

Woodland Carbon Code Advisory Board minutes

Wednesday 26 February 2025 on Microsoft Teams

Present: Pat Snowdon, Vicky West, Andy Baker, Susan Szymborski-Welsh, Jonathan Speed, Leon DeBell (Scottish Forestry), Fiona Hay (Welsh Government), Ayse Selcuk (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs - Defra), Matthew Brander (Edinburgh University), Robert South (Institute of Chartered Foresters), James Russell (Marston Vale Trust), Andy Grundy, Rebecca Fairman, Alex Hart (Soil Association), Chris Waterfield (Forestry Commission), Graham Clark (Country Land and Business Association), Ewan Mackie (Forest Research), Areeb Arshad (ACT), Nick Blyth (Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment), Peter Coleman (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero), Peter Wilson (Wilson Applied/ UK Woodland Assurance Standard), Steve Clarkson (Organic Farmers & Growers), Emma Kerr (Scottish Woodlands), Helge Hansen (Foresight Group)

Apologies: Jamie Smith (Scottish Forestry), Ben Searle (Northern Ireland Forest Service), Stuart Goodall, (Confederation of Forest Industries - Confor), Anne Mari Cobb, Renée Kirkvliet-Hermans, (IUCN - Peatland Code), Bruce Kennedy (Boston Consulting Group), Mark Broadmeadow (Forestry Commission), Robert Guest (Foresight Group).

1. Outstanding actions

Pat provided updates on outstanding actions from the previous executive board meeting:

Action 1: Pat to discuss the Nature Market Strategy Board name with board members.

Update: Pat will mention this to board members at their next meeting.

2. Updates

Statistics - projects

Vicky shared statistics about the Woodland Carbon Code. Between 1 April and 31 December 2024 there were:

- 227 new projects registered with the code
- 234 other projects were removed from the registry
- 103 projects validated to the code
- 8 projects verified to the code

Vicky explained that the number of new projects and validations are similar to this time last year and that the number of verifications has increased. Projects which were removed from the registry tended to be projects less than one hectare which had mainly been combined into larger projects, although some were permanently removed. The net increase in projects registered is over 10,500 hectares.

Achievements

Pat highlighted some achievements the Woodland Carbon Code team made during 2024, including:

- An increase in the number of people and skills in the team
- Establishing the Nature Markets Strategy Board
- Developing template buyer-seller contracts
- Enhancing communications and engagement activities
- Preparing for the registry re-tender
- Exploring how we can use technology to help with monitoring
- Consulting on the code's additionality test
- Ensuring the code is financially sustainable
- Engaging with wider standards and nature-based markets

He also highlighted future developments, including a new version of the code and continued development of a potential woodland water code. There is also due to be a decision in 2025 by the UK Emissions Trading Scheme Authority on whether greenhouse gas removals (including woodland removals under the Woodland Carbon Code) should be integrated into the UK Emissions Trading Scheme.

Nick Blyth asked what it would mean for the code if its credits are integrated into the UK Emissions Trading Scheme. Pat explained that, if this decision was made, there would be work to explore this and it could be several years until implementation.

Robert South asked if the code would be responding to the Defra's land use consultation. Pat said the team are aware of it, but that they didn't plan to respond formally.

ICROA and ICVCM accreditation

Andy explained that the International Carbon Reduction and Offset Alliance (ICROA) is asking standards to renew their accreditation every three years. The Woodland Carbon Code is due for reassessment later this year.

He provided an update on work to prepare to apply for the code to be assessed by the Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market and whether this should be done at the same time or after the application to ICROA. He outlined a range of options for when to apply and how this may impact on plans to update the code.

Andy Grundy and Chris Waterfield expressed support for renewal with ICROA first.

Andy Baker and Helge Hansen explained that buyers value credits with the Core Carbon Principles label and Pat added that these standards help to highlight integrity in the voluntary carbon market. James Russell suggested that aligning with international standards can help to facilitate working beyond the domestic market.

Improving efficiency

Andy provided an overview of work to improve the efficiency of Woodland Carbon Code operations. He presented graphs which highlight how an increase in capacity has helped the team to complete validations more quickly.

Emma Kerr asked if there is similar data for the timescales involved in completing verifications. Andy explained this is something the team is looking to gather.

Andy Grundy welcomed the improvements and suggested it would be important to ensure the new team members are fully trained on the verification process as there are lots in the pipeline. Emma added that ensuring the survey protocol is clear would help with verifications too.

UK Land Carbon Registry retender

Vicky provided an update on the project to retender for a registry provider. The tender will open for submissions in March and the team hopes to agree a contract by summer 2025. S&P Global will be making updates to the current platform in the meantime.

CivTech Challenge

Vicky provided an update on the code's involvement in the CivTech Challenge.

The team has selected three companies to work with during the accelerator stage. The companies are exploring how they can use technology to administer, measure and predict the carbon performance of projects more coherently, efficiently and effectively.

Members asked whether the companies and their solutions will work together. Vicky explained that this is being encouraged and that there may be scope for wider integration too.

Andy Grundy and Emma Kerr suggested it would be important to involve board members and project developers in the project. Vicky highlighted that the companies will be contacting project developers over the coming weeks.

Peter Coleman highlighted that the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology has been assessing above ground biomass of short rotation coppice/forestry.

Action 1: Vicky to follow up with Peter on the above ground biomass project.

Additionality

Andy explained that the consultation on the additionality test closed at the end of November. There were over 40 responses and the team is analysing the data and considering next steps. The team will publish consultation responses and a high level report in the next few days.

Members discussed the timing of any changes. Andy explained that if any changes will be made, the timing would be considered carefully and there will be a transition period. This will help with the planting season and ensure project developers have time to prepare.

Action 2: Board members to get in touch with any further thoughts or ideas

Biodiversity crediting consultation

Vicky gave an update on work to develop a procedure to measure and account for biodiversity within the Peatland Code and Woodland Carbon Code programmes.

The project team recently consulted on draft methodologies. There were 25 responses and there was general support for the proposal.

The findings will be published shortly and the team are considering next steps.

Small projects

Vicky outlined plans to explore ways to make it easier for small projects to access the code and detailed a range of options.

Emma Kerr suggested revisiting the definition of small woodlands and how the rules currently apply to small woodlands.

Andy Grundy added that it would be good to consider a specialised option for projects which want to generate units for their own use.

Action 3: Board members to share ideas to help small projects access the Code with Vicky

3. Buyer-seller contracts

Jonathan Speed provided an update on the project to develop template agreements for buying and selling units from Peatland and Woodland Carbon Code projects. The templates will help buyers and sellers understand the risks and liabilities they should consider.

Jonathan explained that 48 organisations have now engaged in the project, helping to shape and provide feedback on the templates. This includes project developers, consultancies, legal and investment teams as well as buyers and insurance brokers.

The project team are reviewing the feedback and making changes, before publishing the final templates in March.

Robert South and Graham Clark thanked Jonathan for his work which will make it easier for landowners to access the code.

4. Remote sensing pilot

Leon outlined proposals for a methodology to conduct monitoring for year five verifications using drone imagery. He is developing plans to trial the approach in the summer. If the methodology is effective, it would accelerate the use of remote sensing technologies to improve the efficiency, health and safety, consistency and integrity of the monitoring and verification process.

Helge Hansen asked if it would be useful to do a LiDAR survey before trees are planted to create a ground height model. Leon responded that this may be useful, but it wouldn't be a requirement.

Robert South suggested that the time drones save will more than make up for the cost of buying them. Leon explained that the process could be completed with a basic model of drone.

Peter Coleman asked if the team could use national LiDAR data to help with monitoring. Leon explained that it has the potential to help in future.

5. Land sales for registered projects

Andy spoke about a paper which was sent to board members in January examining whether a change was needed to the current rule that validation can only be completed by the landowner/tenant who planted the woodland, rather than subsequent owners/tenants.

He explained that reaction to the paper indicated that there was general support for removing this rule. The website has been updated and the team will detail the change in the next clarification to the code.

6. Policy updates from countries

England

Ayse Selcuk confirmed that the Climate Change Committee published their [recommendations for the seventh carbon budget](#) today. She informed the group that Defra is continuing work with the UK Emissions Trading Scheme Authority to explore whether greenhouse gas removals should be integrated into the scheme. She also reported that Defra has been supporting work on retendering for a UK Land Carbon Registry provider.

Scotland

Pat highlighted that Scottish Forestry has published a [woodland creation route map](#) and is working on a resilience route map. He also mentioned that the Scottish Government is continuing to work on a new climate change plan.

Wales

Fiona Hay reported that the Welsh Government is running a [consultation on its timber industrial strategy](#). She also highlighted ongoing work on universal actions for trees and agroforestry.

Northern Ireland

Ben Searle was unable to attend but had passed on that there were no major updates.

7. Date of next meeting

Next meeting: 9am to 11am on Wednesday 30 April 2025 via Microsoft Teams.