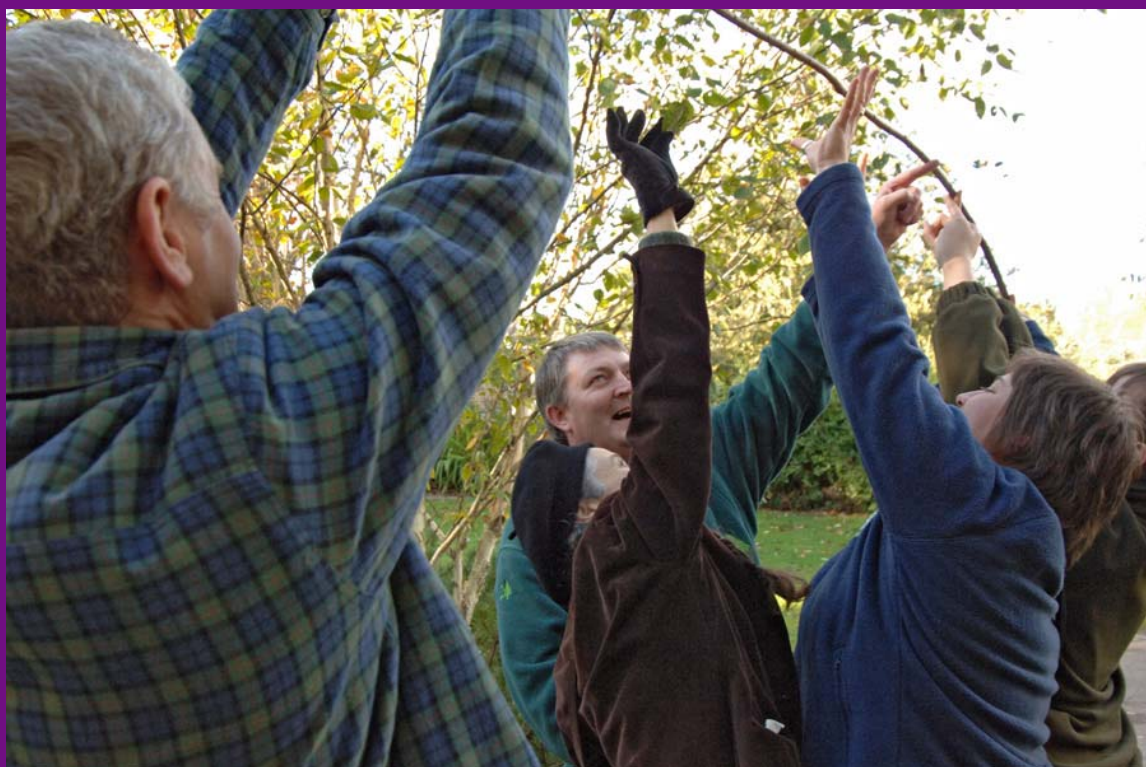


Forestry Commission working with civil society

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Executive Summary

Future engagement with civil society organisations

It is a time of change for the public sector and the way in which it engages with civil society organisations in the delivery of public services and benefits. The coalition government has already signalled its intent to reduce the number of strategic partners it works with, and reduce the level of financial support for civil society organisations coming from the public purse.

It is also clear that the Big Society agenda is evolving to mean more about volunteers, community-based organisations and social enterprises, and less about traditional forms of engagement with the most familiar charities, Trusts and other Third Sector organisations the public sector has become used to dealing with.

This document reports on the experiences of Forestry Commission England and the work it has done with charities Trusts and other civil society organisations over the last ten years. Many of the lessons learnt are relevant and important signposts marking the way to successful working relationships between the public sector and civil society in the future.

1. As part of a wider investigation of partnership working in the Forestry Commission across Great Britain, this study concentrates on the **relationships and partnerships between the Forestry Commission England (FCE), and civil society organisations**.
2. The **objectives** for this study were to:
 - o Map out the relationships with civil society organisations in which FCE is involved.
 - o Investigate the kind of relationships FCE has with civil society organisations across the different areas of the Forestry Commission business and varying geographical scales of the organisation.
 - o Evaluate which types of relationships and partnerships with civil society organisations are most successful and why.
 - o Understand how relationships with civil society organisations contribute to delivering Forestry Commission policy objectives¹.

¹ These are laid out in DEFRA's strategy for 'England's Trees, Woods and Forests' which can be found here: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/documents/forestry/20070620-forestry.pdf>

- Identify any ways in which the Forestry Commission could improve engagement with civil society organisations.
3. The report sets the **context** by discussing definitions of civil society, the Third Sector and related terms; and the meanings and benefits of 'partnership'. It reviews the development of the relationship between government and civil society organisations, and the way that this is embedded in forest policy.
 4. The **research methods** included a literature review to provide context and theoretical background; a desk study of Forestry Commission partnerships and other relationships; analysis to produce a spreadsheet characterising key features of 125 partnerships; questionnaires to district and regional staff; semi-structured interviews with 25 district, regional, and national level Forestry Commission staff and representatives from civil society organisations; extended interviews with 6 participants to gather more in depth case study material about individual partnership arrangements. Content analysis was undertaken to elucidate emerging themes and issues around the central research questions.
 5. In mapping the partnerships, we pay particular attention to two areas of complexity: the **kind of organisation** (constitution / legal definition, size and objectives); and the **scale** at which the relationships operate.
 6. Respondents indicated a **spectrum of relationship types**, with contracts and working relationships at one end of the spectrum, and partnerships and mutual associations at the other. Engagement and shared responsibility increases along this spectrum.
 7. **Partnership working** was very well understood as a particular form of relationship. The term was used to refer to specific projects, or the delivery of particular objectives; and also to ongoing contact and communication which extends existing relationships, for example into the strategic development of new programmes and future relationships.
 8. For the majority of respondents, the difference between 'relationships' and 'partnerships' was to do with the **equality of the relationship**, the sharing of mutual benefits, and working towards shared objectives.
 9. From this study, we see **four kinds of partnerships** involving civil society organisations and the Forestry Commission, based on the purpose, objectives and mode of operation of the partnership
 - Strategic

- Policy delivery
- Networking
- Operational

The report defines these and gives examples of each. In practice the categories are not completely clear cut, and several examples fall into more than one type of partnership.

10. The largest **number of partnerships** and relationships with civil society organisations exist is in the **operational group**, followed by strategic, networking, and policy delivery. Furthermore, it is in the operational partnerships that FCE has more relationships with civil society organisations than with the public sector.
11. In relation to the **strategic themes** of England's Trees Woods and Forests, there is a high degree of engagement with civil society organisations around Quality of Life and Natural Environment issues; medium engagement with Sustainable Resource, and Business and Markets; and low engagement around Climate Change.
12. Activity also **varies geographically** across England. The North West, East Anglia, South East and Midlands are particularly active in terms of partnership working with civil society organisations.
13. The number of relationships also indicates much **higher levels of engagement with medium sized charities** than with other sectors of civil society. Amongst the charities and Trusts there are organisations such as the Woodland Trust, Wildlife Trusts, Federation of Groundwork Trusts and Butterfly Conservation that are particularly well connected to the Commission and involved in partnership working.
14. Engagement with '**Friends of**' groups is also significant. The importance of 'Friends of' groups often comes through the close association they have to parts of the Public Forest Estate.
15. There are 'medium' levels of engagement with larger and smaller charities, as well as Trusts and professional organisations. The **lowest levels of direct engagement** are with community groups and those organisations which form part of what Pearce (2006) describes as the community and self-help sectors of the economy. The **marginal costs** of working with this segment of civil society are very high. This has particular implications when considering the **Big Society agenda**.

16. **Benefits** of partnerships with civil society organisations as perceived by respondents are:
- o Access to **additional sources of funding**
 - o **Improved delivery** through added staff and resource capacity
 - o **Access to skills and knowledge** additional and complementary to that available in the Forestry Commission
 - o **Increased levels of engagement** with people and issues beyond the reach of the Forestry Commission and other public sector bodies
 - o **New ideas**
 - o **Continuity of delivery** when projects change funding structure or objectives evolve
 - o Civil society organisations have the **ability to lobby and act independently** which can increase partnership legitimacy amongst users
 - o Civil society organisations often have **greater flexibility and more proactive** timescales which can speed delivery of projects and actions.
17. **Barriers** to such partnerships as perceived by respondents are:
- o The **significant amount of time** spent liaising with partners to build relationships
 - o A **lack of understanding** of each others' objectives/ways of working/limitations
 - o **Inequality** of effort/support/input from other partners can result in increased workload
 - o Issues to do with **public relations**, media and communications - negative publicity or 'stealing the limelight'
 - o Over-reliance on **key persons** or 'champions' and **personality clashes** leading to difficult project implementation.
18. The **ingredients of success** were identified as being:
- o Mutual **communication**
 - o **Transparency** in decision making and mutual objective setting
 - o Ability to build **shared working practice**
 - o Mutual **understanding** of the organisations involved and their organisational objectives and professional context
 - o Mutual **trust and respect** which comes as a consequence of communication and understanding

- **Individual champions** and managing people.
19. **Formal arrangements** for partnerships included: partnership agreements, Memorandum of Understanding, formal delivery contracts, public sector procedural arrangements, community management agreements, block grants, terms of reference, leasing, and estates permissions. Evidence from this study highlights that there is no form that obviously performs better than others; the **processes and principles** already described are more important than the actual constitution of the relationships.
20. Four issues were repeatedly **suggested to improve partnership working**:
- planning enough **time** for good partnership working;
 - **communication** as an on-going process, and without sudden endings;
 - need to **link different levels** of the organisation
 - need for **guidance** on partnership working.
21. Perceptions of the **future** were characterised by **uncertainty**, and a variety of expectations of the role of partnerships.
22. A clear articulation of **evaluation procedures** to measure the success of certain kinds of relationship could be useful for future organisational learning. This is particularly the case when looking for objective measures of value and real impact of relationships with civil society organisations. Proper evaluation of relationships and partnership requires a definition of success, and criteria against which to judge it. These criteria, and the data needed, were not available.
23. In terms of the qualitative evidence collected, the manner in which a relationship or a partnership is **defined or constituted does not appear to determine the success** of a relationship or partnership. It is the **fundamental principles** of building good relationships and partnerships that emerge as more important. Relationships need to be **objective driven**, and the form of the relationship or partnership that is best suited to the delivery of these will vary from case to case.
24. There is a need for robust **decisions around which partners and civil society organisations to work with**. This does not necessarily mean slimming down or simplifying the number and type of organisations that the Commission works with, but success depends on building realistic numbers of relationships and links with organisations. These need to consider:
- demonstrable **capacity** and **low risk** on the part of the civil society organisation with respect to delivery of specific and defined objectives/outcomes

- partner **understanding of Forestry Commission** needs and ways of working
- **complementary competencies** between the Commission and civil society organisations, understood and articulated in a way that aids role development and value-added in the relationship
- **professionalism** in project and activity management
- Third Sector organisations **able to link together different levels** of organisation and operation, from local delivery to national strategy, and between parts of the Commission's business.

25. The evidence suggests that FCE gets the **best results** from relationships with medium-sized civil society organisations that operate at both local and more strategic national level. These charities and trusts deliver outcomes that are focused on the needs of communities and forests, but which are also closely matched to FCE policy objectives because of the national level understanding. These '**dual scale**' **medium-sized civil society organisations** also seem to be the most able to manage communication across different parts of the Commission, as well as react to changing policy and funding contexts whilst still maintaining organisational capacity.

26. The Forestry Commission could continue working with civil society organisations to deliver forest policy objectives. **Opportunities** include:

- Developing new **service delivery** models
- Creating **space for innovation** and entrepreneurship
- Facilitating links with new civil society organisations around **climate change**, and community links to climate change and sustainable resource use
- Facilitating productive relationships between representatives from the Third Sector and civil society at **multiple scale** levels for maximum impact
- Creating **communication and learning systems** within and between relationships and partnerships to share experiences, evaluate successes and evolve good practice.

For further information about this study please contact:
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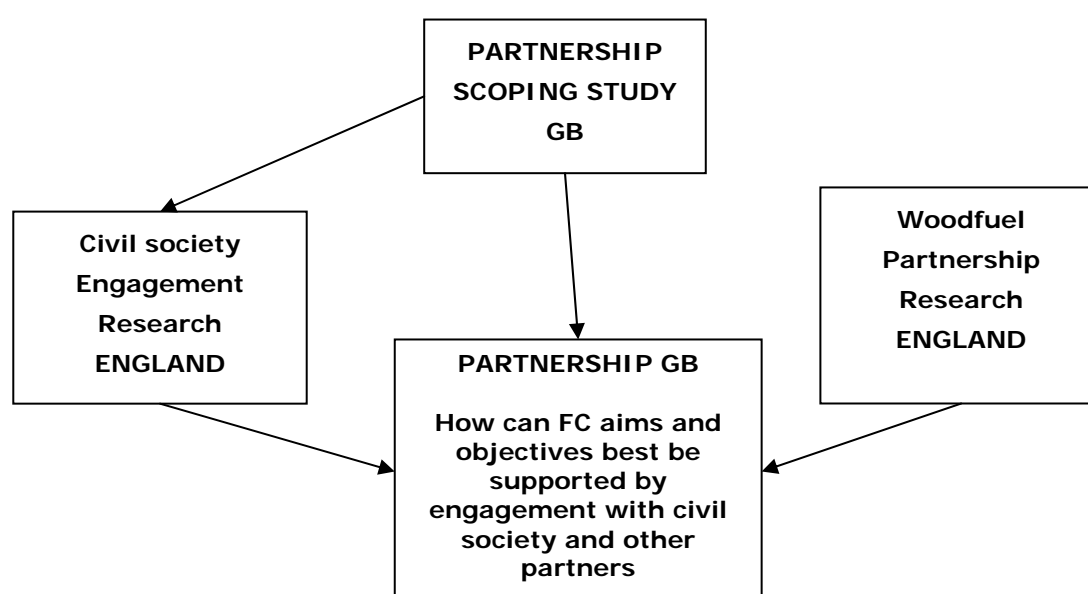
1. Introduction

This document presents research reviewing FCE's current relationship with the Third Sector. It provides an overview of the different kinds of partnerships the Forestry Commission has with Third Sector organisations in different areas of the Forestry Commission business, as well as with different sections of the organisation.

The report is divided into four sections. The first starts by providing a background into the idea of partnership and the increasing importance of building working relationships with civil society organisations (including those previously referred to as part of the Third Sector). The second section sets out the research methods that included: a review of relevant literature; a desk study of Forestry Commission partnership working with civil society organisations; and a series of qualitative interviews with a sample of key individuals from the Forestry Commission and from charities, Trusts and Local Authorities. The third and fourth sections of the report synthesise and evaluate the research results and draw out significant conclusions.

This study of Forestry Commission relationships with civil society is part of a wider investigation of partnership working in the Forestry Commission across Great Britain (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Schematic illustration of partnership research



A scoping study looking at the concept of partnership has already been undertaken in England, Wales and Scotland. This contributed to the form and scope of this

examination of Forestry Commission relationships with civil society. A study of partnership working in the wood fuel and biomass sector is also underway. This study concentrates on engagement with civil society organisations and partnerships in England. Taken together, the scoping study, civil society study, and the wood fuel research will all inform the wider partnership research.

This summary report is aimed at Forestry Commission staff and others who wish to know more about civil society and how the Forestry Commission currently works with this sector.

1.1 Aims and Objectives

This piece of research aimed to investigate the relationships and partnerships developed between FCE, and civil society organisations – previously referred to as the Third Sector. The research results and information collected support the FCE's work refreshing and developing their original Third Sector Strategy². FCE has been working on this strategy in association with the Environment Agency and Natural England under the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' *'Third Sector Strategy'*³ developed from the Compact⁴. An important part of this research is, therefore, to understand how the Forestry Commission is viewed as an organisation by its partners, and to find out more about the successful management of relationships with civil society organisations.

The specific research objectives for this study were to:

- Map out the relationships that FCE has with civil society organisations.
- Investigate the kind of relationships FCE has with civil society organisations across the different areas of the Forestry Commission business and varying geographical scales of the organisation.
- Evaluate which types of relationships and partnerships with civil society organisations are most successful and why.

² See here for more info: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestry.nsf/byunique/infd-7x8luq>

³ View the strategy at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/about/how/third-sector/documents/Defra-Third-Sector-Strategy-1108.pdf>

⁴ The Compact is the longstanding agreement that sets out shared principles and guidelines for effective partnership working between government and the third sector in England. See here for more information: <http://www.thecompact.org.uk/>

- Understand how relationships with civil society contribute to delivering Forestry Commission policy objectives⁵.
- Identify any ways in which the Forestry Commission could improve engagement with civil society.

1.2 Definitions and policy context

1.2.1 Civil society and the Third Sector

Whilst 'civil society' has been a well used general terms for society and individuals outside of government and public structures, the recognition of a "Third Sector" is a relatively recent phenomenon, with its original roots in academic debates about voluntary action that arose during the late 1970s and early 1980s. At that time, the central points of discussion were about how best to characterise the growing number of voluntary organisations and the meaning of "voluntary action", "philanthropy", "mutuality" and "charity". It was not until the first part of the 1990's that the idea of a discreet and real-world 'third sector' of the economy really began to have some purchase. It was during this period that charities and voluntary organisations began to have a noticeable impact on service provision, and highlighted some of the shortcomings in the provision of the full range of social, welfare and environmental benefits demanded by society brought about by a reliance on markets (Kendall 2000).

By the late 1990's as political administrations changed, New Labour was involved in a project to find a 'Third Way' of government, one that stepped beyond the traditional tension between choosing either market orientated or public oriented approaches to enterprise ownership and the delivery of goods and services. The 'Third Way' that they promoted was concerned with creating a mixed welfare model of political economy (Durose and Rummery 2006; Kendall 2000; Morris 2000; Powell and Dowling 2006), or a political economy in which the Third Sector could "offer choice and responsiveness in the delivery of public services [and] help promote local civic culture and forms of community development" (Giddens 2000:81 cited in Williams 2002: 249). Kendall (2000) argues that this Third Way of government, actively including voluntary and other third sector bodies, also provided the Labour administration with a means of extending the communitarian ideal of achieving "a community in which power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many and not the few" (Kendall 2000: 16).

⁵ These are laid out in DEFRA's strategy for 'England's Trees, Woods and Forests' which can be found here: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/documents/forestry/20070620-forestry.pdf>

The reason that the Third Sector has been given so much attention is not only one of political ideology. As a sector it has reached a size and scale that generates a significant impact in a range of different social, cultural and environmental policy arenas. For example, income to the sector in 2006/2007 was estimated at around £33 billion, with £12 billion worth of income coming from Government in 2007/2008 (The Cabinet Office 2009). Charitable giving to registered charities in the UK generally by private individual donors ran to £9.9 billion in 2008/2009 (CAF and NCVO 2009). (Clark 2010). Depending on which measure is used, the Third Sector represents between two and nine per cent of the UK's Gross Domestic Product (Cabinet Office 2009; CAF and NCVO 2009).

This interest in the sector has continued with the incoming coalition government. Although an ideological break has been signalled by a change in language away from 'Third Sector' back to 'civil society', statements of intent from the new government have shown that it continues to value the actual and potential contribution of civil society organisations to the economic and social welfare of the UK⁶. 'Civil society' is a much broader term than Third Sector, and it has been argued by some that this will force a loss of cohesive identity amongst the larger charities, Trusts and other 'Third Sector' organisations, particularly as the role of individuals and smaller community-based organisations (the social economy of family and neighbourhood) begins to evolve under the new, England focused, 'Big Society' banner (Alcock 2010).

However, most commentators agree that

- the promised public sector reform and civil service retrenchment does highlight a continuing role for larger civil society organisations in providing goods and services that can no longer be provided by the state;
- the number of strategic partnerships between government and Third Sector organisations will be reduced at the same time as the relatively high levels of public sector investment in Third Sector organisations will also decline⁷.

Information about the numbers of civil society organisations and size of the segment involved in environmental issues such as conservation, forestry and land-use are hard to come by. In the last Sector Panel Survey for which figures are available in 2005/2006 (Cabinet Office 2009), around 3% of the sector by value belonged to the 'environmental' service area. Although the top three causes that UK donors support (in terms of numbers of donors donating) are medical research (20%), hospitals and hospices (15%), and children and young people (14%), it is noticeable that in terms

⁶ See for example "Building the Big Society" available from:

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/407789/building-big-society.pdf

⁷ See for example: <http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/news/Article/1020886/Office-Civil-Society-will-cut-number-strategic-partners-42-15-next-year/>

of the actual value of donations given the 'environment' and 'faith and religion' are the two areas ranked highest (CAF and NCVO 2009).

Given the great diversity of civil society organisations, it continues to be difficult to find a universally accepted definition of the sector as a whole, or a characterisation of the range of organisations, groups and individuals who populate it.

Civil society as an idea has a long history. It has, in research and policy literature, been described more as a set of social relations rather than a 'sector' (Evers and Laville 2004), a way of describing uncoerced collective social action around shared values and interests by institutions other than the family, state and market⁸, and a set of ideals around the vision of a 'good society' based on principles of co-operation, solidarity, mutual commitment and freedom which have complemented, and influenced, the formal institutions of democracy (Commission of Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society 2010).

The new coalition government Office for Civil Society identifies civil society organisations as voluntary and community groups, social enterprises, charities, cooperatives and mutuals. For the majority of commentators Third Sector organisations (TSOs) have been seen as a specific segment of civil society. In contrast to smaller community-based groups and the informal actions of individuals, TSOs are a distinct group consisting of the more formalised and larger global, national, regional and local organisations that have become familiar partners in, and advocates in for, the environmental sector. This would include the larger and medium sized charities, smaller community land trusts, the Co-Operative movement, campaigning groups and land and property holding Trusts and charities.

Morris (2000) argues that TSOs must, to some degree, display five key characteristics. These characteristics are that they should be: organised or institutionalised to some degree in terms of their form and method of operation; private meaning institutionally separate from government; non-profit-distributing in that profits are not returned to owners or directors but are directed towards continuing the mission and objectives of the organisation; self governing; and voluntary in so far as a meaningful degree of voluntary participation is involved in the operation, governance and management of the organisation.

⁸ See the definition from The London School of Economics here:
http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what_is_civil_society.htm

A slightly simpler definition was promoted by the UK's Office of the Third Sector⁹. According to them the Third Sector encompasses organisations and institutions which differ from private or business organisations in that they are value driven rather than profits driven. In their view Third Sector organisations principally re-invest surpluses or raise funds to further social, environmental or cultural objectives.

In the new political context the 'Third Sector' may well be a term falling out of fashion, but it did serve to make a useful distinction between organisations which are neither purely private (i.e. conventional businesses and households) nor purely public (government and public agency), maintaining a distinction too between informal volunteering and individual social action on the one hand (see for example Ruston 2003) and a more organised area of the socio-political economy.

The organisations which form this part of civil society are not only numerous, but very varied in terms of their values, objectives, constituted form, staff and membership size, the size of their income stream and their financial value. It covers organisations as diverse as formalised community groups, voluntary organisations, faith and equalities groups, charities, around 55,000 social enterprises, 4,500 co-operatives, as well as mutual groups and 1,830 housing associations (Commission for the Compact 2009; DEFRA 2008).

The boundaries between social enterprises, charities and traditional businesses warrant further definition because not only is this often an area of confusion, but the coalition government has emphasised its interest in social enterprises as potential public service delivery agents¹⁰. DEFRA (2008: 15) defines social enterprises as "businesses with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise for shareholders and owners". Familiar examples of social enterprises in a forestry or environmental context would include: Hill Holt Wood in Lincolnshire¹¹ which works to create products and services useful to the community through woodland-based teaching and training activities, particularly with disadvantaged young people (O'Brien 2004; O'Brien 2005); not-for-profit companies such as the Mersey Forest¹² which use income to further social and environmental objectives

⁹ The Office of the Third Sector formed part of the Cabinet Office in the United Kingdom under the Labour government. Under the coalition government this office was replaced in May 2010 by the Office for Civil Society. Most third-sector matters are devolved in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

¹⁰ See here for example: <http://www.appgsocialenterprise.org.uk/pages/appg.html>

¹¹ See here: <http://hillholtwood.com/about/>

¹² See here: <http://merseyforest.org.uk/>

through community forestry activities; and The Eden Project¹³ which has supported local environmental schemes and benefitted from corporate social responsibility actions to fulfil its mission of environmental education and local regeneration. Other well known examples of social enterprises outside the forestry sector include fair-trade enterprises such as Divine Chocolate, worker owned companies such as John Lewis, and Jamie Oliver's restaurant and youth training enterprise "15".

One of the main differences between social enterprises and charities is that a 'charity' is a recognised legal form, but a 'social enterprise' is not. A social enterprise mark that defines social enterprises more closely was launched at the end of 2009¹⁴, but individual social enterprises may take up one of a number of possible legal identities (e.g. company, employee owned company, Community Interest Company, co-operative, or a charity). So, for example, although Hill Holt Wood is known and promotes itself as being a social enterprise, it is legally constituted as a registered charity. It is equally important to recognise that many of the UK's charities operate as businesses, and report income generated through trading on an annual basis¹⁵. The charity and trading arm are normally constituted as legally separate but related organisations. For example, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) operates as the RSPB and RSPB Sales Ltd, and the National Trust as the National Trust and National Trust (Enterprises) Ltd. Profits from the business and trading operations are used to provide income to the charitable arm of the organisation. The Eden Project too includes both a Registered Charity and a Limited Company in this case generating 'profit for a purpose' which is ploughed back into furthering the charitable mission of the project.

A useful framework for understanding the diversity and complexity of civil society organisations, and how these relate to public and private spheres, has been developed by Pearce (2006). As Figure 2 illustrates, Pearce begins from the premise that the economy can be divided into two sections: That which is market driven and engages in trade, and that which is planned and does not trade.

There are three systems of the economy which fit into the trading and non-trading areas in different ways. The first (public), second (private) and third (Third Sector or civil society-based) systems of the economy have predominant or characteristic features, with only the third system encompassing both market driven and planned economic approaches.

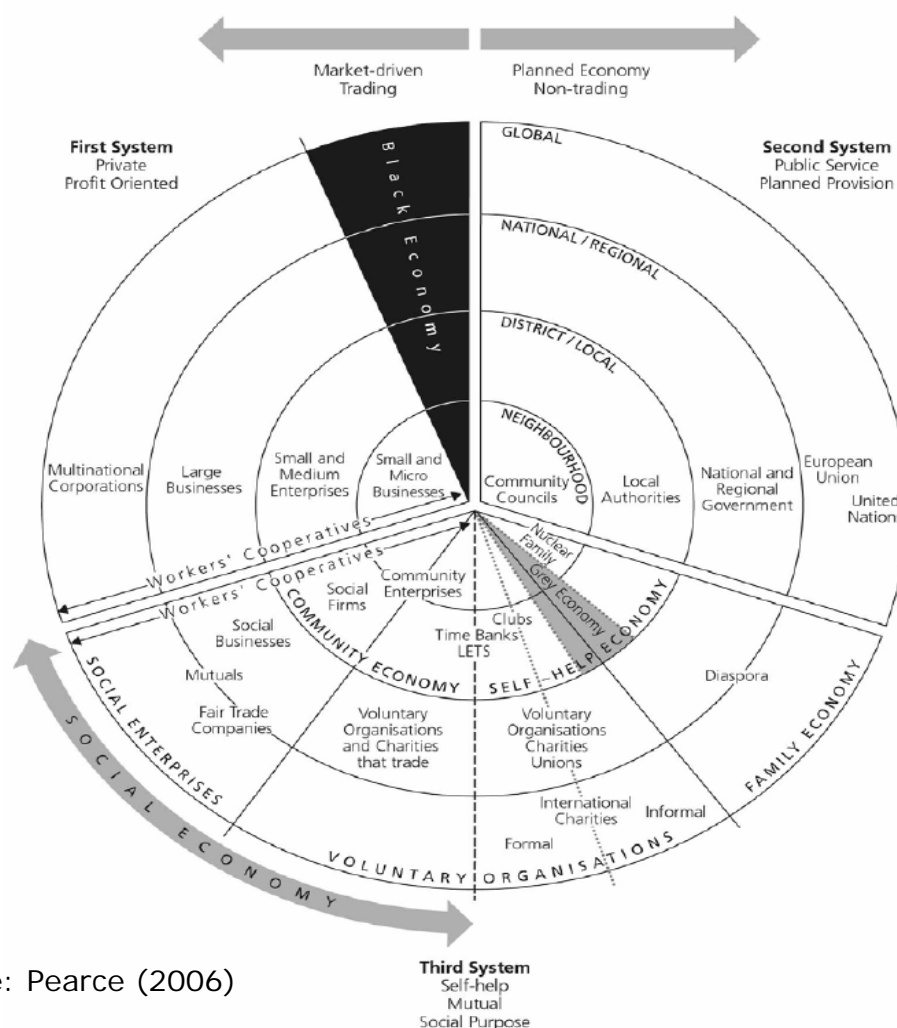
¹³ Find out more here: <http://www.edenproject.com/our-work/index.php>

¹⁴ See here: <http://www.socialenterprisemark.org.uk/>

¹⁵ See the Charity Commission database and Summary Information Reports on every registered charity here: <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/Showcharity/RegisterOfCharities/RegisterHomePage.aspx>

The diagram also illustrates the wide spectrum of organisations operating at different points on the scale level, and with different primary objectives. The third system is mainly driven by objectives and values based on self-help mutuality and the delivery of social purpose, but, importantly this third system of the economy includes organisations which are operating in areas and in ways which lie close to the second or private system through to those more closely reflecting the first or public sector. What emerges from Pearce's conceptualisation, is an area of the third system he labels the "social economy". This involves some of the larger and more formalised organisations we might once have termed as TSOs which clearly operate at different levels of the economy global to local neighbourhood level. The kinds and forms of enterprises and organisations involved have quite different capacities and bring about different outcomes according to the level at which they act.

Figure 2. Pearce's model of the three systems of the economy



Source: Pearce (2006)

Moving from this 'social economy' to the right of his diagram towards the second system, there is a gradual transition to organisations and institutions which are smaller less formal and more concerned with individual and family-based voluntary action and engagement, the part of civil society action not necessarily captured in previous definitions of the Third Sector, but certainly included in the new coalitions government's vision of civil society.

In terms of this research and the needs of the Forestry Commission, this diagram helps to provide a way of understanding and characterising the range of organisations the Commission works with. It shows the relationships between the varied organisations that form civil society and operate either within the 'social economy', or the other parts of the third system. This division into different systems and segments demonstrates different potential areas of effective working and the reach that organisations which the Forestry Commission might work with may have in terms of scale of operation and connections with second and first systems of the economy.

1.2.2 Partnership and other relationships

Other terms in need of an early definition include 'partnership' and 'relationship'. In many instances the two terms are used synonymously. Part of our wider research work has been to investigate how partnership is understood and defined within the Forestry Commission. Throughout our scoping study interviews, people tended to use the phrases 'partnership working' and 'relationship building' slightly differently. The implication was that a relationship is something that you 'build' in order to achieve the conditions that allow working in partnership. A relationship can therefore be defined as a state of connectedness, the recognition of a certain level of engagement, or a way of contracting business. Following on from this, a 'partnership' is characterised as one of many types of relationship, which has specific features and particular meaning.

Most definitions of partnerships within the academic literature, describe synergistic relationships between two or more organisations that are based on realising mutual benefits at a level beyond that which a single organisation could achieve alone (Greer 2001; Macintosh 1992). Whilst this may be a commonly agreed key feature of partnerships, there continues to be much argument about the additional detail, and individual interpretations can differ quite dramatically (Dowling and Powell 2004; Glendinning et al. 2002; Powell and Dowling 2006; Roberts et al 2002). In this report, we adopt the following definition:

"A joint working arrangement where partners are otherwise independent bodies, cooperating to achieve a common goal; this may involve the creation of

new organisational structures or processes to plan and implement a joint programme, as well as sharing relevant information, risks and rewards"
Audit Commission (1998 in Dowling and Powell 2004: 310)

The definition has little to say about the form a partnership may take, or the roles of different partners. These can vary greatly. Partnerships may be 'formal' organisations or associations which involve a legal or other type of binding constitution or working agreement. They can also be 'informal' and more loosely based on relationships of trust and mutual consent. The roles that different organisations play within partnerships can be very diverse. In some partnerships, all the partners may be active in sharing roles and responsibilities, in others it may be agreed that some are less active and take on a specific role such as providing the funding, or providing land and permissions for a partnership project to take place.

Understanding these definitions is important as the variables help us to develop a structure for analysis. But we should also note that 'partnership' and 'partnership working' are terms which are themselves linked to ideas about the Third Sector and a particular *modus operandi* of the previous Labour administration.

There is an emerging discourse and set of ideas around 'co-production' which may rework the older partnership model. The concept of co-production promotes the involvement of users of services to design and deliver those same services in equal partnership with professionals. There has always been a role for civil society organisations (TSOs) in mediating this kind of public engagement or representing service users. The idea of co-production takes this further. It builds on the notion of localism and mutualism and developing the capacity and self reliance of service users so that they are no longer passive recipients of services but part of the 'machinery' which supports, develops and maintains those services (the Lab and New Economics Foundation 2009).

The familiar roles of civil society organisations as community and service user advocates, and of public agencies supporting the supply of public services through strategic partnerships with TSOs, is likely to change as a result.

1.2.3 Benefits of working with civil society organisations

It is the way in which civil society organisations are both part of, and working within 'society at large', the third system (Pearce 2006), which has proved so attractive to government. Civil society organisations are considered to form a vital link between government and people. So the assumed benefits of working with civil society organisations have strong social dimensions including:

- Civil society organisations have expertise in many areas that public bodies do not, often because they work directly with people and groups (Commission for the Compact 2009).
- They understand the needs of their beneficiaries and may therefore be able to provide new and effective answers to problems that Government may be unable to comprehend (Commission for the Compact 2009).
- They can provide voice and representation for citizens and communities through campaigning and advocacy (Commission for the Compact 2009).
- They often specialise in working with the most disadvantaged and marginalised people and places and engage people in social and environmental challenges (Department of Communities and Local Government 2007).
- They can help strengthen cohesion by building bridges and bonds within communities (Department of Communities and Local Government 2007).

All of these assumed benefits are important for the environmental sector and for forestry. Civil society organisations may also provide:

- voice and advocacy on behalf of non-human beneficiaries, e.g. species and habitats, which may otherwise be overlooked;
- additional specialist knowledge and skills as they relate to environmental management and adaptation.

1.2.4 Forestry Commission working with civil society organisations

A landmark event for TSOs organisations was the publication of The Compact in 1998. This signalled how clearly civil society organisations were valued by government and how closely government wanted to work with these organisations. The Compact acted as a catalyst for more frequent and larger-value engagement with third sector organisations and provided public agencies the justification needed to support policy delivery through Third Sector engagement. The Compact was refreshed at the end of 2009¹⁶. It restates the case for partnership working including a description of the shared principles for effective relationships between Government and the civil society in England. The coalition administration has also restated the case for working with the voluntary and community sector through the Compact.

¹⁶ <http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/files/102054/FileName/TheCompact.pdf>

With The Compact pointing the way for future civil society working, additional policy documents and legislation have added detail to the scope and emphasis that working with different parts of the sector will involve. The Charities Act (2006)¹⁷ was important and is worth mentioning here, because it picked up on some of the principles outlined in the Compact and reinforced the requirement that “all charities must exist for the public benefit”. It also promoted improvements to cross-sector relationships. In 2002 the Office of the Third Sector’s “Social Enterprise; a Strategy for Success”¹⁸ and subsequent “Social Enterprise Action Plan; Scaling New Heights (2006)”¹⁹ set out visions for a sustainable social enterprise sector, recognising the potential of a segment of civil society to contribute to an inclusive economy (Cabinet Office, 2007). In July 2007 the Cabinet Office published “The Future Role of the Third Sector in Social and Economic Regeneration”²⁰. This report followed the largest ever consultation with the Third Sector and set out a ten year plan, incorporating £515m of spending over three years, for programme support and the development of sector capacity.

Strengthening the role of civil society and partnership approaches to working and service delivery, has come at a time of increasing devolution, regionalism and reorganisation of political and administrative structures across England and the UK. Territorial development and governance through the regions and through Local Authorities has opened up governance structures at a number of sub-national tiers, working at regional, local and very local levels. For most Regional initiatives and Local Authorities, partnership working and engagement with TSOs became a cornerstone of governance looking to progress localism in understanding and delivery. Wilkinson and Craig (2002: 1) emphasise this when they say that by 2001 “*virtually every major government social policy initiative was predicated on partnership working and the language of local governance is now also strongly influenced by this concept*”. The links between partnership working and the Third Sector were manifested in both issue-based and area-based partnerships including Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and Local Area Partnerships (LAPs), as well as Regional and Sub-Regional Partnerships. There was also an integration of Third Sector engagement indicators in the performance monitoring of Public Service Agreements through National Indicator 6 “participation in volunteering” and 7 “enabling a thriving Third Sector”.

¹⁷ Web Link to Charities Act: http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2006/ukpga_20060050_en_1

¹⁸ See here: http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/third_sector/assets/se_strategy_2002.pdf

¹⁹ See here: http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/third_sector/assets/se_action_plan_2006.pdf

²⁰ View the Report:

http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/third_sector/assets/the_future_role_of_the_third_sector_in_economic_and_social_regeneration.pdf

As part of the effort to establish ways of working with civil society organisations, many Local Authorities and LSPs have evolved their own Compacts. As Local Authorities have generally concentrated on service delivery, they have tended to engage with TSOs and deliver grant at the frontline of social welfare, health and education sectors, as well as take forward activities connected with regional economic development and regeneration.

All of these changes have had an impact on public agencies working in the environment and land-based sectors. The FCE's Forestry Strategy "A New Focus for England's Woodlands" (Forestry Commission England 1998) was published in the same year as The Compact and makes continuous reference to 'encouraging the active participation and involvement of the private and voluntary sectors' in achieving its delivery aims. The current strategy, 'England's Trees Woods and Forests' (DEFRA 2007) commonly referred to as 'ETWF', sets out the Government's vision and priorities for England's tree and woodland resource over the next fifty years. Commitment to civil society continues to be evident throughout the policy statement. The effectiveness of the strategy is shown to be dependant upon central and local Government building strong partnerships with private woodland owners, businesses, social enterprises and community groups. The Forestry Commission and Natural England ETWF Delivery Plan 2008-2012²¹ is the implementation strategy for the policy, setting out what needs to be done to achieve the five aims of the ETWF (Forestry Commission England 2008). Each of the five key themes for action, make connections to partnerships and collaborative approaches with civil society organisations and others as the means to achieving policy objectives and project outcomes most effectively.

The evolution of partnership working and engagement with civil society within the Forestry Commission has strongly reflected wider trends. The Commission links with national, regional and local governance systems as they are concerned with economic and environmental regeneration and management. This brought it into contact with the Regional Development fora and Local Strategic Partnerships, and regional forestry forums. It continues to work with Local Authorities, and some planning committees as a partner as well as a consultee. In addition the Commission has, and currently continues to provide grant to civil society organisations for services and activities connected with woodland management and the maintenance of environmental services, as well as the development of enterprises associated with woodlands and trees, quality of life, health and wellbeing social benefits.

Formalising the relationship between civil society and government agencies concerned with the environment, DEFRA published the "Third Sector Strategy" in June 2007 to

²¹ See the Delivery Plan in full at: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/etwf>

explain how it would improve partnerships with TSOs (DEFRA 2008). It aims to achieve the department's overall mission of living within environmental means and forms the basis of DEFRA's response to the signing of the Compact.

In 2009 the Forestry Commission, Natural England and the Environment Agency produced an informal Third Sector statement outlining their memorandum of understanding to work together on policy delivery (Forestry Commission et al. 2009). It sets out what the three organisations offer and what they expect in return from their civil society partners and stakeholders.

2. Methodology

This study of how FCE engages with civil society organisations forms part of a wider investigation of partnership working that was described in the introduction to this report. Part of the methodology was to use the earlier scoping study for background information to help structure questions, and material used in developing a characterisation of relationships and partnership types.

2.1 Data Collection

The research reported here employed a mixed-methods approach including the following:

- **Literature review:** A search of the academic and policy literature looked for further information concerning Third Sector and civil society partnership working and policy imperatives to put engagement with the sector into context, and to find out more about how partnerships successfully deliver against objectives. Journal searching was confined to journal literature from the last ten years and focused on the UK. Data was sourced through Scirus, an academic search engine linked to Web of Knowledge, Science Direct and other online indexing and full-text social and environmental research databases. Scopus and Google Scholar were used to find broader non-journal sources and policy documents.
- **Desk study of Forestry Commission partnerships, programmes and projects** that include civil society organisations: A search of the ETWF Delivery Plan, Forestry Commission press releases, as well as the annual reports of the Regional Forestry Frameworks, project and programme web pages, and a web-based search of Forestry Commission working with civil society organisations, produced a list of partnerships and organisations working with the Commission, as well as additional background information about the range of other partners, partnership or project aims, budgets and project/partnership working methods.

This information was put together in a spreadsheet and used to characterise partnership types, and links with ETWF delivery targets.

- **A questionnaire** which was administered by email to Regional and District level FCE staff: The questionnaire asked for information about the partnerships with civil society organisations, key areas of work that staff were involved with, and opinions about working with charities, voluntary organisations and other civil society partners (see Annex 5.2). The sampling frame was constructed using the Forestry Commission staff list, selecting Forest Management Directors (FMDs) across the eleven Districts, and the Regional Directors and other interested staff over the nine forestry Regions.
- **Semi-structured interviews (SSI)** were conducted with key informants from the Commission, civil society organisations, and people employed in partnerships by Local Authorities: The interview schedule asked for information about understandings of partnership as well as investigating benefits and drawbacks of working, lessons learned, and perceptions regarding future trends engaging with TSOs (see Annex 5.1). Snowball sampling was used to recruit respondents from the FCE in the national office and beyond into Regions and Districts, as well as representatives of civil society organisations the Commission works with. Some suggestions for civil society contacts also came from questionnaire returns. In terms of civil society contacts a 'paired sample' approach was used to select two individuals per civil society organisation, one operating at a national level and another at a local level. Interviews were digitally recorded but were not transcribed in full. Summary descriptions of the interview and transcription of selected key phrases were prepared.
- **Case studies** were selected from the local level semi-structured interviews: A sub-sample of projects were selected for more detailed investigation as case studies. The objective of selecting these cases studies was to extend the questioning and draw out more detailed evidence about how relationships with civil society organisations were constituted, and what forms of partnership and partnership working were successful. The case studies were also expected to provide evidence to support issues emerging from the interviews and questionnaires. Case study investigation was led through semi-structured interviews using a specific additional section of the interview schedule (see section D of the interview schedule Annex 5.1), alongside a review of project documents and additional information. Case study interviews were administered to selected local, regional and national level staff.

Table 1 provides summary information about the final sample composition.

Table 1. Summary characteristics of the interview and questionnaire sample

Respondent's organisation and role	Research Method			Total
	Question-naire	SSI	Case studies	
FCE Regional staff	5	1	1	7
FCE District staff	3	3	1	7
FCE national office staff	0	4	-	4
Civil society - Large organisations	0	1	1	2
Civil society - Small and medium sized organisations	0	8	2	10
Local Authority partnership staff	0	2	1	3
Total	8	19	6	<u>33</u>

2.2 Analysis

Results from the different data collection exercises were analysed using two different techniques.

- A **spreadsheet of partnerships** was constructed using the information from the desk review, the lists of partnerships, projects and organisations returned in the questionnaires as well as those mentioned during interviews. A total of 135 partnerships were recorded with 125 specific to England. More than 140 different civil society organisations were listed operating with the Commission in England. These partnerships were all either current, or very recently ended.

The information contained in the spreadsheet was referenced to FCE District (Forest Enterprise) and FCE Region (Forestry Commission) according to the Part of the business involved. The sample composition means that there are no records of relationships with civil society organisations from NE region / Kielder District, or from East Midlands Region / Sherwood and Lincolnshire, and Northants Districts.

The spreadsheet provided a matrix from which a characterisation of partnership types was developed and simple count data of the kinds and spread of civil society working was generated.

- **Content analysis** was used to interrogate the interview and questionnaire data, and to synthesise information about emerging themes and issues.

Selected segments of the semi-structured interviews were transcribed to provide textual evidence of key points.

3. Results

The following section presents results against the five broad questions derived from the research objectives, namely:

1. How and where is FCE working with civil society organisations?
2. What are the perceived benefits and drawbacks of relationships with civil society organisations?
3. What are the ingredients of successful relationships with civil society organisations?
4. What are the lessons learned that could improve future working with civil society organisations?
5. What does the future hold for relationships with civil society organisations?

3.1 Mapping FCE relationships with civil society organisations

The ETWF delivery plan has an 'actions spreadsheet' that provides details about completed and planned working, and lists out the partnership organisations with whom this will be undertaken²². However, the list is not exhaustive, it does not include all the civil society organisations the Forestry Commission works with, nor does it include all the partnership working that the Regional and District staff are involved with.

In this section we attempt to build an overview of the extent of Forestry Commission engagement with civil society organisations beyond the information given in the ETWF actions spreadsheet. Finding a way to navigate the complexity of the large number of relationships that the Forestry Commission has with civil society organisations, our mapping tries to characterise the types of relationships and organisations involved, and the ETWF delivery areas covered. There are two areas of complexity that we pay particular attention to. These are the kind of organisation in terms of constitution or

²² Available at: [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/eng-etwf-actions-list.xls/\\$FILE/eng-etwf-actions-list.xls](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/eng-etwf-actions-list.xls/$FILE/eng-etwf-actions-list.xls)

legal definition, size and objectives, and secondly the scale level at which the relationships operate. Pearce (2006) has already indicated in his model of the economy introduced in section 1.2 of this report, that relationships with the organisations operating in the third system of the economy, and the probable outcomes of partnership working, will be conditioned by the sort of organisation involved and the levels at which each organisation operates.

Answering the question how and where does FCE work with civil society organisations, this section begins by defining relationships and partnerships using information from the partnership spreadsheet as well as qualitative interviews. The following part of the report characterises different types of partnerships and tries to show who these partnerships are with, the extent of working in these different partnerships and in which areas of the business and parts of the country they are happening in.

A distinction has already been made between relationships and partnerships in our introduction. We use both terms and concepts in our analysis of FCE working with civil society organisations because FCE engages with them through a variety of different kinds of relationships. Some of these may be connected to partnership working and some may not. Looking at relationships more broadly, rather than just partnerships specifically, provides more information from which to characterise the ways in which FCE works with different civil society organisations, and counts of 'relationships' (rather than numbers of partnerships) help to illustrate the degree of engagement between FCE and different segments of civil society.

3.1.1 Relationships

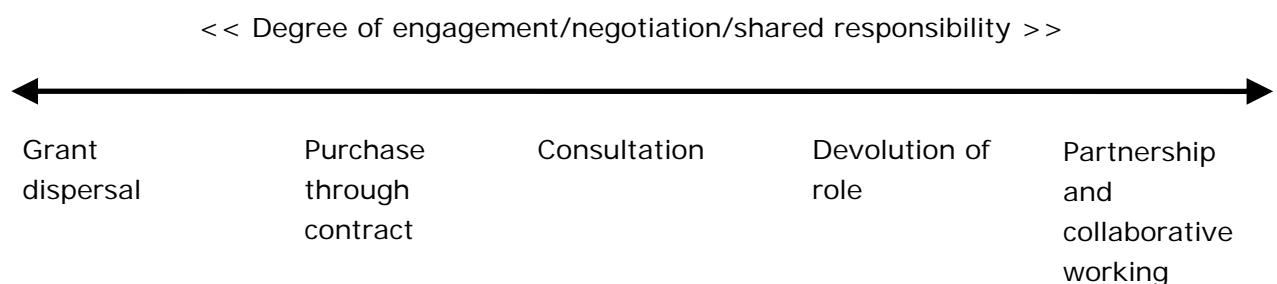
Relationships are used throughout this research as an important indicator of FCE working with civil society organisations. It is important to understand what FCE staff and civil society colleagues understood relationships to be. The range of relationships uncovered by the research can be summarised as:

- Partnership and collaborative working
- Informal and personal communication
- The devolution of responsibility to civil society organisations through award of contracts and formalisation of roles for specific actions
- Contractual
- Advocacy and campaigning (i.e. a relationship in which the Forestry Commission is lobbied by a civil society organisation)
- Consultation

- Grant giving or grant receiving and dispersing.

What the list indicates is a full spectrum of relationship types, which depending on the degree of engagement or shared responsibility has contracts and working relationships at one end of the spectrum, and partnerships and mutual associations at the other (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. A continuum of relationship types present between the Forestry Commission and civil society organisations



However, partnership and collaborative working may involve a mix of all of these different kinds of relationship. For example in some partnerships civil society organisations might be contracted to deliver specific actions or targets, without being full members of the actual partnership. The distinctions being made here are illustrated by this comment;

"[Partnership is] distinct from other working relationships we have for example where for example a landowner might say to us "I want a job doing can you come and help get it done with some of your volunteers" and we might say yes to that but in that circumstance the landowner is dictating what work is done, what site it's going to be done on when they want it done, maybe how much they're willing to pay us and that's almost like a local contractor relationship. And equally, on a larger scale there are some programmes we deliver where another organisation is the lead body and we have a formal sub contract to deliver a part of the programme, so I would see those as contractual relationships as distinct from a partnership where there is a more sharing and more equality about what you're doing together"

Staff member from a medium-sized charity

There is a difference between contractual and 'devolved contracts' too. Devolved responsibility may involve a formal contractual agreement between the Forestry Commission and a civil society organisation, but, unlike the standard contractual agreement specifying the exact works to be undertaken, tends to be more flexible and

evolutionary allowing the contractor greater autonomy in exchange for taking on the role and responsibility for delivering a particular outcome. Contractual and devolved arrangements are not without their own problems and issues, and may not always be successful even though they seem straight forward. One medium sized charity reported problems with both kinds of arrangements where different parts of the Forestry Commission were unaware of agreements made and contracts issued which had led to problems of delivery on the ground.

The last set of comments that came forward from discussions were about Third Sector organisations that had multiple functions around a single issue, such as a lobbying function around species conservation. Advocacy and lobbying of the Forestry Commission by one part of a civil society organisation can inhibit or present a barrier to working with other sections of the same organisation.

3.1.2 Understandings of partnership

As the discussion of relationships covered above suggests, partnership working was very well understood as a particular form of relationship by Forestry Commission staff as well as by individuals from Third Sector organisations. In many cases the term 'partnership' or 'partnership working' was used to refer to specific projects, or the delivery of particular objectives. 'Partnership working' also existed beyond specific projects, and in these cases it was about ongoing contact and communication extending relationships between the Commission and civil society organisations that had worked together, including the strategic development of new programmes and future relationships.

For the majority of respondents, the difference between what they saw as 'relationships' and what they perceived to be 'partnerships' was to do with the equality of the relationship, the sharing of mutual benefits, and working towards shared objectives. The definition of an equal relationship was not one in which the roles, responsibilities and endowments of the partners were the same, but rather where these were fair, mutually agreed, and accepted, and contributed to realising shared objectives, for example:

"To me partnership is about working with other people and organisations they can be in the Forestry Commission as well as in external and Third Sector organisations and it's where you've got a shared agenda, a common thing you all understand and agree you are trying to achieve"
FCE national office staff

"Partnership for me is where we're working with another organisation as equals – that could either be in the short term to deliver a project or it could be in the

longer term to figure out more strategically where we're going to get to and how we can complement one another."

Staff member from medium-sized charity

Underlying this notion of equality and fairness, is the recognition that different partners bring different skills and resources to the partnership. A key issue in partnership relationships is the way in which one partner takes the lead to co-ordinate resources and maintain the efforts of all the other members. Whilst there was general consensus amongst respondents that leadership was essential, there was a strong view that if a lead organisation starts to dominate in terms of decision making power, or operational attitude, the relationship between parties can no longer be described as a partnership. It becomes some other form of working relationship.

"There are different kinds of partnerships, they work differently, you know higher level stuff which is about influencing, and other partnerships which are about delivering real interventions but they have something in common and that is a degree of equality in how things are decided and organised you can't have a partnership with a dominant organisation it's something else then I'm sure a dictionary definition of partnership has something to do with equality and equal power"

FCE District staff

"In my mind as long as everyone is making a practical contribution then it's a partnership, as long as it's not one organisation dictating"

Staff member from small charity

"This partnership is not about the [organisation name] dictating everything that should happen, if that was the case we might as well do it on our own land, it's about a project that everybody is buying in to. I think it's inevitable that one organisation will take the bulk of the responsibility as long as everybody is able to contribute to the project, although that is not necessarily going to be in an equal [i.e. exactly similar] way"

Staff member from small/medium charity

3.1.3 Characterisation of Forestry Commission partnerships

Having established the way in which relationships and partnership are understood by Commission and Civil society partners, this section aims to characterise the different kinds of partnerships that the Forestry Commission is involved in by:

- Identifying and categorising the forms of partnership

- Showing which areas of the business and locations these partnerships and relationships exist
- Show what these partnerships and relationships are delivering for the Commission
- and finally, show which kinds of Civil society organisations the Commission is working with.

The reason for looking at partnerships at this level of detail is to acknowledge their place as one of the most important forms of relationship in delivering FCE objectives, and find a way of understanding how the different kinds of relationships already identified relate to them. It is also important to characterise Forestry Commission partnerships as a way to uncover the types of relationships and working arrangements that deliver the best results and outcomes for the Commission.

Other than the information supplied in the ETWF action spreadsheet, there is currently no English national level database of the partnerships that the Forestry Commission is involved with, the partners they work with, or indeed the nature of their work.

Despite previous attempts to institute a Great Britain-wide Commission database for all projects and partnerships, there is no longer a systematic method collecting and collating this kind of information apart from the Project Initiation Document (PID) database. In the FCE this database is used to record information for large scale projects over £100 thousand in value (O'Brien and Urquhart 2010). Neither is there a Commission-wide definition of 'partnership' or a way of categorising different forms of relationships with external organisations. The document that comes closest to doing this is a new internal guidance manual about working with others that is being developed by Forestry Commission Wales (Finch 2010). Based on our interviews and a scoping review of wellbeing projects and programmes across the Forestry Commission, SERG found no evidence of the systematic recording or evaluation of the outcomes and impact of partnership working where this has been undertaken as part of a project or programme, or any other forms of relationship.

There are different ways of theorising partnerships, and these ideas tend to categorise partnerships either by organisational form and the degree of sharing and mutuality (see for example Stoker 1998) or by the overall objectives of the partnership (see for example Macintosh 1992). Using the data generated in this study, four different kinds of partnerships involving Civil society organisations and the Forestry Commission emerge. The categorisations are based on the purpose, objectives and mode of operation of the partnership.

These categories and their definitions are as follows:

- **Strategic** partnerships are about forward looking, high impact relationships involving integration into governance and decision making processes. There are ties to the work of Regional Forest Frameworks, to Local Authorities and Local Authority partnerships, and to regional development and planning fora.
- **Policy delivery** relationships are those concerned with a direct and explicit set of actions designed to deliver against a specific policy target. It is true to say that most, if not all, partnerships and relationships contribute to ETWF policy objectives. However, there are a particular set of partnerships where this is an explicit aim of partnership working.
- **Operational** partnerships and relationships are more to do with the day-to-day operations of the Forestry Commission. They are relationships that focus on organising activities and actions closely linked with the management of the public forest estate as well as the Commission's function as a grant aiding body.
- **Networking** partnerships and relationships may be formal or informal and are about sharing of information, communication and maintaining institutional contacts. They may also have associated sets of actions and delivery roles.

Examples of the different kinds of partnership and the common levels of operation are outlined in Table 2.

It is important to note that the boundaries between the categories are not always clear cut in practice. There are some partnerships, projects, programmes and activities that overlap between categories depending on the aims of the partnership and the way the partnership is defined. This is very evident in the partnerships concerned with policy delivery. These tend to cut across 'strategic' and 'operational' relationships. For example, The Mayor's Street Trees in London is an 'operational' partnership since it is concerned with tree planting and the delivery of the Forestry Commission's London Tree and Woodland Grant Scheme to support this, but it is also explicitly linked to policy delivery through mention in the ETWF Action Plan Quality of Life theme action to "work with key partners to deliver innovation in green infrastructure". Similarly the Hampshire Heathland programme is an operational partnership because it is about forest management and tree maintenance, but it is also concerned with the delivery of policy as there are specific objectives that fall under ETWF Action Plan theme Natural Environment 3 "removal of inappropriate woodland and protection and expansion of rare habitats".

Table 2. Categorisation of Forestry Commission partnerships

Partnership Type	Definition	Examples	Level of operation
Strategic	May or may not involve the FC implementing on the ground, but where partnership working involves the development of forward looking actions and collaboration in important decision making fora and governance processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Steering groups Consultees Regional Forestry Framework partnerships The Deer Initiative 	National and regional
Policy Delivery	Partnership working directly and specifically to delivering against an <u>explicit</u> policy or delivery plan objective.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Newlands Butterflies in Woodlands Heartwoods West Weald Landscape partnership 	National, regional, local/District
Operational	Partnerships which are usually local and site focused, undertaking actions and projects which improve operational working on the Public Forest Estate or delivering Forestry Commission grants. There may be policy and delivery plan benefits but these are not an <u>explicit</u> reason for partnership working.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RSPB forest-based retail outlet Access agreements with horse riding groups Collaborative working with cycling and MTB groups Agreement with 'Friends of' Westonbirt Mayor of London's Street Tree Programme 	Local/District but may have an underlying regional/national level agreement
Networking	May or may not have formal agreements or Memoranda of Understanding, but are regarded as partnerships, and focus on the sharing of information and maintain institutional contacts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Biodiversity partnerships Countryside Recreation Network Visitor Safety in the Countryside Group 	National, regional, local/District

Figure 4 uses data from the sample of partnerships to illustrate the extent of Forestry Commission working associated with these different kinds of partnership. Two measures are used, the total number of partnerships in the sample ($n=125$), and the number of relationships with Civil society organisations these partnerships represent ($n=284$). 'Relationships' in this context refers to the number of Civil society organisations associated with each of the particular partnerships and projects identified. It does not equate to the number of organisations that the FCE work with ($n=140$), since the same organisation may be working within a number of different partnerships. It also proved too difficult from a data collection and management point of view to list all of the different kinds of working relationships that existed within partnerships, or outwith of those partnerships. This crude measure of relationships still provides a useful quantitative overview of engagement with civil society organisations, since it captures some sense of the frequency of working with certain civil society partners and how FCE works with different parts or different branches of the same organisation e.g. the Groundwork Trust which is both a national organisation and one with regional branches, or the RSPB that works at national and local levels as well as in different business areas.

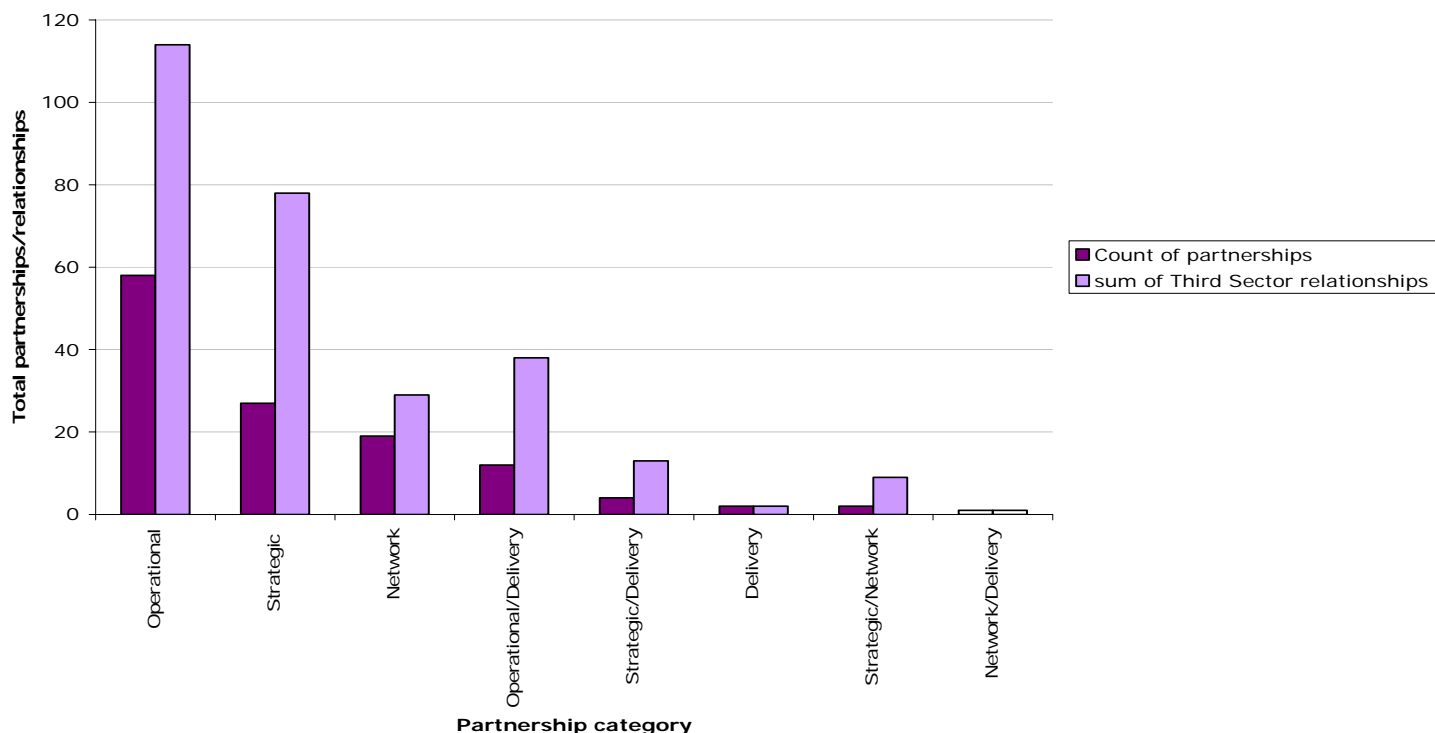
Figure 4 shows that the area in which the largest number of partnerships and relationships with civil society organisations exist is in the operational group, followed by strategic, networking, and policy delivery. Investigating the ways in which the relationships within each of the categories are constituted, there are no obvious patterns of association between the categories.

Operational partnerships include a mix of sizes and values from small and medium numbers of partners and funding, with formal and informal agreements, but also include one or two large projects particularly where the aims of the partnership are to improve resource quality and access at the landscape level. In the strategic category the partnerships operate mostly at regional scale, they are bigger in terms of their scope but not necessarily in terms of the numbers of people or organisations involved nor the budgets allocated, although there are some larger projects in this group focused on urban regeneration and renewal. Networking partnerships also exist as formal and informal institutions, many have little or no specific funding, and they operate at all scale levels from national to district.

Figure 5 compares the number of relationships that FCE has with the public sector and with civil society organisations. In this display the policy delivery relationships have been aggregated, so that a clear pattern across the four partnership categories can be observed. The frequency and strength of relationships with civil society organisations is highlighted in operational and strategic partnerships.

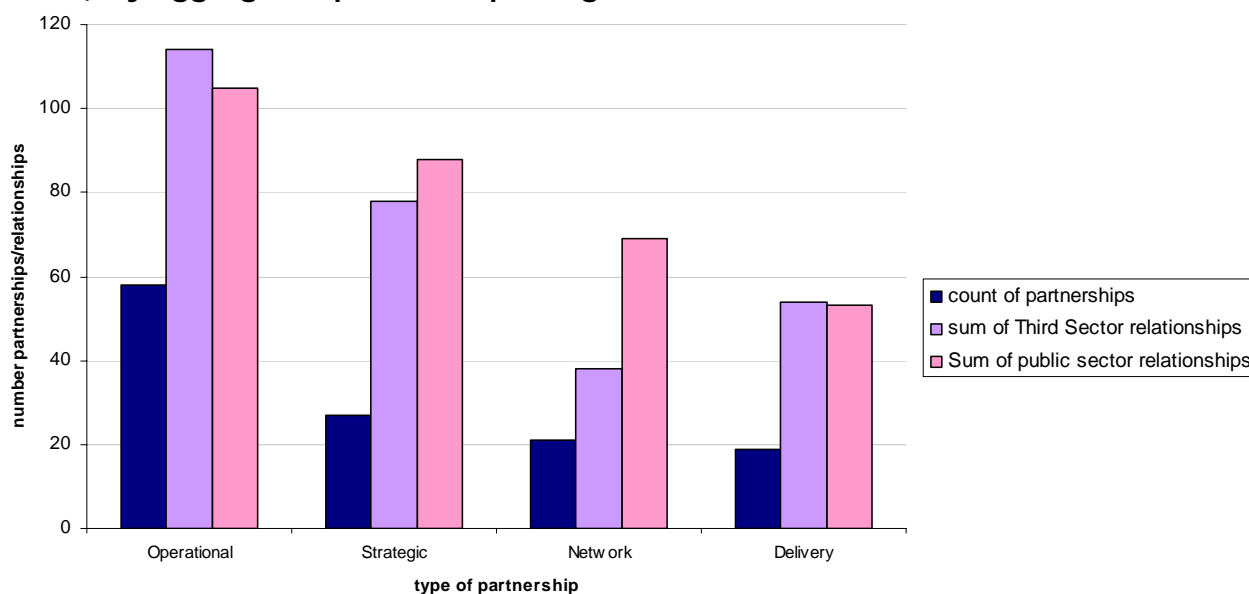
This is perhaps unsurprising since these are to do with service delivery and practical actions. The ratio of relationships to partnerships in this category indicates a relatively large number of partnerships with smaller numbers of partners. Both the strategic and particularly networking partnerships have a greater number of relationships with public sector organisations.

Figure 4. Extent of Forestry Commission England working in different kinds of partnership gauged by the number of partnerships (n=125) and number of civil society partner relationships (n=284)



This chart does not include information from NE region / Kielder District, or from East Midlands Region / Sherwood and Lincs and Northants Districts

Figure 5. Comparison of civil society (n= 284) and public sector relationships (n=315) by aggregated partnership categories



This chart does not include information from NE region / Kielder District, or from East Midlands Region / Sherwood and Lincs and Northants Districts

Table 3 summarises the areas of partnership working against ETWF themes and actions. This provides a picture of the emphasis in areas of work rather than the different kinds of partnership, and shows the degree of engagement with civil society organisations in each of these areas expressed as the number of relationships. Because some of the partnerships and projects identified have multiple objectives when set against the ETWF themes, so the number of relationships includes multiple scores to account for where this is the case. What the table illustrates is a high degree of engagement with civil society organisations around Quality of Life and Natural Environment issues, a significant amount of work involving the Sustainable Resource, but less engagement around Climate Change. This lower level of engagement in the area of climate change is surprising considering the current importance and policy emphasis of work in this area. However, it may be that being a newer thematic area relationships and partnership working is still in a process of growth and development.

Figure 6 shows how relationships with civil society organisations are distributed between different parts of the business. The Commission has more connections with civil society organisations compared to Forest Enterprise, although there are a significant number of joint working relationships. In terms of the categories of partnership these relationships represent, there are many more operational connections in terms of Forest Enterprise with the largest number of relationships between civil society organisations and Forestry Commission being strategic. The data accurately reflects the different roles that the Commission and Forest Enterprise have.

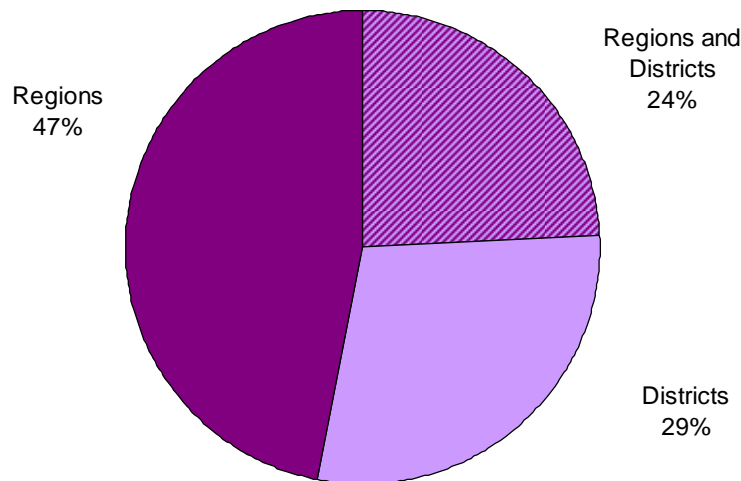
Figure 7 goes on to show the number of relationships with civil society organisations as they occur in different Forest Districts. The North West, East Anglia, South East and Midlands areas are particularly active in terms of partnership working with civil society organisations. The pattern reflects the population density of these areas as well as woodland cover and regional forestry aims to increase urban and peri-urban forest cover and social engagement with the forest estate.

Table 3. Areas of Forestry Commission England civil society partnership working
(n=292 (284 + 8))

ETWF Themes	ETWF Delivery Plan Themes	Specific area of work	Examples	Degree of engagement
Working Woodlands	Sustainable Resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deer management • Landscape Management • Tree Planting and woodland creation • Better engagement with woodland owners/managers/communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deer Initiative - The Living Landscape 	Medium (46)
	Business and Markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enterprise development • Employment and apprenticeships • Information networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small Woods apprenticeship - Heartwoods 	Medium (48)
Land and Natural Environment	Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Street trees and urban forestry • Climate change education • Research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Carbon Sink Forestry Project - Biomass Energy Centre 	Low (37)
	Natural Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecosystem services • Ancient woodland • Rare/declining species • Cultural heritage • Environmental Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lepidoptera on FC land - Osprey and Red Kite Projects 	High (86)
Communities and Places	Quality of Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreation • Sport • Volunteering • Widening access • Health and wellbeing • Green infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Green Gyms - CTC Championship Project - Forest of Dean Sculpture Trail - SE Green Infrastructure Partnership 	High (75)

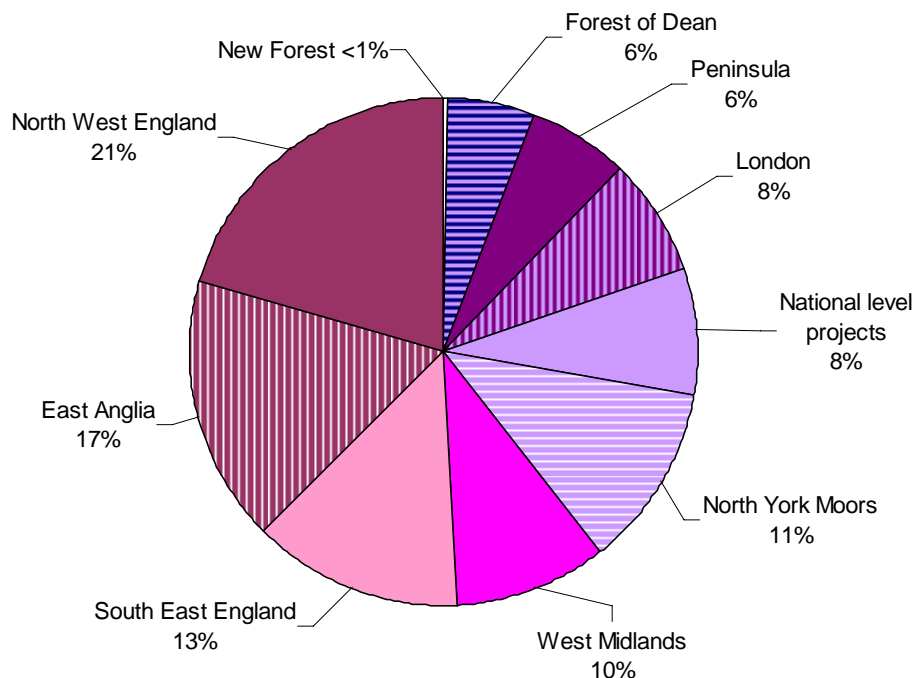
This table does not include information from NE Region / Kielder District, or from East Midlands Region / Sherwood and Lincs and Northants Districts

Figure 6. The proportion of civil society relationships (n=284) by Forestry Commission England business area



This chart does not include information from NE region / Kielder District, or from East Midlands Region / Sherwood and Lincs and Northants Districts

Figure 7. Proportion of civil society relationships (n=284) with Forestry Commission England across 8 of 11 Forest Districts*



***Notes:** Includes information from Regions (FC) and Districts (FE), even though the District is the unit of analysis in this chart. London is a Region not a District but has been separated out from South East England as a special case. This chart does not include information from NE region / Kielder District, or from East Midlands Region / Sherwood and Lincs and Northants Districts

Table 4 uses the data captured in the spreadsheet of partnerships as well as information from the qualitative interviews to provide a list of some of the civil society organisations that the Forestry Commission works with, and segments these into the type of organisation, sector and size. The degree of engagement indicated was assessed using the count of relationships, as well as qualitative data from respondents, nearly all of whom reported on the range of relationships they had with different civil society organisations and whom they thought were key players in terms of sustained relationships. The value of examining this data is in the illustration of the complex landscape of organisations that the Commission works with, and also shows areas of particular emphasis in terms of institutional connections. The Commission clearly works with the full spectrum of civil society organisations, although social enterprises are the least well represented segment of the sector.

Overall, judging by the numbers of relationships, there are far greater levels of engagement with medium sized charities than with other types of civil society organisations, although engagement with 'Friends of' groups are also significant. The importance of 'Friends of' groups often comes through the close association they have to parts of the Public Forest Estate.

Amongst the charities and Trusts there are organisations such as the Woodland Trust, Wildlife Trusts, Federation of Groundwork Trusts and Butterfly Conservation that are particularly well connected to the Commission and are involved in much of the partnership working. There are 'medium' levels of engagement with larger and smaller charities, as well as Trusts and professional organisations. The lowest levels of direct engagement are with community groups and those organisations which form part of what Pearce (2006) describes as the community and self-help sectors of the economy. Contact with civil society organisations at the very local level is often mediated through civil society organisations with a district and regional and national level presence. These are the levels at which Forestry Commission relationships with civil society organisations are most numerous.

Table 4. Segmentation of Civil society organisations working with the Forestry Commission England

Segment	Examples (annual turnover £ ²³)	Degree of FC engagement
Charities and Non-Governmental Organisations		
Large charities	RSPB (>100m), National Trust (>400m)	Low - Medium
Medium sized charities	Woodland Trust (28m), Federation of Groundwork Trusts (28m), BTCV (29m), YHA (50m), CSV environmental (20m), Sustrans (26m)	High – Very High
Small charities	Butterfly Conservation (3.5m), Small Woods Association (<1m), Jericho Project (1.7m), Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (1.2m), Grantscape (1m), The Ramblers Association (<8m), Buglife (<600k), FWAG (<4m) Blue Sky (<800k)	Medium-High
Very small charities	Mountain Bothies Association (100k), Grassroots (<10k), Hamsterley Trailblazers (<10k), Peabody Trust (100k)	Low
Trusts small and medium	Silvanus Trust (<200k), Wildlife Trusts (national 20m, otherwise between 1 and 10m), Fieldfare Trust (<250k), Greensand Trust (<1m), Forest of Avon Trust (<10k), Forest of Dean Sculpture Trust (40k), Green Light Trust (<300k), Bradford Environmental Action Trust (<300k)	Low - Medium
Social Enterprises		
Woodland focused	Mersey Forest (500k), The Dean Oak Cooperative (?), Rural Development Initiatives (?), Bransholme Enterprises (?)	Low - medium
Issue focused	British Association for Shooting and Conservation (?), Carbon Trust (?)	Low

²³ Using income figures taken from organisations latest available Annual Reports and Accounts published on their respective websites and through the Charities Commission register <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/ShowCharity/RegisterOfCharities/>

Segment	Examples (annual turnover £ ²³)	Degree of FC engagement
Membership Organisations		
Interest Groups	Countryside Management Association, British Horse Society (>7m), CTC (2m), Forest of Dean Commoners Association (?), National Interfaith Network (<400k), SingletrAction (?), Country Land and Business Association (?), International Mountain Biking Association-UK (?)	Low - Medium
Trade and professional associations	ICF(?), CONFOR(?), Renewable Energy Association (?)	Medium - High
Community Based Organisations (CBOs)		
Community woodland groups	Relationships mediated by BTCV, Community Forests and Woodland Trust, may also be direct through local staff	Low
'Friends of' groups	'Friends of' the Lake District (500k) 'Friends of' Bedgebury Pinetum (<200k) 'Friends of' Westonbirt (<800k), 'Friends of' the Pang, Kennet and Lambourn Valleys (?) 'Friends of' Dalby Forest (<10k). Relationships may also mediated by Community Forests and Woodland Trust	Medium - High
Volunteer groups	Gainsborough Young Rangers, NP volunteer groups, relationships normally mediated by BTCV, CSV, Community Forests, and conservation organisations (rarely direct)	Low

3.2 Benefits and drawbacks of partnership working with civil society organisations

3.2.1 Why working with civil society is valued (benefits)

The introductory section of this report outlined the assumed benefits of working with civil society organisations. However, it is important to uncover what benefits are most valued by the Commission and its partners as the success of relationships and partnerships is likely to be related to the realisation of these. Respondents in the Commission as well as the Enterprise recognised an extensive range of benefits and gains that could be made through working in partnership with civil society organisations. These follow closely the assumed benefits of engagement with civil society organisations. The most commonly mentioned benefits included:

- Access to **additional sources of funding** comes through partnership working, and can be a specific benefit of working with the Third Sector
- **Improved delivery** through added staff and resource capacity
- The Third Sector provides **access to skills and knowledge** additional and complementary to that available in the Forestry Commission
- The Third Sector is able to **increase the level of engagement** with people and issues beyond the reach of the Forestry Commission and other public sector bodies
- Third Sector working often generates **new ideas**
- the Third Sector can often provide **continuity of delivery** when projects change funding structure or objectives evolve
- Third Sector organisations have the **ability to lobby and act independently** which can increase partnership legitimacy amongst users
- Third Sector organisations often have **greater flexibility and more proactive** timescales which can speed delivery of projects and actions.

The most commonly mentioned, and probably most important benefits to Forestry Commission staff were the first three on the list concerning increased access to resources, shared skills and expertise and more efficient delivery. These were considered to be the fundamental reasons around which successful partnerships and close working relationships could be built.

Whilst the Forestry Commission is committed to increasing the level of public benefit that is achieved on the public forest estate or through other forms of engagement with trees, woods and forests, this often involves moving beyond traditional forestry towards projects and actions that link with other social, economic and environmental policies. A key issue on this context are the resources required to deliver these kinds of actions. The Commission has land and facilities it can offer in support of projects, but it is constrained in terms of financial support for projects that are not immediately connected with management of the resource. Funding opportunities for the development of novel ideas which link other policy priorities to greenspace, trees and woodlands do exist through for example, the Heritage Lottery Fund, but as a public agency these are not available to the Forestry Commission. For the Commission to deliver the widest possible public benefits partnership working and relationships with civil society organisations able to access these resources is particularly important. For example, one FCE District staff member said:

"Engagement with the third sector provides us with links to sectors of the local community that we may not normally get easy access to, as well as ways to fund that access and think more creatively about what we are able to offer"

As far as the civil society organisations interviewed were concerned they considered their ability to leverage alternative resources as one of their key strengths, which many of the FCE staff acknowledged as an important reason for building relationships. Typical perceptions were that:

"Working with the third sector enables us to carry out work that we may not be able to achieve [alone] due to resource constraints".

FCE District staff

"I think we bring a level of expertise in some areas and certainly I think we can bring some fundraising skills; access to the ability to look for money as well as actual access to funding pots"

Staff member from a large charity

"All organisations are finding themselves short of money and tend to be therefore more willing to form partnerships with the Third Sector, as I think a lot of the funding pots that are available are now aimed at 'hard to reach' groups ... we can access those better"

Staff member from a small charity

Shared skills and knowledge were particularly important as this not only allowed synergistic relationships to develop, but provided a clear rationale for working together, and contributed to the clear delineation of respective roles between

Commission staff and personnel from civil society organisations. The mutual benefits from the two-way flow of knowledge and skills in such relationships were appreciated by both Forestry Commission and civil society respondents. This was true not only in terms of the exchange of skills managing the woodland and forest resource, but also extending beyond forests and managing relationships with people amongst the wider community. The following comments were typical:

"It has taken us a time to realise but, there are things we do well, and areas where we can benefit from the skills and knowledge of others, you know, we don't have to do it all ourselves. Partnership working and relationships with the Third Sector is beneficial because it opens up access to areas where our knowledge needs building, and they know where we can fit in and provide the skills they don't have too"

FCE District staff

"Our expertise is clearly ecology and wildlife and the requirements of rare species, whereas the Forestry Commission are very good at managing land, managing forestry, growing trees and cutting them down, so we like to think we are giving them added value in terms of ecological expertise if you look at the staff list for the Forestry Commission the number of ecologists would be extremely small, but the ecology would be one of their five strands of conservation they are aiming for, so they need that added value from us and we get knowledge of how to manage the trees"

Staff member from medium-sized charity

"I think we bring an insight into the community and grassroots, at times if you're working for a big organisation like the Forestry Commission it's the knowing... because traditionally and historically they've had very limited access to communities, especially minority communities and what [names the organisation] brings to them is a real insight, a real feel for what is going on at the community level. Projects such as [names the project] are a learning curve for them; it helps them identify the needs of the community as well"

Staff member from a small charity

The issue of improved delivery was linked to community or public engagement and the methods by which civil society organisations are often better able to connect with particular sections of the community, and better identify their needs as this might relate to forests, woods and trees. The continuity offered by civil society organisations was also noted, as many of these bodies continue to work in the same area with the same communities even if the funders and funding streams change.

3.2.2 The Drawbacks: Barriers to success

Although there are many recognised benefits to relationships with civil society organisations there were also associated limitations and challenges. These drawbacks underlie some of the main reasons why partnerships and relationships may not work. The main drawbacks from the point of view of Forestry Commission staff were:

- The **significant amount of time** spent liaising with partners or steering groups which is necessary to build relationships but represents a significant investment of resources
- A **lack of understanding** with regards to partner organisations' objectives/ways of working/limitations that causes problems with delivery
- **Inequality** of effort/support/input from other partners that may result in increased workload on one organisation's behalf
- Issues to do with **public relations**, media and communications including generation of negative publicity, or, Third Sector organisations 'stealing the limelight' around successful delivery
- Over-reliance on **key persons** or 'champions' to move things forward and **personality clashes** leading to difficult project implementation.

Many of the barriers to success mentioned by respondents mirror the reasons for successful partnerships and working relationships. We explore some of the issues in greater detail as ingredients of success and just focus on two of the barriers to success here.

The use of time and resources to build and manage relationships and partnerships was mentioned more than any of the other issues affecting success. Commission and civil society staff all recognised that forming new relationships and partnerships, and then going on to maintain relationships with a number of different organisations is far more time consuming than internal collaborations. There is a paradox about the use of time, since there is a clearly recognised need for good communication and relationship building, at the same time as the amount of effort that requires is recognised as a real drain on resources. In the words of one respondent:

" the biggest downside is spending a lot of time which is unproductive It's a business decision really and like all business decisions if you get it wrong you can end up not getting much back for your investment"
FCE national office staff

"Like most partnerships an element of trust is required beforehand. So we sometimes spend years in some cases on meeting with partners, possibly

taking them out on site, working with them on small projects etc, before we are jointly willing to work on a larger scale. The key is to focus on an individual rather than the organisation, but that is a significant investment which may not always pay off over time"

FCE Regional staff

In addition to this respondents emphasised the related issue of the time and energy taken up in partnership processes and the maintenance of relationships, and the affect this had on how quickly, and even whether, partnership goals were achieved.

"I suppose you could say, in terms of time management, steering groups and things like that can be very cumbersome and time consuming and although for many reasons they're essential, I think if they're too bureaucratic, that's definitely a problem, yes when it stops things getting done, when they turn into talking-shops pieces of theatre"

Staff member from a large charity

There are links here too with the different ways of working between civil society organisations and public organisations. The drawbacks of partnership working are closely connected with a lack of understanding between partners concerning the objectives and working methods of each organisation. The perception amongst FCE staff was that many civil society organisations needed extra investment in terms of time for capacity building to be able to work in partnership to a required standard. For the civil society organisations this same issue was often perceived as an over-emphasis on 'box ticking' and bureaucratic process, which could present real challenges to effective working. For example:

"Public sector organisations have a lot of controls put into place, and boxes that need to be ticked,... and obviously they have to make themselves answerable to the general public – there have to be facts and figures that have to be produced, which I think can act as boundaries, that stop you feeling as creative and open, or perhaps entrepreneurial, if you like"

Staff member from small charity

This lack of understanding is further important where it prevents FCE and potential partners from being able to reach a set of shared objectives. Many Third Sector organisations have a particular and narrow focus, e.g. single species conservation or single issue interest, which presents particular challenges to the Commission as it is required to be multiple-issue oriented. For example, one FCE District staff member said:

"drawbacks to Third Sector working really are single agendas – some organisations have a single agenda approach that makes it difficult to engage effectively"

another believed,

"There is a deal of understanding to be reached on how the interests of a single purpose organisation are married in to one which is managing such a range and diversity of things there may be benefits there ... if you have the time to find them"

FCE national office staff

There was a recognition of this amongst civil society organisations too, as indicated by the following comment:

"We have much more in common now with the Forestry Commission, our objectives are so much more similar, so I think, and also it's not just about what we do on our site, or what the Forestry Commission does on their sites, I mean if you're looking at the impacts of climate change and things like that, there is a much greater need for people to look outside of their sites, to look across much wider landscapes, multiple objectives, so you need to have a partnership approach if you're going to achieve anything and you have to understand how to accommodate those different objectives and organisation priorities to get to the bigger picture not the single issue".

Staff member from large charity

3.3 Ingredients of successful partnerships with civil society organisations

3.3.1 Features of success: What works

Information collected during the interviews and from the questionnaires showed that the key features of success have little to do with the form and constitution of the relationship with civil society organisations, and much more to do with the generic principles of partnership working and building meaningful relationships. In other words, the qualitative evidence suggests that it does not matter whether relationships with civil society organisations were formal or informal, or what form they took. There were key processes and issues which were more important to ensuring the success of those working, professional and personal relationships.

This is not to deny the need for different kinds of agreement and a clear articulation of the kind of relationship or partnership being entered into. However, the principles of equality and mutuality, and the ability to build collaborative advantage around shared working practice appeared to be more important to success than the particular constitution of a relationship or partnership.

The key features or ingredients of success were identified as being:

1. Mutual **communication**
2. **Transparency** in decision making and mutual objective setting
3. Ability to build **shared working practice**
4. Mutual **understanding** of the organisations involved and their organisational objectives and professional context
5. Mutual **trust and respect** which comes as a consequence of communication and understanding
6. **Individual champions** and managing people.

Each of these features of success is explored in greater detail below. Even though they have been treated separately, they are of course interlinked.

1. Mutual communication

Mutual communication is about building **meaningful** communication between the Forestry Commission and the organisations and individuals it works with. So, even though the time needed to maintain contacts, develop relationships and ensure good communication were all issues identified as major drawbacks of partnership working, these remain essential tasks and processes in building success. Mutual communication is the ability of the individuals within each organisation in a relationship or partnership being able to discuss, transmit and network information, responses and feedback about day to day situations, the progress of partnership working and other process issues. One of the most important things mentioned by respondents that contribute to success is being able to deal with problems speedily. This is something that relies on trusted, mature communication, moving quickly to understand the situation and putting an end to the chance for rumour and misunderstanding. Many respondents pointed out that when in partnership with a mixed group of people and organisations problems can escalate very quickly unless appropriate lines of communication and action are in place.

Communication needs to be a 'real' line of communication. This means the meaningful transmission of information that moves beyond a small group of people. Diffusion of information to all parts of the Forestry Commission that might be involved

in buying into decisions in the different working areas and delivery levels of the organisation is essential. In other words **communication needs to be frequent** and vary between formal and informal mechanisms, passing through **horizontal and vertical** organisational structures.

"One of the issues we have working with organisation like [name of charity] is that the agreement you make the level of understanding and the statement of shared objectives that you produce they can just become something that is a conversation between that organisation and one or two members of our staff and nobody much else knows about it ... in fact the original agreement with [name of charity] sat on the shelf for years without most of us knowing that it was actually there so it is quite important that an arrangement with a Third Sector body like that doesn't just become a relationship between one member of our staff, who is quite enthusiastic and that, but we need to put it into a formal structure whereby we have defined work programmes to make sure we have got the right level of engagement across the organisation to make sure things are happening"

FCE national staff

Good communication is proactive, not just responsive. It not only includes partners being able to use open dialogue to quickly tackle misunderstandings or other issues, it also means **continuing dialogue** through the process of organising partnership work, and providing thanks and praise for jobs and tasks completed to build confidence and trust between partners. This is particularly true where organisations are working in contentious areas, and difficult social contexts.

"A draft for that [i.e. a set of collaborative activities] was produced 4/5 months ago and all I've had back from Forestry Commission after a few chases is that they've got some issues with it and need to discuss it further, it's just the complete absence of any communication that is really quite frustrating this is how relationships begin to break down "

Staff member from a small charity

"We get all the complaints from everybody about everything, and it would be nice to have a bit more support – and you know, sometimes a bit of a thank you wouldn't go amiss, it's the little things like that which can make all the difference in a relationship"

Staff member from large charity

Continuing dialogue also means maintaining relationships in the medium and longer term, not allowing a halt in communications once initial implementation of activities or a partnership has been established.

2. Transparency in decision making and objective setting

The organisations involved in a relationship need to understand the processes involved in building a partnership agreement (whether formal or informal) and the agreement of objectives and deliverables. All respondents recognised this as a key feature of success clearly linked to mutual understanding of each other's organisations, a clear articulation of the purpose of the relationship, and delineation of respective roles.

"The main ingredients of a successful relationship, partnership, are: matching objectives with both organisations' goals. Understanding both organisations' strengths and weaknesses and managing these. Mutual respect and perhaps a bit more support than with a purely 'contractual' relationship. Be prepared to be flexible"

FCE Regional staff

Transparency and equality in decision making comes about through good communication and the building of mutual trust. It is difficult to build trust, and unless communications are handled well trust can easily be undermined changing the nature of relationships:

3. Shared working practice

Finding ways to share working practice was a particularly important issue for Forestry Commission staff whether the relationships were contractual or more complex partnership agreements. There were three key areas around this issue consistently mentioned by respondents.

The first was to do with finance, the need for **compliance in financial reporting** and cash flow management that referred to Forestry Commission procedures and recognised ways of dealing with finance and external funding. One of the most mentioned issues was how to manage budget line surpluses which often arise working with civil society organisations because of their reliance on volunteer labour and community organisations as delivery agents which sometimes means intended tasks and spend is delayed or postponed.

The second was to do with practical operational concerns and finding ways in which the **work programmes** of individual people in a partnership would be understood using mutually agreeable formats and planning processes that would 'fit' institutionally. This operational planning also extended to integration of site-based actions being incorporated into forest design planning, and business planning.

The final concern related to **project reporting** and the production of documents which presented financial, process and deliverable information in a form that provided measurements against key indicators and markers which made sense to the Forestry Commission as well as the partner organisation.

These three issues link back to effective and open communication, trust, and transparency. They each provide a means to understand the roles in a relationship, the achievement of delivery targets and some measure of a return on investment.

"because we have worked to find this mutual system of planning and reporting that uses Forestry Commission working, we really know exactly what we are getting for our bucks and there is a formal structure to it which means that we can have certain measures and means of engagement between [name of charity] and our own lead national contact and the contacts at each of our regional units We can work across our business [i.e. different parts of the Commission] as well as directly with the [name of charity]. Without those processes being put in place I think we would be less likely to meet success because the Forestry Commission is a complicated organisation, it doesn't work well without set procedures and process"

FCE national office staff

".... shared financial reporting and procedure is important ... it's a part of it a part of success We know exactly what we are getting for our bucks and there is a formal structure to it which means that we can have certain measures and means of engagement between [name of charity] and our lead national contact and the contacts at each of our regional units. It is definitely why the relationship with that particular organisation works so very well"

FCE national office staff

"Their [i.e. smaller Third Sector organisations'] 'hand to mouth' existence can sometimes create additional challenges, e.g. cash flow that makes arrangements more difficult. They may have reduced management and systems that FC has to be aware of and adapt to, i.e. change its expectations, find suitable means"

FCE Regional staff

"Although independent, we are reporting against certain public sector targets, which, in a way is quite helpful not that I like the targets that much but it is helpful because it makes it easier for us to demonstrate the relevance and

the impact of our work and the Commission see what we have done for them in concrete terms ... it's an important part of how we build success "
Staff member from medium-sized charity

4. Mutual understanding

Real communication and trust between organisations is supported by a mutual understanding of the professional context and aims of the organisations involved in a relationship. It has already been noted in the section dealing with barriers that a lack of understanding prevents relationships from moving forward and achieving in the way that they should. Once the reasons why individuals in organisations want to pursue particular objectives, and why they prefer to operate in particular ways becomes understandable, better negotiation and identification of ways in which to reach synergistic relationships is possible. For civil society organisations this means looking to understand the drivers affecting the prioritisation of objectives that public bodies such as the Forestry Commission are working to, as well as understanding the nature of forestry and forest management in a contemporary context.

"Sometimes there is a tendency for some of the other organisations to not quite appreciate how we operate, how we're funded and the constraints we face, we work better together when these things are known"
FCE District staff

"Some organisations don't understand the limitations we have to work to ... the perception is that public bodies stretch further than they can in reality"
FCE District staff

"I can't hope to make things work unless I speak the language that my partners speak! As long as you don't compromise the integrity of your own organisation, and that's really important We have charitable objectives and that's not negotiable"
Staff member from medium-sized charity

"There are frustrations on both sides about not understanding your partner organisation's objectives Certainly foresters have said to me you don't understand what I am trying to do here, you don't see, you won't be satisfied till we have done this, this and this Trying to reconcile those two things [our objectives and theirs] is difficult but that's how the relationships are going to work in the end"
Staff member from medium-sized charity

"Looking more strategically and longer term – when I describe our development function, I always ask 'what's the policy direction?' Because if you've got

government departments talking about climate change and biodiversity conservation, tackling antisocial (sic) behaviour and so on – those are the needs that are being expressed for which we need to devise solutions – how we're going to do that, when the funding will become available etc it is no different in the way we deal with the Commission ... we have to "

Staff member from medium-sized charity

Respondents mentioned some of the most effective ways of overcoming some of this lack of understanding, and talked about the chance to take part in networking activities, and invitations to observe or comment on strategic planning and other activities carried out by FCE as being particularly useful.

"I took part in developing the [mentions area] framework so I had a really good opportunity to understand what the Commission wanted to do and I could see how we could help to develop an urban [forestry] agenda It's been a very positive experience It's to do with the individuals involved as much as with the Commission itself finding that understanding of who we are and what we do ... getting involved in spaces for discussion really helps with that"

Staff member from medium-sized charity

"Working with the Forestry Commission is no different to working with other organisations, in fact it's better than most as we know where we are coming from ... we have been lucky enough to sit in on meetings and networky type events and have got the message about their concerns and objectives I think our expectations are realistic"

Staff member from medium-sized charity

5. Mutual trust and respect

Interviewees identified trust and honesty between partners, built through communication and mutual understanding as critical. It is not only trust that is important, extending respect in relationships is part of this. This includes recognising efforts that different organisations have made to accommodate each other, respecting difference and acknowledging boundaries:

"there are cases where we feel we have gone a long way, we have extended ourselves and spent what for us is a large amount of money and that is sometimes not appreciated because we are part of, you are working with an enormous organisation and you are working with, trifling sums in comparison with some of their budgets they can perceive it as a very small part of the jigsaw ... but we need to be respected for what we manage to do"

Staff member from medium-sized charity

6. Individual champions and managing people

The role of particular individuals within the Commission was mentioned by most of the Third sector organisations interviewed as being a crucial link in building successful relationships. Particular individuals were frequently mentioned. The role that these 'champions' played involved brokering relationships and advocating on behalf of Third Sector organisations. Successful relationships will always be down to personalities and professional attitudes and aptitudes. Successful relationships rely on processes and procedures for ensuring continuity between advocates and original contacts, and for supporting or managing those individuals less skilled at partnership working.

"Successful relationships? Well it's partly down to personalities I think, because until a year ago it was quite a straightforward, uncomplicated relationship, and then there were some personnel changes, and subsequently more changes since, we'd built a relationship with the original person and then they moved on..."

Staff member from a small charity

3.3.2 Relationships: Form and mediation

Types of agreement, mediation and negotiation

The research showed that there are very many different ways of organising partnerships and relationships with civil society organisations. The variety of arrangements included: partnership agreements, Memorandum of Understanding, formal delivery contracts, public sector procedural arrangements, community management agreements, block grants, terms of reference, leasing, and estates permissions. Evidence from the interviews stressed that there were no forms of partnership working or relationship that obviously performed better than others. There is no simple answer about what kind of relationship works, the processes and principles already described are more important than the actual constitution of the relationships.

However, there were some notable remarks about the form of relationships which are worth noting. Relationships can grow too big to manage successfully, as effective communication and negotiation of objectives/positions is hindered as the number of organisations and people increases.

"In the case of the large consortium – there were just too many opinions, voices, approaches - and the whole thing got very messy"

Staff member from medium sized charity

But, some relationships can work better where there is more than one party involved, not only because of the opportunity to use a greater pool of resources, but because negotiation and distribution of roles and 'power' can be more easily managed.

"I do think it would be different if it was just the Forestry Commission and just one other organisation, it works well with more of us in the relationship the Forestry Commission don't have ultimate control and that gives me more freedom they all want certain boxes ticked but they're not too prescriptive because they understand that it's an agreement between a number of different bodies"

Staff member from small charity

There was some discussion about the need for process and structure in the form and management of relationships and partnerships. On the one hand was a recognition by civil society organisations that structure and formalisation of relationships was important, but that this could often present a stifling of innovation and flexibility with changing or developing ideas. As far as Third Sector organisations were concerned maintaining this space for innovation within relationship structures is an important element of success. This comment was typical:

"I think there is a space for the FC to be more entrepreneurial but there have to be very entrepreneurial individuals, and having had experience of working with [mentions FCE staff name] for example, she's got very much a vision of how she sees this site going forward, that's the entrepreneurial side, you need someone with that vision, ok being aware of the background and the boxes you've got to tick, but it's finding your way through that, being able to look past that and I think there are people with those skills and I think increasingly people are realising you've got to change, you've got to develop, you've got to move forward, you've got to look at the individual sites and the local communities and local need....."

Staff member from small charity

As was this:

"Some formal partnerships can be bogged down in bureaucracy, with too much being time spent working on agreements, and sometimes it's just better for people to get together, to talk and develop things from there. I think where projects develop and there is a need for a financial commitment or a need for someone to hold the finances, then perhaps there needs to be a formal agreement - but I'm a bit nervous of having to have a formal agreement for every kind of working relationship because it bogs things down and it can stifle initiatives and stop things getting done.... It takes much longer to get anything done, if there's an opportunity out there, if you go and talk to somebody you

can get most likely get it done in the next few weeks, whereas, if it involves having a meeting and getting a partnership agreement, you know, the drafts get batted back for weeks and weeks and the opportunity can be lost"

Staff member from large charity

Furthermore, respondents noted the important role the Forestry Commission plays providing funds for small, low value, low risk, projects with a variety of civil society organisations. This was viewed as a key issue with regard to achieving success in delivery of ETWF objectives involving new ideas and different organisations.

"There is a danger that the small projects are going to be lost, the Forestry Commission really needs to think about maintaining a low value low risk budget – you know seed funding – to let new ideas through, a testing ground. It's from some of those small initiatives that some of the better ideas spring up, you get to connect with different groups, and things that can have much wider applicability. You need to keep that going."

Staff member from medium-sized charity

Scale level of organisational working

It was very clear from the research that relationships and partnerships are most successful when they work through a variety of scale levels, particularly those that connect the local level with the national or regional. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, a civil society organisation that has a capacity deliver at the local level, but also operates at a national or regional level can connect local needs with strategic overviews that fit in with the wider policy context that the Forestry Commission is working in. The ingredients of success, understanding of organisational need/objectives, and the ability to maintain vertical and horizontal communication are all satisfied by this working at multiple scales. Secondly, the evidence suggests that Third Sector organisations which work at multiple scales, also have the capacity and skills of greatest interest to the Forestry Commission. The delivery of ETWF objectives depend on a range of perspectives, understandings and competencies operating at the different scale levels inherent to the social economy. It is the civil society organisations working at multiple scales that have the spread of skills needed to tie all these issues together. The following comments are typically illustrative:

"You need to have very clear objectives and what you are going to deliver, I think that when they are lost sight of that's when they [i.e. partnerships] become a bit of a talking shop with no deliverables and where the link to smaller organisations and the local level is just lost you can spend hours and hours dedicating time to meetings where you don't actually get a lot from it it just becomes a talking shop the important things is joined up thinking and

operation success comes when the delivery partners can maintain local and strategic presence around objectives"

FCE District staff

"It's all about striking up relationships with individuals, and on some sites you get a forester or a wildlife ranger who really understands what's going on and that's brilliant, but quite often their boss might not be involved and then might not buy into the project or from the other end you quite often get buy-in nationally, on a national scale you work on a national level strategy which is considered very important and then that doesn't really trickle down through work budgets or work programmes the best outcomes come from tying the two together"

Staff member from medium-sized charity

"I am certainly keen to develop this work nationally everybody at the Forestry Commission has been very supportive and welcoming at the local level, just what you want really, with my national hat on though, we need to extend this further ... engage the two at a national and local level more effectively [names the organisation] needs places to work on with volunteers and the Forestry Commission needs work done we need to build in this type of mutual sustainability and it depends on multiple scale communication and understanding"

Staff member from medium-sized charity

In addition to this, the point was made a number of times that local level working, connecting and mediating relationships between smaller local organisations in the community economy was an important function of civil society organisations extending Forestry Commission reach into areas that are otherwise time and resource intensive to connect with.

Legitimacy

Relationships between the Forestry Commission and civil society provide legitimacy for the Forestry Commission as well as for civil society organisations. For the Forestry Commission this legitimacy comes from the credibility of the partner organisations as far as the perceptions of other stakeholders or target groups might be concerned, for example:

".... we think very carefully about involvement and who would be the lead partner on a project ... because it changes the whole kind of tone of the project and the way its perceived by people, as to whether it is a government project or a non-government project like the woodland project we are working on

at the moment is led by [names organisation] with the Forestry Commission as a partner ... and that means you can go and approach a private land owner and you are not representing government, you're independent, and you are not tied into any agendas that that land owner might have with for example, DEFRA, English Nature or the old style Forestry Commission ..."

Staff member from medium-sized charity

It also serves to add to the credibility of civil society organisations with other public or funding bodies if they are known to be in working relationship, or receiving funding from the Commission:

"even small amounts of funding [from the Forestry Commission] can add a lot of credibility amongst other funders within the region so we can do a lot with a tiny bit of seed corn funding"

Staff member from small charity

Relationship and partnership life cycles

A mutual recognition that relationships and partnerships pass through various stages, as understanding, roles and needs evolve, and some kinds of relationship may have a distinct life cycle with a real end point, is very important. Knowing this is a key ingredient of success as it affords understanding of how to develop successful relationships by investing the most appropriate level and type of resources at the most appropriate times and aids understanding of when to bring relationships to an end or when to carry them forward.

"because we had an existing relationship we didn't need that initial brainstorming session, we could just go to the next level, this is what we need to do, how can we do it, and it can be quite quick and straightforward, simply because we had the infrastructure in place to manage it and the understanding between partners and also the expertise we all knew each other its always so much easier then you can just pick up the phone and say no that's not going to work, lets do it differently It takes a long time if we have to start from scratch, you have to bring people together and then you have to decide if you have got the right people, and everybody's got different ideas, and then you go off and then you need another meeting and that's how you do it It's actually is often more efficient and will deliver much better results when you can be quite flexible and slot it in to something that's already ongoing"

Staff member from medium-sized charity

3.4 Suggestions for improving practice

The opinions of respondents from civil society organisations were that, in general, the Forestry Commission has learnt significant lessons in how to establish and manage relationships with the sector over the last five to ten years. There was a recognition by all that the early rush to form partnerships has now become a more reflective process, using early experiences to establish partnerships for well considered reasons leading to fewer 'bad marriages' being formed as a result.

There were four repeated issues concerning improved practice that were elicited from both Forestry Commission and respondents from civil society organisations.

1. Time and planning

Time has already been discussed as a key investment in building successful relationships. The issue here is an organisational acceptance of the need for time to plan. As an institution, the Forestry Commission and civil society organisations both need to recognise the value of forward planning and 'front-end' communication.

2. Communication – short, medium and long term

Communication needs to be understood as an essential continuing process. The intensity and style of communication may change over the course of a relationship, more intense and frequent in the short term and less so in the longer term once a relationship is properly established, but communication with partner organisations should not come to a sudden end. The importance of continuing communication, and the need to plan communication processes that foster relationships in the longer term, should be stressed.

3. The real need to link different levels of the organisation

Being a relatively small organisation spread over a very large geographical area, across a number of different business areas means that the Commission has a complicated business model. Alongside communication a key issue is making sure that different parts of the organisation are tied into relationships and partnerships with civil society organisations in the most appropriate ways to facilitate delivery of activities and services.

4. Guidance

Many of the Forestry Commission respondents suggested that guidance on partnership working would be useful. Even though many of the new recruits to the Commission have skills in this area, for much of the time other Forestry Commission staff learn effective partnership working and how to broker successful relationships through experiential 'on-the-job' learning. A guidance document outlining key principles and

the detail of the most important lessons learnt could provide for more efficient better supported cross-institutional working.

Other suggestions that respondents mentioned included:

- Training in how to broker relationships
- The need for more lesson learning, 'feedback loops', and realistic (i.e. appropriate indicators, light touch process, low resource implication) monitoring and evaluation processes
- A pool of mediators (perhaps from a draw-down service contract) from which to draw to enable balanced views and sound negotiation to take place during partnership establishment and times of crucial decision making
- More opportunities for communication about organisations' objectives and development of strategy.

3.5 Horizon scanning: Perceptions of the future

The research was undertaken before the change of government. Respondents were keen to discuss trends relating to engagement with civil society organisations. There was a mixed reaction to questions about the future of relationships and partnership working between the Commission and civil society organisations. It was already widely understood before the May 2010 election that the public sector would have to respond to recessionary pressures by trimming delivery plans and reducing involvement in certain areas of activity. The most recent surveys examining the condition of civil society organisations have shown similar downward pressures and reactions (Charity Commission 2010; Clark and Wilton 2010). Charitable donations are reduced in some areas but stable in others, which, alongside a reduced *commitment* to spend on partnership projects involving civil society organisations by the public sector means future scenarios are difficult to interpret (interview data and CAF and NCVO 2009).

All of the civil society organisations and Forestry Commission staff surveyed as part of this study see the future in terms of uncertainty. There were four clearly different attitudes or perceptual groups that emerged.

1. Those who thought that the **impact of recession** on civil society organisations **would reduce their capacity and ability to deliver** in place of the public sector. Amongst this group was the perception that the Forestry Commission may no longer be able to provide the direct grant and project income to civil society organisations through partnerships nor income through contractual relationships. For some of the smaller sized organisations where income from the Forestry

Commission is particularly significant part of their capital flow, this was a serious issue.

"The future of partnership working with the third sector is Bleak! [sic] Partnership funds are very much at risk. For this next year for example I have had to cut partnership funds by half [mentions amount] to balance the budget for salary inflation. Forecasts about possible public sector cuts don't bear thinking about. The Third Sector is already suffering from recession. In this region alone both [mentions charity] and [mentions charity] have cut their regional posts and the [mentions charity] has had to completely reorganise".

FCE Regional staff

"Given cuts in funding and increasing [institutional] centralisation, working with the Third Sector will become much harder for the organisation"

FCE District staff

"Third sector involvement is growing, though the third sector is experiencing resource difficulties that overshadow their ability to engage - they need to pay the bills, so must earn cash. We don't always have cash to pay for their involvement"

FCE Regional staff

2. Those respondents (from the Forestry Commission as well as civil society organisations) who thought that **civil society organisations would step in to fill the gaps** left by a withdrawal of the public sector in service delivery. The following views were typical of this group:

"Third sector involvement in the future will be important in view of the fact that public funding e.g. via traditional land based public agencies such as Natural England and Environment Agency and probably local authorities will be reducing over the next few years It's the Third Sector that will be delivering for us"

FCE Regional staff

"the Forestry Commission with a future of reducing resources will become more reliant on the third sector to help deliver key objectives. Closer partnership working on major projects is pretty likely"

FCE Regional staff

3. There was a third group of respondents who thought that the form and scope of partnership working and **relationships with civil society organisations would have to change to take account of new political and financial realities**. For this group the view was that some civil society organisations would find it more

difficult to engage with the forestry agenda, whilst others would find new and increasing opportunities for partnership working and other relationships. What was important here was a strategic approach to communication and scoping potential working arrangements, along with an ability to develop creative, innovative and credible project and policy delivery mechanisms.

"We are likely to have a new government and I suspect it will hit the Commission harder than it will hit [names the charity] its gonna be horrendous they say, but then I don't know umm public service delivery will carry on, and I think it will get harder, I am not saying it's good to have less money, but at the same time it will force people to work together differently and that must be a good thing ... those with a strategic and business-like attitude will innovate and capture greater opportunity".

Staff member from medium-sized charity

"For non-specific Third Sector engagement we'll have a diminished resource and a diminished capability to engage particularly with new opportunities an interesting area for us to explore is whether we have functions and action that we're undertaking that could be delivered in a different way perhaps through even greater engagement with third sector bodies the issue here is capacity, trust and the business risk, which are the sure winners in terms of the organisations we could work with?"

FCE national office staff

"The future has to be the community or the voluntary sector taking the lead,, you know there are going to be cuts to the public sector – I think people are going to be scared to make any commitments, um, I would like, in terms of capacity building and everything, you know and in terms of balance of power and control and things – I would like an organisation like ours to create a role where people like me would work with community/third sector, help them to put in the bids, they would get the money themselves and we would help them with implementing it and managing and being the treasurer and all that".

FCE District staff

4. For another group the increased pressure on resources, is leading to an equal pressure to **prioritise and invest in the most productive and effective relationships and partnerships**. The view here is that the Forestry Commission should not be trying to engage so broadly with so many different areas of the Third Sector, and rather than being 'endlessly responsive' the Commission should take a more strategic approach to finding maximum impact from relationships and partnerships that deliver against priority policy objectives. For example:

"You have to think hard about which organisations are going to be the most useful or those which are going to be the most influential sadly we can't take a soft approach, or sit down with a blank sheet of paper and work out all the people and all the different Third Sector bodies who might be interested.... and make it happen we don't have that opportunity, we don't have that level of resource to work in that way, so we are looking for winners and going through a structured thought process around the opportunities that might arise and that's about prioritisation really "

FCE national office staff

"we don't have to occupy a broad church of relationships, the nature of the forestry strategy means that we are guilty of trying to do too much, cover everything comprehensively a shorter list of partners and partnerships means we can manage things tighter more effectively we need to think more strategically about how best to use non-grant investment to take forward partnerships in key areas"

FCE national office staff

4. Conclusions

In précis, the research questions asked:

- What relationships and partnerships is the Forestry Commission involved with?
- What relationships work?
- What does not work?

This section summarises the findings presented in this report and draws some final conclusions.

Assessing the results – measuring success

Proper evaluation of the question concerning which relationships and partnership 'work' and which do not work, requires a definition of, and specific criteria against which to judge, both 'success' and 'lack of success'.

There are a number of ways in which this could be done:

- Appraising the effectiveness and sustainability of the relationship
- Assessing achievement of partnership/project/activity objectives

- Evaluating Returns on Investment (ROI) and the impacts or outcomes of the partnership/project/activities undertaken.

However, the data needed to properly carry out evaluations of this kind was not available, even amongst the case study partnerships. An early conclusion is that a clear articulation of evaluation procedures to measure the success of certain kinds of relationship could be useful for future organisational learning. This is particularly the case when looking for objective measures of value and real impact of relationships with civil society organisations.

Which relationships work?

In terms of the qualitative evidence collected, the manner in which a relationship or a partnership is **defined or constituted does not appear to determine the success** of a relationship or partnership. It is the **fundamental principles** of building good relationships and partnerships that emerge as more important. Relationships need to be objective driven, and the form of the relationship or partnership that is best suited to the delivery of these will vary from case to case.

Matching the form of the relationship to the objectives that FCE aims to achieve means considering:

- The type of civil society organisation(s) involved (e.g. their area of influence, whether they are delivery or advocacy/lobbying organisations, size and capacity)
- The size of the partnership/relationship (e.g. can communication be maintained between all those involved)
- Finding space for innovation (e.g. are there ways in which small seed funding projects can allow the development or testing of new ideas, can working processes in a relationship allow for experimentation).

The key issues which foster successful relationships are: mutual communication; transparency in decision making processes and the setting of shared objectives; accommodating shared working arrangements; building mutual understanding, trust and respect.

Finding the right partners

The research suggests that there is a need for robust decision making around which partners and civil society organisations to work with. This does not necessarily mean slimming down or simplifying the number and type of organisations that the

Commission works with, but, success depends on building realistic numbers of relationships and links with organisations which consider:

- A demonstrable capacity and low risk on the part of the civil society organisation with respect to delivery of specific and defined objectives/outcomes (this is related to the size of the organisation, their spread and how many other projects and relationships they are involved with, and their financial and capacity related stability/sustainability)
- How too many forestry related initiatives using a small pool of potential civil society partners means that some organisations become involved in multiple projects or sets of activities stretching their capacity beyond a comfortable level and reducing the quality of outputs
- The ability of the civil society organisation to create and propagate impact
- Civil society organisations' understanding of Forestry Commission needs and ways of working
- Complementary competencies between the Commission and civil society organisations that are clearly understood and articulated in a way that aids role development and value added in the relationship
- Professionalism in project and activity management, joint activity planning and reporting including the development of shared working practice and means to manage differences in business process (e.g. reporting, finance systems)
- Appreciation of organisational differences and ability to compromise and accommodate these
- Civil society organisations able to link together different levels of organisation and operation, from local delivery to national strategy, and between parts of the Commission's business.

The evidence suggests that FCE gets the best results from relationships with medium-sized civil society organisations that operate at both a local and more strategic national level. These charities and Trusts deliver outcomes that are focused on the needs of communities and forests, but which are also closely matched to FCE policy objectives because of the national level understanding. These 'dual scale' medium-sized civil society organisations also seem to be the most able to manage communication across different parts of the Commission, as well as react to changing policy and funding contexts whilst still maintaining organisational capacity.

The data collected suggests that FCE faces challenges successfully engaging with smaller civil society organisations such as the local community-based organisations, or individual volunteers, where these relationships exist outside of partnership consortia operating with formal partnership agreements. This is partly to do with the high

marginal costs of engaging with many small organisations, a resource intensive activity, but also to do with the capacity of smaller civil society organisations to deliver against expectations. Where the capacity and role of the smaller civil society organisations is clearly bounded and understood e.g. as in the case of 'Friend of' groups relationships are usually very successful, but where the roles of smaller charities, trusts and community organisations are more diffuse, or where they are given multiple roles beyond their ability to deliver, relationships and outputs may not meet expectations.

Facilitating future opportunities

The future position of the Forestry Commission in terms of working with civil society organisations to deliver forest policy objectives is currently in a state of change and the outcomes not yet clear. However, the particular opportunities that emerge from the research which could be developed are:

- Developing new models of service delivery with civil society organisations including finding ways to build new alliances and relationships with organisations beyond the current pool to capitalise on areas of specific expertise
- Creating space for innovation and entrepreneurship, either by facilitating lower risk opportunities for novel engagement with smaller, lower risk organisations and activities, or by allowing civil society organisations with a proven history of impact and 'professional fit' with the aims and objectives of the Commission to develop new areas of joint working.
- Facilitate links with new civil society organisations to build further the themes and work areas emerging as priorities around climate change, and community links to climate change and sustainable resource use
- Facilitating productive relationships between representatives from civil society at multiple scale levels for maximum impact.
- Looking at the possibility of creating communication and learning systems within and between relationships and partnerships to share experiences, evaluate successes and evolve good practice.

5. Appendices.

5.1 Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule for Third Sector Partnership Research

Introduction

Partnership working is becoming an increasingly important feature of forest management. Our broad research aim is to get a better understanding of how partnerships can be used most effectively to deliver the maximum benefits against FC objectives at national, regional and local levels. We are interested in researching this over the different areas of the FC business. So essentially we are looking at what partnerships work and what doesn't work, finding out more about the reasons why, and using this information think about future partnerships. We have a particular interest in uncovering more information about FC partnerships and relationships with the Third Sector and the particular strengths and weaknesses of communicating and working together with NGOs, charities, community woodlands, social enterprises and voluntary groups.

[remember the difference between 'relationship' with the Third Sector and our view on 'partnership' working with others]

All Participants – General Questions

A. Mapping partnerships

1. Can you tell me about the partnerships between the FC and other organisations that you are aware of in your role?
2. Do you have a way of characterising the different kinds of partnership you have mentioned? [*probe see if there is a scheme that matches our own*]
3. In your experience, which Third Sector organisations are key players in partnership working with the FC? [*prompt for examples*]

4. Can you say anything about what scale and which areas of the business partnerships operate at most commonly within the FC? [*e.g. are they more frequent at the local delivery level? Within Enterprise, or FC?*].

THIRD SECTOR INTERVIEWEES ONLY

- 4.i. Is this the level at which your organisation tends to work at most frequently? [*get detail of organisational working*]

B. The meaning of partnership

5. What does partnership mean to you?
6. What role do partnerships play within the FC/your organisation?
7. How has the idea of partnership developed in the FC/your organisation over the last ten years?
8. Do you feel that there are specific drivers or pressures for you/the organisation to become involved in partnerships? How do you see these developing in the future? [*probe for both internal and external influences*]

C. Pro's and cons of partnership

9. If you haven't already talked about this answering the earlier questions, what do you feel are the benefits of partnership?
10. What are the drawbacks?
11. In which areas of the business/the work of your organisation do you think partnership working is most effective? And Why? [*prompt for specific partnership examples*]

Remember to draw out information about how the benefits and drawbacks relate to different kinds of partnership (strategic, delivery, network, operational) and different levels of operation (national, regional, local)

FOR FC STAFF ONLY

12. Do you think that there are FC objectives which can't or shouldn't be achieved through partnership? [*prompt for any specific examples of partnerships that they don't feel are working*]
13. Do you think the outcomes achieved through partnership are as effective and as sustainable as those achieved by the FC working alone?
14. Can you say something about which partners you feel provide the greatest impact in terms of achieving ETWF objectives and why? [*probe specific*]

organisations/individuals do not need to be mentioned, but the type of organisation and the way in which it works are important]

15. How important do you think the Third Sector is in achieving ETWF objectives?
16. What do you think is the most effective or important role that the FC can play in partnerships if it is to effectively achieve its objectives? [*prompt – i.e. lead, join others initiatives, set up our own partnerships and get others to join us*]
17. Does this apply when thinking about relationships with Third Sector organisations in particular?
18. Do you think the FC is as effective as other organisations at working in partnership? [*probe on specific examples, and on the reasons why or why not*]
19. Do you think the FC is as effective as other organisations managing relationships with the Third Sector? [*probe on specific examples and on the reasons why or why not*]
20. How do you see partnership working developing over the next 5 years?

FOR THIRD SECTOR INTERVIEWEES ONLY

21. Do you view the FC as a partner or do you feel you have a different kind of relationship with the FC?
22. What specifically do you think your organisation brings to the FC?
23. Do you think there are particular benefits brought to the FC by Third Sector organisations in contrast to those from other sectors? [*probe for examples*]
24. Do you feel you have a clear understanding of how your organisation contributes to achieving FC objectives?
25. Is it ever difficult to realise your own objectives as well as those of the FC? [*probe for information about areas of greatest synergy and most difficulty*]
26. How do you think the FC could improve on the way it manages its relationship with your organisation?
27. How do you think the FC could improve on the way it manages partnership working with your organisation?
28. Do you think there are important aspects of partnership working with the Third Sector that the FC needs to consider in greater detail?
29. How do you see partnership working developing over the next 5 years?
30. How do you see the opportunities and demands on the Third Sector developing over the next 5 years?

Participants with Knowledge/Involvement of Specific Partnership

Introduction

We'd like to find out more about the detail of how particular partnerships work, so I would like to move from the general questions I have been asking to ask some more focused questions about the XXXX partnership that you are involved with or that you mentioned earlier on. This will give us tangible 'case study' examples to help us with the evidence we need to support our synthesis of everything people tell us in the earlier more general part of this interview. You might already have told me the answer to some of the questions I have here, so bear with me as we sort through them.

D. Objectives

31. Could you please tell me a bit about the history of the partnership and how and why it was formed?
32. Why did your organisation (FC or other) become involved? [*prompt on motivations, expectations*]
33. How would you define the aims and objectives of the partnership?
34. Were these objectives known at the outset or negotiated/renegotiated along the way? [*prompt for problems, pro's and cons*]

E. Structure and relationships

35. Is the partnership formally constituted? [*probe - is it a formal agreement, what sort?*]
36. Who identified the partners and how were they 'invited'? [*probe - were these the best partners, were others missed out, was the best process employed*]
37. How does the partnership operate? [*probe - who does what?*]
38. Who brings what to the partnership? [*probe on what partners think the other partners are doing/delivering/providing in terms of skills knowledge and resources*]
39. How would you describe the relationships between partners? [*prompt – good, bad, trusting, suspicious, tense, strong, amicable*]

40. How is communication maintained between partners and the partnership process?
41. What important lessons have you learnt about these relationships and partnership structures? [*probe for particular Third Sector issues*]

F. Funding

42. How is the partnership funded and how does this impact upon its operations?
[*prompt for who holds the funding and how it is channelled*]
43. How sustainable is/was the funding?
44. Has funding impacted upon effectiveness and achievement of objectives?
45. Do those who provide most funds have more influence?

G. Objectives, Synergy and Value-added

46. Were/will the objectives (be) met?
47. Were there other outcomes, beyond the formal objectives, that you feel were important?
48. Was the partnership approach the best way of achieving the aims/delivery targets/identified need?
49. What are the key lessons learnt from this initiative?

ALL PARTICIPANTS

H. Endings

50. Is there anything you think is important that I should have asked you about?
51. Is there anybody else you think I should talk to about this?
52. Do you have anything you wish to ask me?

5.2 Email questionnaire



THIRD SECTOR PARTNERSHIP RESEARCH

Social and Economic Research Group

Centre for Human and Ecological Sciences

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Partnership working is becoming an increasingly important feature of how the Forestry Commission works. Our broad research aim is to get a better understanding of how partnership working can be used most effectively to deliver the maximum benefits against FC objectives at national, regional and local levels. We are interested in researching this over the different areas of the FC business.

Essentially we are looking at what kind of partnerships work and which don't work so well, finding out more about the reasons why, and using this information think about future partnerships.

As part of the broader study about partnership, we have a particular interest in uncovering more information about FC partnerships and relationships with the Third Sector. We are interested to find out more about which Third Sector organisations the Forestry Commission is working with and in what capacity. We are also keen to find out more about the strengths and weaknesses of communicating and working together with NGOs, charities, community woodlands, social enterprises and voluntary groups.

We would appreciate your help in completing this brief questionnaire as part of this study. The results will be used to produce a summary report mapping the extent of FC relationships with the Third Sector and providing information useful to FC England's Policy and Programmes Group and Regional Directors.

Your answers to this survey will be anonymous.

Thank you for your help.

Please return this survey sheet and any other information you wish to send by January 29th to

Dr Bianca Ambrose-Oji

Bianca.ambrose-oji@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

If you have any questions about this survey please contact Bianca on 0777 587 0865

Mapping out important partnerships and Third Sector engagement

1. Have you already conducted any form of partnership or Third Sector mapping exercise you could share with us in the form of reports or other documents?

☐ Yes – please email along with this questionnaire to Bianca.ambrose-oji@forestry.gsi.gov.uk and move on to Question 3

☐ No – please move on to Question 2.

2. Please could you list out the partnerships between the FC and other organisations, including the Third Sector, that you are aware of as part of your role?

It may not be possible to list them all. We are interested in those you consider to be most important or effective, or those which have been the most instructive.

Partnership or Project name	Third Sector or other Organisation(s) involved	FC Business area (e.g. Enterprise/Commission)	Level of operation (e.g. local, Regional)

3. Do you feel that partnership working is concentrated in particular areas of the business? Please could you say something about this?

4. Do you feel Third Sector engagement is concentrated in particular areas of the business? Please could you say something about this?

Effectiveness of Third Sector engagement

5. What do you think are the most important benefits of working with the Third Sector?

6. Do you feel there are any important weaknesses in working with the Third Sector?

7. How important do you think working with the Third Sector is in achieving ETWF objectives? Please explain your answer as far as you can.

Successful Third Sector engagement

8. What do you feel are the main ingredients of a successful relationship with a Third Sector organisation?

9. How do you view the future of FC involvement with the Third Sector?

ADDITIONAL CONTACTS

10. Can you suggest other people in the FC, or contacts from Third Sector organisations, we could talk to about this research?

Organisation	Name/contact

11. Would you be willing to be contacted again for a more detailed interview in connection with this study?

☐ Yes

☐ No

THAT'S ALL!
THANKS FOR YOUR HELP

Please return this survey sheet and any other information you wish to send by January 29th to

Dr Bianca Ambrose-Oji

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6. References

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