



INDUSTRY

Working towards a viable, dynamic and competitive sector.

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The Woodland and Forestry Industry (WFI)

A tradition of sound management and ability to grow quality timber, together with considerable enthusiasm and skill exists throughout the region's woodland and forestry sector, providing the basis for business activity and potential expansion.

One result of this is a plethora of excellent initiatives aimed at diversifying, adding value, reducing costs, enhancing the skills base and securing collaboration. On the other hand, the sector is losing processing capacity and skills, the workforce is ageing and reducing, business collaboration by the sole traders that populate this sector is rare, and the sector is suffering further loss of confidence due to external issues such as the value of the pound and competition from imports. The proximity of Wales, with its investment in woodland and forestry, is viewed as both a threat and an opportunity. The time it takes to grow a timber crop contradicts the quick-return nature of our society and economy. Regional targeting of priorities and resources for woodland creation, management and utilisation are rudimentary and need development. Deer and squirrel control are essential to successful woodland management for timber and biodiversity but face some public opposition. At the heart of a dynamic and competitive sector is the need for owners to be able to manage their woods in an economically viable way.

Aims:

- To encourage the development of a long-term business plan for the woodland and forestry sector.
- To work towards the sector being viable, dynamic, and competitive.
- To promote the role of woodland and forestry in the effective delivery of public benefits.

ACTION

Delivering the vision

Objectives	Actions
<p>WFI 1 To improve the efficiency and viability of the woodland and forestry sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Help businesses access advice and support for adding value and making best use of their assets through initiatives such as Heartwoods and encouraging innovation, co-operation and networking up and down the supply chain. ● Develop collaborations with other land-based sectors, in particular relating to training, adding value and labelling and/or branding. ● Revisit the case for a West Midlands woodland and forestry industry cluster, taking account of the many benefits of woodland and forestry, the study Embedding Woodland Industries and the developing England Forest Industries Partnership. ● Promote certification and chain of custody, and help small woodland owners share costs. ● Promote and facilitate management of deer, grey squirrels and other species that damage trees and woodland in terms of their biodiversity and timber values.
<p>WFI 2 To develop new opportunities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish a reputation for quality wood products from the West Midlands, including through working with the High Value Added Consumer Products Cluster. ● Secure a commitment by politicians, producers and consumers to using local products, including through implementation of the Government's Sustainable Timber Procurement Strategy for public bodies. ● Develop a strategy for more wood, especially local wood, to be used in the construction sector, by working with the Building Technologies Cluster. ● Ensure that strategies for using local timber include working to ensure the availability of supplies. ● Devise a programme to encourage and facilitate the sector to make more effective use of developments in information and communications technology (ICT). ● Support the participation of special needs and minority groups in the region's processing sector (for example, through woodcrafts).
<p>WFI 3 To encourage effective use of and interaction with advice and incentive mechanisms, and adaptation to working within a changing policy, regulation and incentive framework</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support the woodland and forestry sector by promoting the development/acquisition of business skills for sector businesses, including through incorporation of the sector's needs in the FRESA and the Regional Economic Strategy (see also ELS2). ● Run a programme of informative events on grants and regulations, and raise awareness in the sector of opportunities arising from the potential development of an integrated agency for modernised rural delivery.

CASE STUDIES

Heartwoods

Heartwoods was launched in April 2002 to support business in the timber supply chain in Herefordshire, Shropshire and part of Worcestershire.

The project encourages greater use of local timber, creating and safeguarding jobs in the region by bringing investment, knowledge and networking to the sector.

Acting as a directory of suppliers in the region, Heartwoods bridges communication gaps and uses publicity, events and training to educate and connect sellers and buyers in the supply chain. Heartwoods also reinforces businesses from the woodland to the workshop with investment and support to guarantee their survival and to promote growth.

The dual approach of connecting and supporting businesses has greatly improved the sustainable-timber supply chain in the region. Already more than £500,000 of leveraged grant funding has been directed into the chain through Heartwoods, 20 new jobs generated and an additional 1680 tons of local timber brokered.



Image: Heartwoods

Pontrilas Timber

Pontrilas Timber, based close to the Welsh border in Herefordshire, has two sawmills and is a major timber processor in the region.

The softwood sawmill cuts in excess of 150,000m³ a year of sawlogs sourced from England and Wales. It produces carcassing for house building, pallet boards and fencing materials. It is a modern sawmill that resulted from significant investment in predominantly Swedish sawing technology.



Image: Pontrilas Timber

Pontrilas has high-capacity kilns, treatment plants, strength grading machines and other conversion facilities to enable the production of a wide range of products. Its largest customers are timber and builders merchants, situated throughout England and Wales.

The hardwood sawmill cuts more than 10,000m³ a year of oak, ash and beech (of which 70% is oak). Products vary from large section beams and kiln-dried furniture boards to pallet runners and fencing materials. Prefinished and unfinished oak and ash flooring with a full range of facilities are also produced.

Pontrilas is FSC-certified and sources some 15-20% of its supplies from the West Midlands. The mills work on a single-shift system, but if more timber could become available locally, then there is potential to increase production through double-shift working.