FUTURE PROOFING
Plant Health

Understanding tactical and strategic approaches to the future management of Oak Processionary Moth (OPM)

Forest Research
Mariella Marzano
Bianca Ambrose-Oji
Darren Moseley
Mark Atkinson

Tree Council
Jon Stokes
Harriet Rix

March 2019

Executive Summary

- This report summarises the research carried out during 2018-19 in support of a process that will see local authorities and site managers move towards a risk-based approach for OPM management. The research has surfaced and tested ideas and tools that could contribute to support for site-based planning, a strategic action planning toolkit, and an Enhanced Support Package. Lists of potential tools and a framework for further testing and validation of management practices were the main outcomes.

- Site-focussed tactical workshops were organised with site owners and managers affected or likely to be affected by OPM, in order to explore their risk perceptions, current site management planning and delivery, and appetite for greater responsibility over OPM control and concomitant cost-sharing in the future. Three workshops were organised, each focussed on a specific risk or main management objective – (1) Public/animal health, (2) Biodiversity, (3) Tree health.

- 43 respondents attended the site-based workshops which were divided up into three main sessions with opportunities for questions and feedback. The first session focussed on mapping site-based risks, the second focussed on developing a site-based OPM management plan, and during the third session participants were asked to identify what support they would need to develop an OPM management plan.

- Risks were rated on a matrix according to their impact and likelihood by all the site-based participants. Public health risks were considered most impactful and likely. The main differences between likelihood and impact scores occurred with *Tree health* and *Control cost* where impacts were scored somewhat lower than likelihood.

- Public health was the biggest concern for the majority of participants regardless of management objectives and this is closely linked to reputational risks. Other reported concerns relate to occupational health, legal liabilities of landowners relating to ill-health and the financial costs of managing OPM. Participants highlighted a need to study the long-term impacts of control measures on biodiversity, specifically other Lepidoptera and parasitoids.

- Underlying discussions about potential risks was whether OPM is serious enough to warrant current concern and investment. Knowledge about OPM is incomplete and managers are justifying their actions based on partial information. Guidance is needed on the best methods for identifying what level of OPM management is needed.

- Currently there is no joined-up approach at landscape or catchment level and participants highlighted the difficulties in communicating with and influencing neighbours.

- Some of the key challenges facing site mangers in developing site-based plans include identifying numbers and distribution of oak; wide-ranging resource constraints; negative reactions by visitors upon learning that OPM is onsite.

- Support required to develop OPM management plans can be categorised under 6 headings: Science (e,g. best methods for control; latest research on OPM); Data (e.g. tools for site assessment and knowledge sharing); Capacity (e.g. training on OPM control for contractors and staff); Planning/management (e.g. guidance and protocols on developing plans and actions); Funding (are there sources of funding available?); Communication (e.g. improve access to web-based materials; advice).

- The intention of the strategic workshops was to take the first step towards establishing a co-design process around the development of processes and tools to support a risk based approach to OPM with Local Authorities (LAs).

- A total of 40 LA workshop respondents completed the individual assessment exercise (12 in West Sussex, 20 in Surrey and 7 in Camden). *Public health* was the most frequently named risk. *Control costs* and *Tree health* were also frequently reported. In general across the local authority participants, likelihood and impact scores were similar within any one category of risk. Across the three workshops, *Public health* and *Control cost* emerged as the most likely and impactful risks to local authorities.

- Using the individual risk ratings as a starting point, discussion groups within each workshop were asked to consider and agree a list of risks they all agreed were important. The patterns in the group rating of risk are not dissimilar to those emerging from the individual risk mapping exercise. *Public health* and *Occupational health* consistently ranked highest, along with *Costs* and *Loss of revenue* and *Loss of biodiversity*.

- Much of the discussion in the workshops focused on the barriers to action experienced by Tree Officers and others at a site-based tactical level. The barriers to action at a strategic level were more difficult to isolate.

- There was a criticism that the information about OPM exists in several different places over a number of different websites, so there was a general call for Defra to create some kind of central hub for all of those existing resources.

- There was a general feeling that many of the "red risks" discussed could be moved to "green" with more education and communication, particularly of the public.

- The results from the workshops show that the views across the three strategic workshops varied, depending on the level of knowledge of OPM LAs had, their experience of managing it, and the numbers of oak trees they were responsible for. The potential need to take imminent action raises levels of concern about OPM, which in turn could lead to the possibility of an over exaggerated response.

- Next steps for 2019-20 will be to: (1) Support the design, development, testing and evaluation of the pilot phase of the risk-based approach; (2) Support the delivery of the required technical information, guidance and best practice tool-kits to support stakeholders to plan and take action to manage the risks of OPM; Deliver an

evaluation framework for the implementation phase of the risk-based approach.