

SUMMARY

The West Midlands Regional Forestry Framework was originally launched in 2004 aiming to inspire and guide those involved in the management of trees, woodlands and forests in the Government Office region to secure the sustainable development of this resource. Supported by evidence in the baseline study *A Growing Resource* and the more recent *Regional Forestry Economic Baseline for the West Midlands 2009*, the Framework directly connects trees, woodland and forestry to the wider agenda, where there are opportunities to improve the quality of life for everyone.

Both rural and urban trees and woodland are multi-purpose and multi-functional providing a wide range of different benefits and services: timber production, green infrastructure, wood energy, biodiversity, recreation, water and climate change mitigation, landscape aesthetics, employment, health & social care services.

The West Midlands is the fourth most densely wooded region in England amounting to over 100,000 hectares and 8% of the land area. We look to the West Midlands Regional Forestry Framework for direction on how we can best benefit from the tree and woodland assets and hence be better custodians of them. The Framework sets out priorities for activity across the private, public and voluntary sector.

This refreshing and updating of the Framework, aligning more closely with the Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests and other national and regional strategies, will result in the continuation of what has already been working well - the development of new benefits for the trees, woodland and forestry sector and local communities and an improved environment in urban and rural areas.

After five years implementation, the Framework's vision and its aims, objectives and actions (the Delivery Plan) originally developed from the key stakeholders' aspirations for the woodland and forestry sector have been reviewed. The refreshed Framework has been widely discussed and formulated by a number of specialist thematic task groups and has been out to wider consultation amongst Forum Members and key stakeholders. The Framework is now web-based and sits alongside the three-year rolling Delivery Plans which are updated every year highlighting the work to be done and the resources needed. Annual monitoring and evaluation will continue.

THEMES

The original 11 strategic themes have been updated and streamlined to 9. Each includes a brief comment on the current situation for woodland and forestry and details the aims and objectives that have been determined by the stakeholders. Accompanying each theme we have a number of illustrative case studies.

- [Tree and Woodland Cover](#)
- [Trees, Woods & Forestry Industry](#)
- [Wood Energy & Recycling](#)
- [Recreation & Tourism](#)

- Health & Wellbeing
- Fostering Social Inclusion
- Enhancing Biodiversity
- Climate Change
- Green Infrastructure

The nine themes of the Framework are not mutually exclusive; instead there are close linkages between many of them. For example, many objectives under the Trees & Woodland Cover theme link with Biodiversity, and Health & Wellbeing objectives are closely associated with Social Inclusion. This table gives a simple and broad indication of how the themes relate to one another.

Main inter-linkages between Framework themes

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Trees & Woodland Cover	○	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. Trees, Woodland & Forestry Industry	✓	○	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3. Wood Energy	✓	✓	○				✓	✓	✓
4. Recreation & Tourism	✓	✓		○	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5. Health & Wellbeing		✓		✓	○	✓		✓	✓
6. Social inclusion		✓		✓	✓	○			
7. Biodiversity	✓	✓	✓	✓			○	✓	✓
8. Climate Change	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	○	✓
9. Environmental Infrastructure	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	○

OVERARCHING AIMS

The aspirations are for the Framework to:

- Illustrate how regional tree and woodland cover may evolve over several decades, helping to contribute to green infrastructure, deliver new woodlands, manage existing trees and woodlands contributing to the delivery of the West Midlands Regional Strategy and according to the Framework vision so as to enhance the quality of life

- Illustrate the the importance of trees and woodland in the landscape that allows the application of a landscape-scale approach with functioning ecological networks, thus delivering benefits across all the themes
- Demonstrate how trees, woods and forests can make a contribution to a future low-carbon society, ensuring that they are resilient to the impacts of climate change and contributing to the way in which biodiversity and natural resources adjusts and adapts to climate change
- Provide a spatial context for the development of woodland, forestry and green infrastructure in the region contributing to urban and rural renaissance through the regional planning process including, where appropriate, facilitating cross-boundary collaboration
- Secure greater private sector engagement strengthening the forestry voice and ensuring that funding streams and incentives are secured, properly co-ordinated and facilitated to deliver the WMRFF Vision
- Make clear the relevance of trees, woodland and forestry to people's everyday needs, involving local communities wherever possible and appropriate
- Strengthen urban-rural links and see woodland and forestry more successfully embedded in wider urban and rural agendas, particularly in urban fringe areas.
- Improve understanding of trees, woodland and forestry at strategic levels and within regional and local structures so that the woodland and forestry sector can make an effective contribution to other regional policies, delivery plans, joined-up agendas and actions.

The Framework is the regional expression of government policy for trees, woodland and forestry. In refreshing the Framework stakeholders have confirmed that trees, woodland and forests contribute significantly to the lives of everyone in the region.

There are a number of special features relating to trees, woodland and forestry that characterise the West Midlands when compared with other regions:

- The use of timber in building construction throughout the region's history and across all building types.
- The contribution of woodland and forestry to the diversity and distinctiveness of the region's character and landscapes, including its historic dimension.
- An extensive network of hedgerows, street trees, orchards, veteran trees, parkland, traditional woodland estates and ancient woodland.

- Activity, expertise and commitment to make better use of the woodlands in and around the major urban areas.
- The combination and contrast of remote rural areas in the west of the region, accessible rural areas and urban areas.
- The strong sense of responsibility of owners, especially the influence of traditional estates, organisations and local communities for stewardship of their local trees and woodland.
- The network of small and micro-businesses based on the woodland resource of the region.
- The pilot projects and initiatives connecting forestry and health, forestry and social inclusion and forest schools.
- The significance of the region as a transport hub and the contribution of trees and woodlands in greening the transport corridors and improving the region's image.
- The experience of damage from flooding and other climate change effects.

These special features shape the vision for woodland and forestry in the region, which is as follows:

The vision for trees, woodland and forestry is where trees and woodland enhance the landscape and contribute to a high quality of life for all by creating a healthy, wealthy and enriched environment helping the West Midlands be prepared and adapted to the impacts of climate change

To achieve the vision, the West Midlands trees, woodland and forestry sector needs to help the region earn a reputation for:

- Using trees and woodlands to unify and enhance both urban and rural landscapes and to help create a sense of place at a landscape scale.
- Linking consumer to grower, processor and retailer improving the economic viability and the resilience of businesses.
- Promoting quality local wood products for local use.
- Using trees as one of the main tools in urban regeneration and greening programmes.
- Using wood for energy and contributing to a low carbon society.
- Having high standards of care for woodlands where there is public access.

- Using woodlands and forestry to foster social inclusion and cohesion and education for all and to promote good health and quality of life.
- Leading the way on collaboration, innovation and invention.
- Conserving hedges, fruit orchards, parkland, leafy public spaces and veteran trees.
- Using trees and woodlands to enhance transport corridors.
- Making use of woodlands for tourism, local recreation and other non timber products.
- Using trees to help manage flood risk, floodwater and alleviate weather extremes.
- Learning from experience and sharing ideas, expertise and resources.
- Protecting and enhancing ancient woodlands.
- Meeting national, regional and local biodiversity targets relating to woodland and forestry.

Growing trees is a long-term activity, and the Framework takes a long-term perspective. Much can be done now, but it may take years to implement some of the changes needed to achieve a sustainable woodland and forestry sector. The Framework shows how the vision will be delivered, illustrated with a number of case studies.

Each year a rolling three-year delivery plan is developed and updated to accompany the Framework, setting out prioritised and detailed actions. Most woodland in the region is privately owned. Achieving the vision depends on partnerships between private and public sectors. With the vision in common, new partnerships can be developed to deliver private and public benefits.

THE FRAMEWORK IN CONTEXT

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National Policy

The Framework sits within a broader national (and international) policy framework. Some of the key national policy imperatives are:

- UK Sustainable Development Strategy (2005) - highlights the renewed international push for sustainable development from the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002.
- A Strategy for England's Trees Woods and Forestry (2007) – focuses on trees, woods and forests providing a sustainable resource, climate change, the natural environment, quality of life and business and markets.
- England Biodiversity Strategy (2002) – prioritises action for conservation of species and habitats
- UK Forestry Standard (UKFS 2004) – sets the standard for forestry practice in the UK according to sustainable forest management principles.
- England Woodfuel Strategy (2007) - The UK Government is committed to combating climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and Woodfuel is a sustainable and low carbon source of bio-energy that can make a substantial contribution to achieving these targets
- The Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) – outlines the shape of rural development support in England 2007-2013.
- Climate Change: The UK Programme 2006 - sets out policies and priorities for action in the UK and internationally
- Climate Change Plan – Defra (March 2010) – including adaption and mitigation chapters on Forestry

- Keepers of Time (2005) - This statement updates the government's policy towards woodlands and trees by re-emphasising their value, evaluating threats and opportunities and setting out a range of actions to improve their protection and quality.
- Open Habitats Policy (March 2010) Key messages, facts and figures, and background to Government policy on when to convert woodland to open habitat in England
- Living Places – Cleaner, Safer, Greener (DCLG 2006) - this highlights government's commitment to action to make public places greener enhancing the quality of life
- Homes for the Future: more affordable, more sustainable – Housing Green Paper (DCLG 2007) – outlining proposals to increase the supply of housing, to provide well designed and greener homes that are supported by infrastructure and to provide more affordable homes to buy or rent.
- Housing Growth and Green Infrastructure: Natural England Policy position Statement (2008) - a strategically planned and delivered network of high quality green spaces and other environmental features. It should be designed and managed as a multifunctional resource capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.
- The Rural Strategy 2004 sets out a new devolved and targeted approach to rural policy and delivery over the next three to five years, based on the vision set out in the RWP 2000.
- Strategy for Sustainable Construction (BERR 2008) represents government's commitment to sustainable source materials and reduce energy consumption
- Sustainable Procurement Strategy for Local Government (2007) – a step by step approach to sustainable procurement by UK public sector
- Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future (2003) – sets out a vision for making communities more livable.
- Renewable Energy Strategy (BERR 2009): Our Energy Future – Creating a Low Carbon Economy – puts renewable energy at the heart of government's energy policy and response to climate change

Regional Policy

In addition, the Framework sits within a broader regional policy context, with which it seeks to engage. Key regional policy strategies and plans include:

- The Regional Spatial Strategy (2008) – sets out a statutory policy for regional and local planning, provides a regional policy on woodland and forestry, including the contribution of the woodland and forestry sector to the regional landscape, economy and quality of life. It also requires the statutory monitoring of increases in woodland and forestry, as referred to in Biodiversity Action Plans.

- Connecting to Success: The West Midlands Economic Strategy (2007) – recently revised, outlines the strategy for promoting regional economic development and is accompanied by:
- Connecting to Success Delivery Framework (2008) – the regional delivery plan for the economic strategy. This refers to a number of industry ‘clusters,’ some of which link to the woodland and forestry sector, the principal ones being: environmental technologies; building technologies; high-value consumer products; tourism and leisure; food and drink.
- West Midlands Sustainable Development Framework (refreshed 2007) - providing a point of reference for regional activity on sustainable development
- Regional Woodfuel Strategy 2005 and Review 2006 - facilitating the utilisation of wood from our 'regions woodland' and bring under-managed woodlands back into sustainable management for the benefit of biodiversity and climate change
- West Midlands Regional Woodland Opportunities Map version 2 (2008) – Helping to focus activity on areas of maximum public benefit in creating and managing woodlands in the region
- Regional Biodiversity Strategy for the West Midlands 2005 and Review 2009 – sets out the priorities for action in the region
- West Midlands Strategy for the Historic Environment 2009 – sets out the priorities for action in the region
- West Midlands Landscapes for Living (2008) - demonstrating how Local Opportunity Mapping for biodiversity in the West Midlands can make a major contribution to achieving national and regional policy objectives and statutory requirements for enhancing biodiversity
- West Midlands Green Infrastructure Prospectus 2007 and Technical Document - sets a high priority for Green Infrastructure Planning and the delivery plan
- West Midlands Regional Concordat (2003) – an agreement between key regional partners that seeks to secure improved quality of life for people in the West Midlands.
- Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food – West Midlands Delivery Plan (Revised 2009) – sets out the key actions for the region in taking forward the Curry report.
- West Midlands Energy Strategy (consultation 2004) – sets out the priorities for the region in achieving the targets outlined in the Energy White Paper.
- West Midlands Health and Well-Being Strategy 2008 - maintaining, enhancing, improving and protecting the health and well-being of people in the West Midlands Region, reducing health inequalities by 2020 within environmental limits, so as not to compromise healthy life for future generations.

- West Midlands Regional Climate Change Action Plan 2007 - sets out key actions, issues and topics, which will lead to the delivery programme.

OPERATING PRINCIPLES

These operating principles underpin all of the Framework. They complement similar principles in other regional strategies. For the Framework to be successful, it is critical that stakeholders endorse and adopt these principles in their day-to-day work on woodland and forestry, under the auspices of the Regional Woodland and Forestry Forum.

Achieving sustainable and integrated growth

Integrated economic, environmental and social benefits should be jointly pursued by all the activities promoted by the Framework; tools such as sustainability appraisals are available to ensure this. Trees, woodland and forestry share with other sectors the desire for viability and a better quality of life. The sector has a long history of applying the principles of sustainable development to day-to-day management. Now it can demonstrate progress through the forest certification and chain of custody processes.

Looking long term

Policy and planning relating to trees should be long term. Woodland and forestry policy, strategy and activity need stability for the long term. Growing trees is a very long-term business; optimum cropping cycles are about 50 years for softwoods and 100 years for broadleaves. Climate change is also long term with its influence on growing timber and wildlife habitats and species. In contrast, much of the policy framework in which the tree, woodland and forestry sector operates is short term.

Being action-focused

The tree, woodland and forestry sector should be action focused. The various parts of the sector must continue to respond to the lead taken by the Framework by generating practical ideas and creating or promoting opportunities, especially at a landscape scale. The Framework contribution to this action-orientated culture includes linking to other regional strategies and supporting the gathering of information, planning and evaluating those roles that are best done at regional level.

Becoming integrated

Trees, woodland and forestry should be integrated, whether by connecting producer to consumer, bringing woodland and forestry together with other sectors, joining up urban and rural areas, linking woodland with other habitats, joining up advice at the point of delivery, or involving collaborations between businesses to be more efficient and effective.

Delivering value for money

Projects supported by public funds should continue to assess their value for money but pay equal attention to economic, environmental and social impacts.

Being knowledge-based

All tree, woodland and forestry sector activities should be based on the business principles of sound research and knowledge. Wherever possible, tree, woodland and forestry sector activity should continue to gather and make available information and data, and share good practice within and between regions.

Raising awareness

Practitioners in the sector should act as advocates for trees, woodland and forestry and the Framework, addressing the low profile and lack of understanding of trees, woodland and forestry in this country.

Respecting environmental assets and designations

The public expects high standards of environmental protection. In day-to-day work, the tree, woodland and forestry sector needs to meet environmental guidelines and standards and to develop best practice that addresses and respects the needs of natural and historic assets, as well as land use and statutory planning designations.

MONITORING PROGRESS

The Framework and the Delivery Plan is routinely monitored and evaluated. The measuring and reporting is carried out on behalf of the West Midlands Woodland & Forestry Forum on an annual basis and these reports can be found at www.growingourfuture.org

Progress on achieving the actions in the Framework will be reported to the Responsible Regional Authority for the development and implementation of the Strategy of the West Midlands. The Framework is one of a number of key regional strategies that are monitored in this way.

Framework activities also contribute to and work in association with activity under other regional strategies, such as the Regional Biodiversity Strategy for the West Midlands.

Progress on the work targets in the Delivery Plan are regularly assessed and reported annually to the West Midlands Woodland and Forestry Forum. This leads to annual modifications to the three-year rolling Delivery Plans to help meet the objectives set out in the Framework.