Woodland Carbon Code Advisory Board minutes

Wednesday 27 August 2025 on Microsoft Teams

Present: Pat Snowdon, Vicky West, Andy Baker, Susan Szymborski-Welsh, Jamie Smith, Leon Debell (Scottish Forestry), Fiona Hay (Welsh Government), Peter Coleman (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero), Robert South (Institute of Chartered Foresters), Emily Petrie (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs - Defra), Chris Waterfield (Forestry Commission), Areeb Arshad (ACT), Rebecca Fairman (Soil Association), Ewan Mackie (Forest Research), Kate Palmer (Confederation of Forest Industries - Confor), Renée Kerkvliet-Hermans (IUCN - Peatland Code), Matthew Doran (Country Land and Business Association), Craig Mackenzie (University of Edinburgh), Clara Guttman Belling (Cresco Capital Services), Natalia Dorfman (Kita Earth), Nick Swinburn (Woodland Trust).

Apologies: Ben Searle (Northern Ireland Forest Service), Bruce Kennedy (Boston Consulting Group), Mark Broadmeadow (Forestry Commission), Nick Blyth (Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment), Peter Wilson (Wilson Applied/ UK Woodland Assurance Standard), Steve Clarkson (Organic Farmers & Growers), Andy Grundy (Soil Association), Alex MacKinnon (Tilhill Forestry).

1. Welcome to new members

Pat welcomed the new members to the board:

- Alex MacKinnon, Tilhill Forestry Ltd (CarbonStore)
- Kate Palmer, Confor
- Craig Mackenzie, University of Edinburgh
- Natalia Dorfman, Kita Earth Limited
- Clara Guttman Belling, Cresco Capital Services
- Nick Swinburn, Woodland Trust
- Matthew Doran, Country Land and Business Association

2. Conflict of interest

No conflicts of interest were declared by any members.

3. Future vision and aspirations

Pat highlighted some potential future aspirations for the code. Natalia suggested it would be important to have key performance indicators.

4. Outstanding actions

Pat provided an update on actions from the previous executive board meeting.

Pat discussed the Nature Market Strategy Board name with board members at their last meeting. They were considering it.

5. Updates

Statistics

Vicky shared statistics about the Woodland Carbon Code.

In 2024 to 2025, there were:

- 141 projects validated to the code
- 25 projects verified to the code
- Almost 11,000 new hectares of woodland registered with the code
- Almost 5,000 hectares validated to the code
- Almost 900 hectares verified to the code

Rebecca asked if the recent updates to the code will help smaller projects. Vicky explained that the team has increased the threshold for the size of projects which are eligible to use a streamlined process which should make it easier for more small projects to take part.

Vicky also shared the new public view of the registry which includes statistics about Woodland Carbon Code projects and units.

Craig asked about the reasons for undelivered units. Vicky explained that the majority of undelivered units are from a project which decided not to verify early on. They had not sold any carbon units.

Vicky also explained that some projects do not get validated for a variety of reasons, such as being too small to feel commercially viable or failing financial additionality, rather than lower than expected carbon sequestration rates.

ICROA and ICVCM accreditation

Andy explained that the Woodland Carbon Code is applying to have its International Carbon Reduction and Offset Alliance (ICROA) endorsement renewed. The team is preparing a renewal submission.

He also confirmed that the code submitted its application to be assessed by the Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market at the end of July and is awaiting the initial completeness check decision.

UK Land Carbon Registry

Vicky highlighted that S&P Global moved the UK Land Carbon Registry to a new platform on 18 August.

The updated system offers enhanced functionality, with improvements to both the public view and the experience for registered users.

The process to retender for a provider should be completed in the next few weeks.

Version 3 and future updates

Andy provided an update on the new version of the code. Version 3.0 was launched on 1 August with an 11 month transition period.

The update incorporated insights from recent research and consultation feedback and aligns with national and international frameworks. It is designed to make the code more accessible, practical and commercially viable for the land management sector.

The team will update the standard and documents every three years and review the cashflow annually.

Robert South suggested it would be good to look at the rules around which cashflow version projects should use because financial details can change over time. Andy said this is something the group could explore ahead of the next update.

6. CivTech Challenge projects

Leon Debell, the code's monitoring advisor, gave a presentation on the latest developments with the code's CivTech challenge project.

The Woodland Carbon and Peatland Code teams have secured funding from the Scottish Government and Defra to develop a new online platform with Rethink Carbon. The innovation will:

- Simplify administration of Woodland Carbon and Peatland Code projects
- Streamline workflows and automate documentation
- Integrate mapping tools and monitoring data

The project is already underway and will be completed by November 2026.

Rebecca asked if validation and verification body processes would be included in the system. Leon explained that the system is being designed to integrate with other platforms so it should make collaboration easier.

7. Drone trial - 5 year verification

Leon reported on initial findings from the trial of using drones for year 5 verifications. The trial highlighted some challenges with the approach, such as the potential to miss very small saplings. It also identified benefits such as time saved in the field.

Leon explained that once some modifications have been made, the methodology should be a viable option for completing year 5 verifications.

The group discussed the cost savings which could be achieved by using remote monitoring methods for verifications.

8. Biodiversity project phase 2

Renée Kerkvliet-Hermans from the Peatland Code gave a presentation on the second phase of the biodiversity crediting project.

The Peatland and Woodland Carbon Code teams have been awarded funding from the Facility for Investment Ready Nature in Scotland to develop standardised biodiversity metrics and financial tools for peatlands and woodlands.

The project will build on previous work which explored how biodiversity uplift could be measured, validated and monetised within the codes.

The project team will:

- Collate and analyse data from pristine or restored woodland and peatland sites
- Refine and develop metrics, creating community similarity indices for some species groups
- Use this data to calculate the biodiversity uplift of a project
- Review the costs and potential income from monitoring biodiversity uplift
- Create a roadmap for incorporating biodiversity crediting into the codes
- Provide template documents and improve the process to validate and verify biodiversity projects

Areeb asked if there could be any links with Biodiversity Net Gain. Renée explained that it is a compliance scheme so would not be compatible with the code's requirements for legal additionality.

Craig enquired whether the team had done any market analysis to understand demand of credits. Renée reported that market research had been conducted in the first phase of the project.

Nick raised a concern that the biodiversity crediting might work best for larger projects. Renée agreed this was a risk and that the team have been discussing how to address this.

Rob made the point that it is important not to add complexity to the codes.

9. Working groups

Pat and Vicky discussed plans to set up working groups to help enlist expertise from across the sector and to help engage stakeholders in the development of the code.

Members will be selected through a public recruitment process. Each group will focus on a specific issue and provide recommendations to Executive Board.

Plans are underway to establish the first working group which will explore the monitoring of Woodland Carbon Code projects.

Members of the group welcomed this initiative. Suggestions included setting key performance indicators, having advisory board members chair the groups and ensuring meetings are long enough to fully understand and explore the issues.

Action 1: Members to suggest working group subjects to Pat or Vicky.

10. Future developments

Vicky outlined plans for future development of the code. This includes:

- Exploring how to support more small woods to access the code
- Clarifying rules for the buffer
- Updating biomass and soil carbon estimates
- Enhancing the registry
- Supporting the development of a woodland water code

Robert suggested the code should re-consider how thin and no-thin options are handled because the current approach is not supporting best practice in terms of forest management. Ewan responded that the best management regime depends on the landowner's objectives.

Matthew discussed the idea of accounting for the carbon in harvested wood products. Pat highlighted that Forest Research investigated this six years ago and suggested it could be another topic for a working group.

11. New website and future communications plans

Susan Szymborski-Welsh, the code's communications officer, provided an update on the Woodland Carbon Code website.

The team migrated the website to a new platform earlier this year, launching the new site in June. The new website is more modern, accessible and secure. The move is part of ongoing work to ensure content on the website is comprehensive, concise and easy to read.

The next step will be to undertake user testing to inform future improvements.

Other strategic communications plans for the coming months include:

- Establishing a project developer forum
- Planning a collaborative communications campaign
- Align communications across different organisations involved in delivering the code

12. Policy updates from countries

England

Chris Waterfield noted there weren't any significant updates to report.

Scotland

Jamie Smith gave an update on tree planting rates and highlighted plans to stimulate the creation of more small woodlands.

Wales

Fiona Hay highlighted that the Welsh Government launched its Timber Industrial Strategy in July and has shared details of a new Sustainable Farming Scheme which will start in 2026. It is also developing a new capital grant scheme.

Northern Ireland

Ben Searle was unable to attend.

13. Any other business and date of next meeting

Pat shared a tribute to James Hepburne Scott who passed away in August. James played a vital role in helping to establish the code and was a key supporter throughout its development.

Areeb Arshad asked if there had been any update on allowing the Woodland Carbon Code to be included in the UK Emissions Trading Scheme. Members highlighted that the UK Emissions Trading Scheme Authority had recently shared an update which explained there is a strong case for inclusion and the Authority is working to explore some of the remaining concerns people may have. Pat advised that no decision has been taken by the ETS Authority at this point.

Next meeting: 9am to 11am on Wednesday 26 November 2025 via Microsoft Teams.