

**WEST MIDLANDS WOODLAND AND FORESTRY FORUM**  
**Meeting at NFU, National Agricultural Centre**  
**Stoneleigh**  
**16 JULY AT 10am**

**Minutes**

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

The Chair welcomed members, who then introduced themselves. Heather Lucas then outlined the relocation of the NFU to the new building at Stoneleigh which was built by a local Warwick firm, using natural materials and sustainable features where possible.

**2. Progress against actions arising from last meeting**

Members noted the document.

The papers, presentations, minutes are available to view on the Forum website at [www.growingourfuture.org](http://www.growingourfuture.org)

The Chair asked for comments on the new way of informing members following meetings: a bulletin of main points distributed soon after the meeting, minutes published on the Growing Our Future website, and Progress against Actions paper distributed before the next meeting. The Forum agreed that this method of working should be adopted. It was agreed that the glossary of acronyms should be updated on the website.

<b>Action:</b> SR to update glossary of acronyms on website.
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**3. Chairman's Report (*Paper A*)**

With reference to the item on tree safety, Ken Simons reported that trees were seen either as a liability or as an asset, and that the Local Authorities were trying to steer a course between these views. Chris Hastie added that BSI were being too premature and that much more research would be required if consensus in the industry on the tree safety issue was to be achieved. The valuing of trees within the urban landscape was important as were the opportunities provided by trees and woodlands for enriching the environment and quality of life for all. Clear research was needed on the strength of the benefits of trees, rather than mitigating liability for tree safety. Graham Garrett informed the meeting that the industry had written to BSI asking for the draft standard to be delayed, and it was likely that this would happen.

Bill Heslegrave reported that the recent Trees and Climate Change conference in London had produced some interesting information. This included the activity of the Trees and Design Action Group, which is bringing together a range of professionals, including those from the built environment, to devise innovative and practical action for trees in urban areas. Chris Blakeley had seen the importance of trees in the urban landscape being recognised in conferences lately.

It was agreed that a response to the consultation on tree safety would be made on behalf of the forum to ask the process to be delayed until more research was carried out on the subject.

<b>Action:</b> JW to draft Forum response; Members were encouraged to respond too
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**4. Regional Forestry Framework Monitoring Report 2007-2008 & Delivery Plan**

2008-2011 Presentation & Summary - Sara Roberts

Following the monitoring and evaluation of the progress achieved against the Forestry Framework objectives, Sara Roberts reported that the draft of the next three-year rolling delivery plan 2008-2011 had been put together and partner organisations were

encouraged to comment. It would be on [www.growingourfuture.org](http://www.growingourfuture.org) website from August onwards. She distributed the Summary annual monitoring report highlighting the excellent response from stakeholders in the monitoring process, with 103 responses, the majority of which were from the private sector.

A business health-check survey had been put together. Information is also being extracted from the Jaako Poyry study at a regional level. This work would be presented to the forum in due course.

**Action:** If anyone wishes to see a draft of the Delivery Plan 2008-11, please contact Sara Roberts ([sara.roberts@wmra.gov.uk](mailto:sara.roberts@wmra.gov.uk)) or Julia Hall ([julia.hall@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:julia.hall@forestry.gsi.gov.uk))

A discussion then took place on the results from the monitoring process:

- Charles Bridgeman felt there was little encouragement to apply for grants, especially due to the perceived complexity of the EWGS application process. Sara Roberts added that tree nurseries had difficulties in planning for the quantities of trees required ahead. Bill Heslegrave replied that nevertheless, the money available for grants was being well committed.
- Andy Grundy reported that due to Gangmaster Licensing Laws, contractors were no longer allowed to sub-contract, therefore tree planting was mainly being carried out by large contractors.
- Bill Heslegrave informed the meeting that the FC had a new national lead for Woodfuel: Angela Duignan. She had visited the West Midlands region recently and joined in with the Wood Energy task group.
- Chris Day asked why protestors against woodfuel CHP plants were taking the line that they were detrimental to the environment and would industrialise the countryside. Sara Roberts thought this was mainly due to the lack of accurate information and the difficulty of raising awareness. Andy Grundy added that there was an out-migration of retirees to rural areas, and these people were more vocal than the local rural community, and had a “nimby” attitude, whereas the local families were not so against change.
- The forum may need to re-visit how we communicate the work that the RFF is pulling together across the region.

#### 5. National Forest – Sophie Churchill

Sophie Churchill gave a presentation on the work of the National Forest to date and its plans for the future. Since its inception, tree coverage across the area had leapt from 6% to 18% and an investment of £3.5 million Defra funds per annum levered in a total of £62 million external funding. A review of the work of the company over the next 6 years was underway at present. Sophie welcomed comments from members of the forum on this. The main challenges at present were to encourage landowners to plant trees in a climate of expected food shortages, and the planned growth in the region of population by 80,000 people. The NFC was involved in discussion with planners on these issues.

Gesa Reiss reported that for the Great Western Community Forest at Swindon, the increased population had actually benefited the landscape. Chris Day felt there were great opportunities to put woodfuel onto the growth point agenda by talking to the developers. It would be hugely beneficial to the community if poplar could be grown – this could be integrated with wild flower meadows and incorporating public access. Work would also be provided for woodsmen to manage these plantations.

The economic activity in the forest at present consisted of both stand-alone businesses such as supplying woodfuel, and add-on businesses. Mostly these companies were small, but a few young local people with training in forestry were also being encouraged. Chris Blakeley felt it was important for the NFC to have links with key regional programmes such as the Integrated Regional Strategy which would be published in 2009-10. There may also be some Section 106 money available for environmental projects. Bill Heslegrave explained that there would be some real opportunities for the NFC to engage around the Burton Growth Point, as it was a forestry exemplar project (one of three nationally) looking at green infrastructure opportunities in

relation to growth, with special emphasis on trees and woodlands. The NFC was in a good position to be an exemplar and a pilot for projects in the area.

#### 6. Rural Hubs – Henry Lucas

Henry Lucas, the Chair of the Warwickshire Rural Hub gave a presentation on the work of the organisation, which was set up in 2003 and consists of members from rural businesses only (website [www.ruralhub.org.uk](http://www.ruralhub.org.uk)). There are five hubs across the region and their work concentrated on making a difference to the whole rural infrastructure. With their priorities being Food, Rural Tourism, Bio-Energy, Non-Food Crops, Resource and Waste Management, and Agriculture the Hubs hoped to expand the work through the help of RDPE funding to provide capacity building, training and on-farm demonstrations and the creation of a farming and food centre..

Work which had been carried out with the forestry sector included a project to look at trying to increase the financial outputs of woodlands. They had also supported the setting up a woodfuel supply chain in Warwickshire, but after initial enthusiasm were finding it difficult in finding someone to take ownership. They had also asked the NFU why biomass was not used from the start in their new building at Stoneleigh. Charles Bridgeman reported that the CLA tried to take on a similar advocacy and facilitation remit in the region, supported by AWM.

#### 7. England's Trees Woods and Forests – Delivery Plan – Bill Heslegrave

Bill Heslegrave provided some background on the ETWF Strategy which was published last year; and work had now progressed to the Delivery Plan. There had been much input from the West Midlands during the consultation period and this, together with comments from other regions, had resulted in significant changes to the document. The revised draft had been signed off by the National Committee and submitted to Ministers during mid July. It was hoped to get Ministerial endorsement prior to the Parliamentary recess and publication organised for September / October.

Forum members were invited to consider:

- How should RFF delivery take account of the ETWF plan before it is refreshed?
- How extensive should Growing our Future revision be in broad terms?
- Possible ways in which the refreshed Framework can be delivered incorporating ETWF.

<p><b>Action</b> – before next forum meeting, members to be e-mailed asking for comments on the refreshing of the Growing our Future Delivery Plan. This should coincide with the publication of the ETWF Delivery Plan.</p>
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Charles Bridgeman felt that the focus needed to be taken back to forestry rather than trees and that there was no recognition of the reality of forestry being uneconomic. Part of the problem was felt to be over-regulation of the industry. JW explained that there were debates on the title of the strategy, but recognition of urban trees also needed to be included. The issue now should be how to make best use of the strategy.

Martin Sutton explained that in the public sector, funding was obtained most easily in social forestry, and that maybe the private sector could find ways of engaging in social forestry to make it economic. Also, the public sector was funding schemes in woodfuel which would eventually benefit the private sector by being exemplars.

**8. Rural Delivery Programme for England – delivering in the region – Simon West  
Funding opportunities under Axis 1 & 3**

Simon had been on secondment from FC to AWM for the last 9 months, working on funding opportunities from the RDPE. He outlined the grants that may become available through these funds. Most of the opportunities would be in low carbon / biomass projects.

There were also 8 Leader projects around the region with £3 million to use to support community projects. These would be delivered mainly by Local Authorities. Claire Robinson reported that priorities were being identified at the moment and that engagement was needed at this stage as there was the possibility of funding some social access work in this way.

Sophie Churchill expressed concern that Business Link had changed its contact procedure and this could mean that it was not possible to speak to the person with the best knowledge on the subject in question. Ros Burnley, Lantra, asked members to report any problems with Business Link to her as this was part of her remit, but there had been a huge change in the running of Business Link so there shouldn't be many problems. Heartwoods were working on training advisors for Business Link and together with FC were holding a meeting with them shortly.

**9. Woodfuel Supply Chain – Andy Grundy (Paper B)**

Andy Grundy explained that firewood logs were still and would continue to be the biggest product in woodfuel economically. The economics had moved the woodfuel market forward recently as fuel prices had increased.

Andy outlined the West Midlands Woodfuel Supply Chain Project and a bid for RDPE funding through Axis 1 Environmental Technologies had recently been submitted. The project seeks to develop the woodfuel industry through cluster activity across the whole region, reducing the carbon footprint of the area and helping the rural economy, whilst contributing to the regional target of bringing an additional c 230,000 tonnes of woodfuel into production (the national target is 2 million tonnes). There was a need to educate the public, as well as farmers, in forest management, and to get more forestry contractors into the sector. Andy reported that the Biomass Energy Centre would become the main source of information on woodfuel nationally. The government had published a consultation document on renewable energy ([www.berr.gov.uk/energy/sources/renewables/strategy/page43356](http://www.berr.gov.uk/energy/sources/renewables/strategy/page43356)) ; the consultation would continue until September.

**Action:** contact Andy if you wish to know more about the consultation on renewable energy.

There is a five-day international conference on woodfuel, including site visits, at Warwick University 14<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> September. More details can be found on the Heartwoods website.

**10. Trees and Timber – Ros Burnley, Lantra**

Ros Burnley, West Midlands Regional Partnership Manager, and UK Partnership Manager for Trees and Timber, gave a description of Lantra's work in the region and its work with trees and timber nationally.

Lantra is a sector skills council (one of 25 in the country). They ensure that businesses have the skills they need to be competitive. Each sector skills council has the responsibility for carrying out labour market research, developing national occupational standards ensuring that they remain "fit for purpose", liaising with government and other agencies particularly on skills policies and strategies.

They are promoting a 14-19 diploma which takes real industry examples into schools – details are available from Ros. She would also like help with reviewing the National

Occupational Standards for the industry. Job profiling and the review of the standards would be taking place before the end of the year and, after that, the qualification structures and apprenticeship framework would be reviewed. There would be further opportunities to extend the range of occupational standards and qualification structures and pathways in due course, for example in greenwood trades and social forestry.

**Action:** Any interested members who wish to help with these issues / reviews to contact Ros. The industry needs to tell Lantra what they want from the training.  
Sara Roberts, through Judy Walker, to ask the Workforce Development Group to contact Ros concerning these issues.

#### 11. Ancient & Native Woodlands Guidance – Bill Heslegrave (*Paper C*)

BH invited members to feed into the consultation process on this guidance, which was open until 22nd August. He explained that this was “guidance” but would of course be mandatory if related to EWGS funded activity. The Chair felt it was not appropriate for the Forum to feed into the consultation as a group, since it was mostly aimed at the practitioner.

The Chair reported that woodland working was becoming increasingly difficult given the management constraints such as European Protected Species, Habitats Regulations, etc. It has to be acknowledged that many of the forest management guidelines favoured threatened species populations and habitats rather than individuals and the viability and sustainability of their businesses. This may need to be revisited at a future meeting. Richard Sochacki thanked the FC for their work in explaining the new guidelines and how to work with them to open up the window of opportunity to work in woodlands.

Action: Any members who wish to respond to the consultation on the Ancient & Native Woodlands Guidance can do so - see website (<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-7f3ben> )

#### 12. Items for Information – Papers

- a) EWGS update (*Paper D*)
- b) RFF task group reports (*Paper E*)
- c) SNR Update (*Paper F*)

There were no additional comments or queries on these papers.

#### 13. AOB

None

#### 14. Date of next meeting

Wednesday 19 November; Ludlow Food Centre confirmed.

**Action:** any items for the next meeting should be sent to Judith Webb, Sara Roberts or Julia Hall for inclusion on the agenda.