwest region, in Cumbria, Lancashire and Cheshire.

For the first phase, and in order to present a clear picture of the added value(s) of the project, an initial survey of derelict land was carried out and a geographical information (GIS) style Public Benefit Recording System (PBRS) was developed by the Forestry Commission and the partners. The PBRS scores and maps a range of social scores (e.g. social deprivation, health action targets, proximity to schools and services), environmental factors (e.g. proximity to SSSIs, existing forests and nature reserves, air quality measures and waterways) and economic factors (proximity to business areas and employment zones and transport links). The purpose of the PBRS is to map the area in relation to the potential to create maximum public benefit and in doing so to present a case for a strategic programme of work.

The Newlands project has been developed around the insights gained from community forests, from the new drive to maximise public benefit based on community development within this area, and from the accumulated understanding of the complex and difficult-to-quantify outcomes associated with realising wider social benefits. It is suggested that evaluation and strategic selection of areas has been based on calculations of their potential ability to maximise public benefit. The case study illustrates an approach to the evaluation of this public benefit based on a GIS mapping device, the PBRS, and is offered as an objective social indicator to argue the case for public benefit. It appears that the apparent objectivity of the PBRS evaluation of the Merseyside sites has been influential in bringing in the necessary development funding and in convincing the Government, through the funding agency (NWDA), that added economic and social outcomes would follow on from re-development and 'greening' of the sites. Nevertheless, in the minds of some forest managers, this objective indicator is no substitute for local intelligence. As the Newlands project officer said:

*"We had to do an awful lot of work to convince central government that greening and 'soft end' use will lead to economic development...There's nothing to back that up except common sense. There isn't enough emphasis placed on the common sense argument that people would like to live in a nice environment and to be able to walk to work...PBRS helps to identify the potential, but it doesn't give you the full picture. You shouldn't use it as a god-given case – not without local intelligence."*

The view is that PBRS is a useful tool for strategic selection and in establishing the potential value of sites but its function is limited: its 'objectivity' is restrictively framed in that it is not a participatory tool capable of capturing a full range of perspectives including common sense or common knowledge. With qualified exceptions (see, for instance, Rubiano and Haines-Young, 2002) the painting-by-numbers approach that is inherent in any quantitative mapping system does not allow for the complexity and cultural diversity that community development reveals. There is a danger of re-defining as a technical matter a process that requires a greater level of experience, local knowledge and engagement, and a high level of negotiating skills.

The Newlands project is at the very early stages of development. It has been successful so far in bringing together a partnership and in accessing funds for the regeneration and maintenance of an urban area to community woodlands. The level of public engagement required to further this operation is understood, but the ability to sustain the operation and to meet the economic objectives and visions, promised at the outset will depend on the extent to which these visions are negotiable and realistic. The PBRS has been a useful tool in presenting a case for wider social and economic benefits, but this is a promise that has yet to be proven. For instance, aspirations for a Newlands site to create 'Salford's answer to Central Park' might appeal to commercial interests but could also create unrealistic expectations for local people and damage the credibility of the project in the longer term.



## Public participation and partnership: emerging issues

This chapter describes the insights arising from the interviews and case studies. Key issues are set in the context of an emerging new devolved arrangement of policy and practice within the Forestry Commission and Forest Enterprise.

A new emphasis on partnership working and participatory practice appears to be having a marked effect on these arrangements and on the way things are done in some, but not all, areas of forestry. Most significantly, this new emphasis is to be found in new areas of work around regeneration of derelict and under-used land (DUN). The question is whether and how this new way of working is taking over more generally as a new mode of governance within forest practice. If this is the case, it is of interest to know how it is becoming part of the active institution building, what the pitfalls and the potentials are, and what the features of the new devolved structures are. The following questions appear to be relevant.

### Scale of governance

The case studies have illustrated that recent changes in the way forestry is practiced are a result of pressures at several levels of governance. The pressures that relate to the 'scale' of governance (referred to in Chapter 3) raise questions about participation. For instance, membership of the European Union and governance by the European Commission, in addition to wider international agreements on sustainable development, have led to 'scaling-up', whereas devolution has led to 'scaling-down' to more local levels. What happens when the scale of governance alters either upwards or downwards is a simultaneous re-configuration of the focus for regulation in terms of participation by stakeholders. For instance, policy making in forestry at an international level is closely related to a top-down approach to policy, driven by the 1992 United Nations' Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro (The Earth Summit) and with attempts to turn stakeholder dialogue into action for sustainable forestry at a national level, where it is felt that the real concerns are about loss of habitat, nature conservation and biodiversity (T. Rollinson, personal communication). Highly visible 'interests' (such as those of World wide fund for nature) are represented in these areas as part of that stakeholder dialogue, but there appears to be a marked absence of visible 'interest groups' "who can legitimately represent social issues" (T. Rollinson, personal communication). Sustainability indicators are currently being developed (Forestry Commission, 2002) in line with a perceived need to develop objective measures of UK performance and to measure sustainable forest practice, but it is suggested that the 'people indicators' are not well developed. The change towards participatory practice experienced at this level has been the move to institute new partnerships and wider engagement with the key interest groups, usually heads of industry and representatives of the more powerful national government bodies. At this level the stakeholder participation is uneven, and probably unequal. However, the change in attitude that has accompanied this move is described as a more 'receptive', 'listening' attitude (rather than being over-concerned about maintaining visibility: "where is our logo?").

At a national level the social agenda is now an important feature of the UK forest strategy for sustainable development. A primary issue addressed by the concept of multi-purpose forestry is the new aspiration of realising the importance of woodlands in terms of 'social benefit', in contrast with targeting reforestation. This is a key issue in northwest England which has, according to the Forestry Commission Conservator for the northwest region: "*least woodland [in the UK] and the most people!*" and that: "*In the UK the social benefits [of forestry] are largely untouched... Forestry punches above its weight ... The aspirational goal of doubling woodland has been dropped in favour of social/environmental benefits...*" However, without measurable social indicators it would very hard to argue the case for

them. For instance, the PBRs has been useful as an indicator of the potential to realise economic and wider social benefits for the Newlands project and thus provides the necessary evidence to attract funding support. Nevertheless, public benefit indicators are context dependent and extremely difficult to quantify. The temptation is to over-simplify and re-define political choices as a technical matter.

Also at regional level, within devolved structures of governance, the question of scale re-emerges as a problem in trying to reconcile conflicts of interest between national policies and diverse local practices and interests. As the Grizedale Forest case study illustrates, these conflicts of interest are difficult to resolve when the National Park Authority has the over-arching aims in governing the area to serve the interests of a wider national public and, where those policies impact upon local community livelihoods they leave local people feeling relatively powerless.

## Where does the power lie?

New partnerships are clearly a terrain where issues of power are being re-defined in new structures of governance and this is an area where it is becoming increasingly difficult to identify where the power lies. The shifts in scale also introduce new decision-makers whilst dis-empowering others. The director of the Mersey Forest project spoke about their involvement with a very wide network of organisations of up to 100 and the need to act as a power broker to maintain a functioning forest. The answer, when asked where the power of veto lay was: "With whoever has the money I guess".

One feature of political devolution and the shift from government to regional governance in northwest England has been the introduction of new institutions and stakeholders such as the North West Development Agency (NWDA). The effect of this has been to create new power relations within the area of forestry practice, principally because the regional development agency is funding many of the new regeneration initiatives. To some extent, devolution has, through the regional development agency, brought funding and power from national to regional level, although it would be premature to suggest the end of central government control since the funding and, ultimately, the policy, emanates from there. Without clear guidelines or democratic controls of these new sources of funding which establish the relations of power and authority between the new structures (for instance without a regional assembly) there will be more opportunities for power struggles and unresolved conflicts of interest between partners (Ian MacArthur, personal communication).

A further issue concerns the relative status of partners. For instance, are representatives from community groups being seen as equal partners with the more powerful and well resourced agencies and business interests?

These are all questions that warrant further research but there are a further questions around the issue of entitlement.

## Who is entitled to participate?

Linked with the question of changing power relationships within these new partnerships, is an issue about who is entitled to participate. The actual practice of governance, as is evident in the case studies, is necessarily constrained by questions about who can, or is entitled to, participate, at what level, and to what effect. For instance, in discussing the relationship between partnership working and public participation, Lowndes (2001) questions whether local partnerships can really represent and champion the interests of a whole community (including ethnic minorities, elderly and disabled people, young people and disadvantaged youth). This is an issue that some policy makers and practitioners within the Forestry Commission are beginning to recognise. For example, Rollinson made the following point:

*"Our aim is to achieve a balance, that is acceptable today, between competing demands on our forests and woodlands and to understand that the balance might be different tomorrow. We also need to be aware that there are many voices that are never heard..."* (in O'Brien and Claridge, 2002)

At a more practical level, and in the context of the Newlands project, the project officer made a point about the need for the partnership to bring the needs of the community to the forefront of their strategy, when asking for endorsement of policy guidelines that ensured full partnership and participation by local communities (Waterfield, 2003):

*“Woodlands created in urban areas with public access are not necessarily community woodlands. In order to ensure that new woodlands genuinely meet the needs of local communities, inclusive methods of consultation are required and a willingness by all partners to recognise local people as key stakeholders. New woodlands that fail to achieve this at the outset are likely to provide environments that are under-used, or at the worst, abused, in future.”*

The important point is that the build up of new layers of bureaucracy should not diminish the need for partners to act responsibly as champions of the groups they represent. As an experienced practitioner in partnership working, the Mersey Forest project director spoke about this style of management as a ‘mind-set change’. He explained the need to inform and consult with all their partners and made the point that it takes experience and skill to judge the level at which this engagement should happen. Sometimes partners just need to be informed, at other times they may be asked to choose between options, and at other times the engagement is at a more complex or involved level (as in the case of the Community Contracting Initiative).

## **Building trust**

The question of how to build trust has emerged as a key issue in the evaluation of new local partnerships like the Newlands project partnership. If local partnerships are to gain and maintain the trust of local communities, their funders partners need to develop new skills to cope with the complexities of this new style of governance and to move beyond the traditional predict-and-provide relationship between expert provider and a lay consumer.

As this review of participatory practice and the case studies indicates there is an increasing awareness amongst those who engage in partnerships of the extra requirements, and in particular the requirement to interact with, listen to, negotiate and learn from their community members. There is evidence of this from the case studies. The emphasis is now on interactive learning, and as illustrated by the planned new Grizedale Forest educational facility, and the community development approach adopted by the Community Contracting Initiative project in the Mersey Forest, an ‘active citizen’ model of engagement is required, as the skills of facilitation and negotiation. Learning also comes from the ability to listen and to negotiate effective social settlements between conflicting interests and within wider policy constraints. This is not just an issue about the relationship between the professionals and the public. The Grizedale Forest case study illustrates how professionals from different interest areas (such as timber growing nature conservation and landscape assessment) are now learning to listen to and understand the interests and expertise of others.

However, negotiation can only go so far when national policies over-ride local interests (as in the Lake District National Park) or in cases where professional expertise is not sufficient to overcome natural limits (such as place unsuitable for tree growth). All of these factors appear to be essential aspects of building successful partnerships and imply a very different way of working.

Indications of their success or failure, in terms of social or public benefit, is difficult to quantify, but positive qualitative outcomes can be demonstrated; so too can the negative outcomes of getting it wrong. In some areas of plantation forestry getting it wrong simply means that visitor car parks are empty, but in urban community forest areas, the level of dereliction and vandalism indicates the extent to which management may have failed.

## Is this a sustainable mode of governance?

The case studies show that the process of setting up and maintaining good relationships, both within inter-agency partnerships and with a wider civil society, requires a range of skills including sensitivity and on-going commitment. All of this needs to be supported by adequate funding. Only then can this new mode of governance be sustained.

A key issue, as apparent from the Mersey Forest, is the need for clear lines of accountability and ways of indicating or evaluating progress. Indicators used by the Mersey Forest are based on a range of broader and more sensitive and inclusive qualitative outcomes such as increased levels of community involvement and health benefits, rather than narrow quantitative outputs. Clark states that sustainability indicators are for everyone, including all partners and the wider public: *“so we can act in our different ways to ensure that our forests continue to provide for generations to come”*. (Forestry Commission, 2002)

Sustainable development is an over-arching objective but there are many issues yet to be resolved. For instance, it is still unclear how the public benefit outcomes will be negotiated within devolved partnerships. Furthermore, who is to be held responsible for maintaining the sense of common purpose that is essential to sustain a well-managed environment and to realise the visionary promises that secured the start-up funding?

## Conclusions and recommendations

The aim of this report has been to comment on the Forestry Commission's changing emphasis towards participatory governance as part of the 2002 Devolution Review. It also provides a guide for future investigation and research in this area. The conclusions and suggestions given below are therefore pointers rather than specific recommendations. They arise from the information contained in the literature and also from the case studies and from the interviews undertaken in this study.

This report places strong emphasis on participatory working and new participatory styles of governance. Following the 2002 Devolution Review, the Forestry Commission concluded that there was a need to achieve greater integration of forestry with other rural policy work. It is being suggested here that the subsequent inter-agency partnership working, allied with the need to address a whole new range of stakeholders, and the new forms of public participation that it entails, marks a noticeable shift. This may be regarded as a 'paradigm shift' in the way the Forestry Commission governs its various functions.

The newly devolved approach to forest management, based on partnership and wider stakeholder participation, implies a new mode of participatory governance, the features of which include changing relationships of power and authority. A participatory approach to governance also embodies features such as power sharing, transparency and accountability. This is undoubtedly something of a juggling act but forest practice is already undergoing changes as a result of many political and economic challenges. The case studies show that this has resulted in subsequent re-configurations in the relationship between state controlled agencies and bodies, private enterprises and civil society.

It is evident that these changes, at various levels from the global to the local, are demanding new forms of engagement and dialogue between different forms of expertise. They are also requiring negotiation of more complex and qualitative strategic outcomes, such as health and education benefits in contrast to previous pre-determined and quantifiable outputs such as areas of forestry to be planted and wood products to be marketed. All of this is beginning to create a new type of forest manager as in the case of the Mersey Forest who has a sound understanding of multi-purpose forestry and skills in partnership working, such as negotiation and facilitation.

This review has found that, in some areas, new approaches to governance in forestry (such as in the northwest England) are innovative and encouraging. But there has been insufficient time to reflect on how to build on this and to promote good practice more widely.

A number of areas where research and development could be most effectively focused are outlined below. These suggestions are offered as an indication of how on-going research could be targeted to:

- **Exploring ways to negotiate the relationship between decisions at different scales, or levels, of governance.**

There is a move towards devolved governance in parallel with international agreements on sustainable development and towards agreed sustainability indicators. Devolved governance is not simply about scaling down to local level, there has to be some means of achieving a political settlement, or negotiating between diverse local experiences and interests and national and international policy. This review indicates that this is an area that warrants further research.

- **Creating a capacity to move towards more qualitative and sustainable outcomes in addition to quantitative outputs.**

This review found that the move towards public benefit forestry has introduced new pressures

to devise indicators to account for these outcomes in an objective way (i.e. the Public Benefit Recording System (PBRs)). The PBRs case study shows that it can be a useful tool, but much of what people value cannot be reduced to numbers and it remains to be seen whether public benefit can be objectively mapped. For instance, 'hard' objective indicators do not allow for uncertainty, complexity and cultural diversity. However, there needs to be some way of balancing social and natural science to provide indicators for sustainable outcomes and to meet new requirements for public benefit forestry. It has been suggested that the ability to do that will depend on how flexible and realistic the targets are.

- **Finding new opportunities and new ways of engaging with other areas of expertise.**  
While forestry still involves specific areas of expertise, the identity and role of a forester is changing. Partnership working is a key feature of that change and brings with it a requirement for a range of new skills and new mechanisms for mediating between public, official and private institutions and between professional interests. The capacity to engage in open-ended dialogue towards negotiated outcomes requires facilitation skills and the ability to listen and learn. Furthermore, it is evident that maintaining effective partnerships requires time commitment and adequate resources. All of these factors have yet to be assessed and accounted for.
- **Responding the needs of a wider range of stakeholders.**  
It is clear that for the Forestry Commission their 'stakeholders' now demand more than just timber and wood products. A greater range of stakeholders is engaged with forestry, and on many more levels. New approaches to participation move beyond a static consumer model. This review points to the need for recognition of different methods to address different 'publics' in their various capacities. Although clear guidelines are essential, there is no blueprint for stakeholder participation, and there is no substitute for on-going experience. It is suggested that experience needs to be widely disseminated and shared.
- **Encouraging and embracing changes in thinking about and understanding of governance and styles of management described as 'a mind-set change'.**  
This amounts to a change in the way things are governed, and in essence a new culture. However, a participatory mode of governance does not mean giving up existing expertise. It is about applying existing expertise in a more appropriate way and making use of new forms of professional, academic and lay expertise. In general this will involve an attitude of learning and a clearer understanding of areas of responsibility and thus becoming more relevant and 'accountable'.

In summary, the challenge is to build on an existing trend within the Forestry Commission for new partnerships and participatory governance without losing a century of learning and good forest management.

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## Appendix 1: Interviews

In addition to interviews with key personnel at the Forestry Commission in Edinburgh, a range of people were interviewed to obtain information and diverse perspectives of the Forestry Commission's and Forest Enterprise's current involvement in these areas. These interviews, conducted between May 2003 and August 2003, include:

Bob Allen	Groundwork North West
Ian Brodie	Friends of the Lake District
Mac Carding	Community Contracting Initiative Co-ordinator, British Trust for Nature Conservation
Adam Davison	Forestry Commission, Newlands Community Development Officer
Rodney Everett	Private landowner, Middlewood, Lancashire
David Harpley	Cumbria Wildlife Trust
Keith Jones	Forestry Commission, Conservator for the North West
Ian MacArthur	Groundwork North West, Regional Director
Paul Nolan	Mersey Forest, Community Forest Manager
Martin Reynolds	North West Development Agency
Tim Rollinson	Forestry Commission, Edinburgh
Marcus Sangster	Forestry Commission, Edinburgh
Jo Sayers	Mersey Forest, Community Development Manager
Mark Street	Forest Enterprise, Manager and Land Agent
Paul Tiplady	Lake District National Park
Joanne Tippett	University of Manchester
Chris Waterfield	Forestry Commission, Newlands Project Officer

Case study areas included Grizedale Forest, Risley Moss Community Forest, Penny Wood, Whiston Wood, Littlewood and Speke Woods and involved conversations with a local community ranger in the Liverpool area and members of the local community, including farmers, in the Grizedale area.



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