

Left to right:
Confor's Stuart
Goodall, Confor's
Caroline Harrison,
Perridge Forestry
Manager
Chris Marrow,
Kleen Kutt's
Dave Radford,
Alastair Sandels
(FISA), Sir Harry
Studholme.



Taking responsibility

Carolyn Locher reports on the recent Confor/FISA South West regional field day.

ATTEENDEES from across the supply chain assemble at Perridge Estate's 400 hilly hectares near Exeter. Stewarded by the Studholme family for over 100 years, Sir Harry, Chair of the Forestry Commission, welcomed us to this Confor and FISA South West Regional Field Day: 'Integrated Planning & Safe Management of Forest Operations in a Mixed Lowland Estate'. As a private landowner, Sir Harry sets the scene with a stark reminder. "Imagine what it is like when things go wrong, either with a life-changing injury or a death. Beyond dealing with the tragic consequences, frightening investigations pick over what you could have done. Blame is thrown and families break down, maybe leading to mental health problems or suicide. We all need to participate in health and safety (H&S) in a grounded way, talking sensibly, incorporating it into the way we do things and taking responsibility. H&S has to live, it cannot just be a box that you fill in every Monday."

Alastair Sandels, Chair of FISA and Vice Chair of the ICF, explains that FISA codifies guidance that is out of date. "FISA's aim is to establish a workplace free of injury and death. People – especially contractors – are angry at being on the receiving end of decisions that

put them at risk. Forests are workplaces, with multiple hazards, not just an investment asset. Owners entering into a commercial enterprise have a fiduciary responsibility for managing those assets in a safe way. When people take personal responsibility for safety, change occurs rapidly."¹

ESTATE BACKGROUND

PERRIDGE Estate encompasses a series of steep slopes and valleys, mostly water-retentive culm soil (clay), Devon Red Sandstone and a basalt layer that is quarried. The headwaters of the Alphin Brook and River Kenn run through the estate, whose woodlands cover 68%, farming activities 32%, and open ground 3%. The estate has ten residential lets, five commercial lets, one scheduled ancient monument and no public rights of way. Two power networks, an old railway line (and low bridge) and a network of tracks divide the woodlands, which offer residential (and horse-riding) access, host occasional Territorial Army training events and a deer shoot, and implement active squirrel control.

Managed to varying degrees throughout the last century, the best hardwoods were felled in the World Wars and for death duties in



– 600mm as standard – to accommodate the flash downpours we experience frequently."

CLIENT EXPECTATIONS

FOR many landowners and forestry agents, maximising timber income for the on-the-spot market is the priority, agents encouraging high client expectations on price from the start. "Last year, three people were killed in

forests. Twelve were seriously injured in the last quarter of 2017,"

says Alastair. "Agents must emphasise 'safe planning at work' at

the start, informing the landowner of the consequences, their responsibilities and

duty of care. Put safety before price, treat contractors with respect,

especially people using chainsaws."²

Chris prefers to establish long-term relationships with

contractors than to use

whomsoever offers the best timber price in a given year. "Inducting contractors to a site once saves time and offers continuity, familiarity, motivation, high standards of work and clear accountability. All benefit H&S."

SHORT-TERM PLANNING ANNUAL OPERATIONS

STANDING on a low bridge (haulier site hazard) that spans the old railway line, Chris offers an overview and the detail of the methodology behind the Operational

the 1950s. Conifer plantings (1950/60s larch; 1970/90s Douglas fir) were aimed at ensuring long-term economic viability. Today, the woodlands comprise 68% conifer (main crop Douglas fir/larch) and 32% broadleaf (main crop oak).

LONG-TERM WOODLAND PLANNING

EIGHT years ago, forest manager Chris Marrow's initial woodland plan focused on three things: clearing 45 ha of rhododendron and laurel, catching up with a backlog of thinnings and upgrading forest roads to accommodate the more systematic harvesting programme of around 40 ha every year (now underway).

Chris says, "We sequenced the early works, clearing rhododendron, thinning (conifers every five years, 34–35 ha per year: broadleaf every 15 years, 6 ha per year) and upgrading tracks as we went, sinking large culvert pipes

Top: Perridge Estate woodlands comprise 68% conifer and 32% broadleaf. While the estate has a good set of tracks and rides, many are narrow and need upgrading to accommodate modern machinery.

Above: Digger driver Kev spent years working on harvesters. He is uniquely placed to know what types of tracks and ramps harvesters need. In constant communication with colleagues via a CB radio in his cab, his concern is that people can be hard to spot externally from inside the cab.

Above right: Motor-manual team – Alan, back left; Pat, front. Kleen Kutt has invested in a (supposedly weather-proof) Pfanner radio system for the motor-manual team's helmets (around GBP 500, an economical investment considering the use they will get over the years), and handheld radios for the cabs.

Site Assessment for a specific year's works programme, which varies by site and by year. "An Operational Site Assessment quantifies the 'works' area, volume (species and product assortment), and identifies not only the hazards (steep slopes, the estate's private water supply and rivers, power supplies, tenanted properties) but also the full range of considerations (landscape and visibility, biodiversity, conservation interests including archaeology, and other estate activities). I pass this information to Dave Radford, Forestry Works Manager (and owner) of Kleen Kutt harvesting contractors to assess (and risk assess). Dave then prepares his price offer.

"Within this process, we incorporate other estate objectives into the harvesting programme (bat habitat, biodiversity). We informally walk the site, making reasonable allowance for the proportion of handwork (saw and winch) and machine work. Dave can then cost (and deploy) kit that is most appropriate for the site into the equation, pricing all the fiddly bits in a way that is open and fair."

Chris says, "Approaching the job this way, H&S is automatically built into our considerations. It ensures that Harry receives a fair and competitive offer representing everything we want done. Of course it is based on current market prices, but it isn't a 'timber only' price because this approach includes other work and encourages a sensible, safe approach to the work. It is an optimum price."

Alastair notes that by properly pricing works, Kleen Kutt does not have to enter into sub-optimal contracts that may lead to other consequences. He says, "The industry is bad on informing agents, landowners and professionals about timber prices: what price it is appropriate to pay or receive. If information on market conditions is freely circulated, safety risks can be financially mitigated for."

Once agreed, a contract schedule and works specification is written and a formal pre-commencement meeting organised, attended by the landowner's representative (Chris); Forest Works Manager (Dave Radford); site safety coordinator (Jack Radford, supports the Forest Works Manager); and subcontractor (Pat, hand-cutter). "When more people attend, more people get the whole picture, and works run far more smoothly, cultivating a more responsible attitude towards H&S."

Dave says, "We still have to keep the lorries loaded, but being better informed means that we can address any issues as they arise, because they have been priced and we know what Chris is trying to achieve."

Chris maintains regular dialogue with commercial concerns, farmers and estate tenants to ensure their safety. He informs hauliers about forest access and turning difficulties. He lets the local parish council know when timber lorries will come through the village.

OPERATIONAL WORKING AREA

A yellow warning sign marks the 'operational working area'. Barrier tape informs tenants not to access certain tracks. Chris wonders how long before the stringent site safety and welfare protocols seen on construction sites (who have the funds) are enforced in forestry: fencing; Portakabins for site check-in; billboards worth of site 'do's' and 'don'ts' and operator welfare units.

"It has arrived," says Alastair. "HSE are inspecting 50 forestry sites this year. They will be looking at welfare." If the industry fails to deal with poor safety culture there is a risk that HSE may well eventually regulate, introducing CDM as per the construction industry.

"Legislation already states that 'reasonable means' must be provided. Working here on a long-term contract, Kleen Kutt could invest in portable facilities, building costs into the job price." Sir Harry agrees. "Landowners need to recognise the extra costs carried by the contractor and be prepared to pay for health and safety." With no public access, vandalism should not be an issue.

MACHINERY, MOTOR MANUAL TEAM AND OPERATIONAL KIT

KLEEN Kutt's JCB 360-degree excavator equipped with CB radio (as are all machines) scrapes water-trapping soil and vegetation off the solid stone railway track. Chris says, "Before harvesting, Dave upgrades any tracks that need it, reinstates them post operations and tidies a site when finished. In the wood rented out for war games, we took out 500 metres in just over a week and the site was left tidier than before!"

While mechanised harvesting makes forestry safer, especially when clearing windblow, not all slopes can be driven. The motor-manual team - Pat on chainsaw and Alan on tractor-mounted winch - have been with Kleen Kutt for five years and four years respectively.

Dave says, "We don't have a high staff

turnover. We employ our cutters and winchmen on a day rate. Still productive, it takes the pressure off them. A tree takes as long as it takes to get down. We tried piece-work, but with the job quality we want to achieve, we found it did not work." Alastair hopes this becomes the industry norm.

Kleen Kutt has invested in a Pfanter radio system for the motor-manual team's helmets and handheld radios for the cabs. "The teams are in touch and know roughly where everyone is and what is happening to them."

Alastair says, "If an operator is not in eye contact with a colleague, radios help maintain effective communication and save a site manager's time walking the site trying to catch up with people."³

MANAGING H&S: SITE SAFETY COORDINATOR ROLE

KLEEN Kutt service two long-term contracts, enabling investment in a new Ponsse Wisent forwarder, currently loading stems felled by the Ponsse Fox harvester operated by site safety coordinator Jack Radford.

Each morning, Jack checks the work site signage and emergency tape, a tape trail left for an ambulance to follow should it be needed. He makes any adjustments required. Chris leaves it up to Jack (and forwarder driver Steve) to specify where fuel is safely stored. For the daily risk assessment, Jack speaks with the four machine operators who start at 6:30 am, and hand-cutters who start at 7:30 am. He ensures that they know where first-aid kits and spill kits are, that they know what they are doing that day and the vehicle movements into and out of the site.

He tried doing this via radio. Physically catching up with the team does consume time, but showing them the paperwork removes any confusion. Alastair suggests keeping a site safety diary, asking for signatures once a week, concentrating team members' minds on H&S and protecting their interests. "If they ask questions, it shows they are listening."

Issues are rare. Jack says, "They are good



Above: In a stand already fairly advanced in its thinning, Dave's son Jack fells more stems in Kleen Kutt's Ponsse Fox harvester. Attendees stand 90 metres away (Risk Zone), which increases to 200 metres in case of chain shot. The harvester utilises bandtracks on the slopes in these woods. Chris has specified that no machines can run on the stone road with tracks fitted, because of the damage they can do.

lads. They know they have to move so much per day, so they get on with it. I remind them occasionally to remove brash; easily forgotten if you have a lot of lorries." At the end of the working day, he makes sure everyone is accounted for.

We skirt Perridge's newly refurbished loading bay, currently busy with Kleen Kutt's two timber lorries. Jack coordinated timber pickup timings with South West Water's tanker deliveries, to avoid congestion on the single-track roads surrounding the estate. Alastair suggests keeping a written record of public roads that are badly maintained (potholes and more), so that blame for damage cannot be passed on to a haulier. Chris agrees. As an ex-policeman, he knows the value of notes written at the time. "CYA'. Cover your arse."

POWER LINES

NATIONAL Grid (33,000 volts) and Western Power Network (11,000 volts) power lines cross the estate (worked around and under by specialist contractors employed directly by the power networks). Attendees ask whose responsibility it is, at the start of the planning process, to protect people from overhead hazards. Chris says, "The power lines coincide with our woodland block divisions. We either minimise the amount of times we pass under them or measure their height and assess the clearance (sometimes done by a power network representative) and install signs to warn machine operators."⁴



Left: Kleen Kutt service two long-term contracts, enabling investment in the new Ponsse Wisent forwarder currently unloading stems the harvester felled on this lesser slope during lunch.

Last year, two planned three-month outages to replace National Grid power lines offered the opportunity to work a total of three miles of woodland frontage, thinning trees within the 'Red Zone'. "It was six months of organised chaos."

National Grid's civil engineering contractor took an interesting approach to H&S and coordinating their many subcontractors. "We ended up with four sets of (welfare) Portaloos on one stretch of forest track. They risk-assessed a section of forest road in need of refurbishment to allow machinery in and out that ran below the lines. They measured the lines' height above the road (20 metres) and the tipper lorry's reach (7 metres). Even with a potential 13-metre gap, they still tipped stone at the top of road, double-handling to where it was needed because they do not tip under power lines. With a rule like that, what is the point of a risk assessment, which I understood to mean working out how to do things safely? A blanket rule stops active thinking."

Confor's Stuart Goodall and FISA's Alastair Sandels thank attendees for coming and

Confor's England Manager Caroline Harrison for organising the event. They both thank Dave Radford, Chris Marrow and Sir Harry for making it happen.

Walking back up to the only flat patch of land at Perridge, Sir Harry says, "Today was important to me. Not only was it about the people here, it was about raising the issue of danger and the awareness around H&S. It is important for all of us."

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Notes:

¹ FISA's 'Managing H&S in Forestry' revision document is coming soon, helping professionals improve planning forestry works from inception.

² FISA is offering training for agents, professionals and landowners on managing expectations. A bidder 'questionnaire', highlighting site constraints and asking

buyers to outline their H&S and Welfare policy, possibly setting aside a Contingency Fund to cover any eventualities should things go wrong, may be made available.

³ FISA is still deciding whether the contractor, timber buyer or owner should be responsible for erecting, maintaining and removing power line hazard signs and/or goal posts. They are considering marking out 'hazard corridors', ensuring the warnings stay with people, to be paid for by the network operators.

⁴ FISA has revised Basic Chainsaw Guidance Note 302 (out now), which describes the principle of risk-assessing machinery for taking down hung-up trees. It suggests quarantining the area around a hung-up tree and bringing in a machine to help bring it down.

Guidance Notes on traction winches (T-winch for use with forwarders and needing specially prepared platforms for anchor points allowed for in the planning stage and prepared when making improvements before works begin), especially good for working with on steep sites, will be available soon.

Kleen Kutt's John Deere skidder.



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