

**WEST MIDLANDS WOODLAND AND FORESTRY FORUM
MEETING 22nd NOVEMBER 2006, 9.45 for 10.00am**

WOOLHOPE VILLAGE HALL, HEREFORDSHIRE

MINUTES

Present:

Andrew Woods	Woodland Industries Task Group
Claire Robinson	Advantage West Midlands
Andrew Blake	AONB Officers
David Ritchie	Chairman
David Jam	Deer Initiative
Judith Leigh	English Heritage
Judith Webb	Forestry and Timber Association
Bill Heslegrave	Forestry Commission
Simon West	Forestry Commission
Steve Cresswell	Forestry Commission
David Howatson	Government Office for the West Midlands
Suzanne Gardner	Sport England
Judy Walker	Small Woods Association
Hayley Campbell-Gibbons	Lantra
Nick Young	Natural England
Sarah Faulkner	National Farmer's Union
Sara Roberts	RFF Delivery Plan Manager
John Blessington	Shropshire County Council
Stephanie Wickison	Staffordshire County Council
Chris Blakeley	West Midlands Regional Assembly
Justin Millward	Woodland Trust
Chris Bray	Worcestershire County Council
Helen Woodman	Worcestershire Wildlife Trust
Andy Grundy	Heartwoods 2
Dave Sykes	Forest Enterprise
David Lovelace	
Chris Stubbs	Woolhope Dome Project Officer

Apologies:

Martin Sutton	Borough of Telford & Wrekin
Ruth Hytch	Cannock Chase AONB
Andrew Heaton	Natural England
Ian Hickman	Forest Enterprise
Sarah Davis	GOWM Public Health Group
Alan Leather	National Forest
Clive Keble	National Forest
Hugh Devlin	National Trust
David Shelley	Ramblers Association
David Sulman	UK Forest Products Association
Andrew Sharkey	Woodland Trust
Jeff Edwards	WM Biodiversity Partnership
Simon Hodgson	Forest Enterprise

1. Welcome and Chair's introduction

The Chairman read out the list of apologies and welcomed members to Woolhope.

2. Minutes of the meeting of 28th June 2006 and matters arising

Amendments to the minutes: Helen Woodman to be added to the list of attendees.

Item 3: WH reported that press releases were to be issued soon regarding the RFF delivery plan and website.

Item 5 : to be discussed under item 6 of the agenda.

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Item 8 : WH updated the forum on the Green Infrastructure Planning Prospectus for the region, produced through the Task Group, which was now complete and in the process of being printed.

Action: *prospectus to be made available to members of the forum.*

Nick Young said that the new Growth Points provided good opportunities, requiring local authorities to work closely with Natural England, and also that the emphasis on green issues had been encouraging.

3. England Forest Industries Partnership - Mapping Study of the Woodland and Forest Sector – Taking forward in the region

Judith Webb gave a presentation on behalf of Simon Hodgson, who was unable to attend the meeting. Judith sits on EFIP for Confor (the Confederation of Forest Industries). She explained that the FC, Defra, Countryside Agency, Lantra, North West Development Agency, Confor, and a two processing companies had put money into the report, the full version of which was available if requested.

The report showed that there were nearly 3,500 businesses in the forestry sector in the West Midlands, employing in excess of 35,000 people.

The full report, looking at England, gives a good overview. England is the second largest market for paper and wood products in Europe and accounts for 1% of employment although there are significant regional differences. It showed that the industry was of national, regional and local importance, but that regions had not taken advantage of what the sector could provide, using only 39% of the resource potential and using only 16% home-grown timber. Therefore the sector needed to grow as a whole.

Proposals in the report:

- to work together as a sector,
- leadership groups needed to be established at national and regional levels.
- initiatives needed to link resource with the market.
- Sector to be promoted, focussing on the impact on social, economic and environmental contributions.
- market share to be grown by developing supply chain initiatives.
- owners to be re-engaged with the market.
- supply chain to be re-connected through better communication.
- unified responses to competitive issues to be developed.
- barriers to growth to be removed, especially in planning
- co-ordination of skills and training.

- responses to climate change to be developed
- regions to be targeted as a basis for sector strategy implementation.
- respond to new opportunities eg bedding, construction, etc.

Conclusion:

- The sector was worth supporting and developing
- Needed to improve partnership working.
- Needed to engage at regional and national levels
- Initiatives that support market development to be developed.
- There were multiple benefits across industry and into quality of life, economic and social agendas.

The summary dealt with the England overview whereas the full report also looked at the regions.

Judith felt the key items to focus on were partnership working / communication, and growing the market. The region already had some leadership in the region with the Woodland Industry Task Group, but that this group would need to look at how to connect with the secondary market. She explained that EFIP were now looking at its next priorities, such as linking with key people in each region to become effective. It was also important to remember that this was not just a rural issue, taking in the whole supply chain, and that this issue had a wider role in the regional agenda.

4. Review of the Regional Economic Strategy – consultation opportunities

Claire Robinson gave a presentation on the review of the Regional Economic Strategy. She explained that, at present, the policy choices were in consultation (until 28th February), and that the document should be finalised in September 2007.

Key findings

- Low productivity was the main cause of the output gap
- Poor performance on skills enterprise performance was around the UK average
- There were major variations in sub-regional performance
- Changing geography of economic activity.

Consultation events / discussions would be held across the region, although there was no timetable as yet for this.

The themes in consultation were: enterprise, innovation, skills, economic activity, quality of life, infrastructure, the role of places, the role of sectors, and broader issues. There were questions under all these headings.

The question was raised as to how flexible the review process would be, for example, picking up on the Stern report on climate change. This would be dealt with by future proofing, although climate change was already in the document.

Bill Heslegrave said that in the current RES, forestry did not receive specific mention, and that he would like through the review to find ways to improve the engagement of forestry with the RES.. There were a lot of

policy themes where there was forestry input, but in relatively small ways. However, overall, forestry does make a difference, especially in rural areas. He stated that he would respond on behalf of the FC to the consultation, and was happy to circulate this response as a basis for individual responses if requested.

There was concern that the task groups were not feeding into the process. Claire explained that although she did not have time to attend meetings, she did see the minutes of them, from which issues needed to be distilled. The Chairman welcomed suggestions to improve links between the forum and task groups.

Action: *Claire Robinson to forward policy update*

Bill Heslegrave to circulate FC response to consultation.

5. Rural Development Plan for England – Regional Implementation Plan

Claire Robinson reported that the plan had been in drafting since July and that the second draft had gone to the European Rural Group (a regional group under the Rural Affairs Forum which is overseeing RIP) for their views. A further draft would then go to the Rural Affairs Forum on December 8th for endorsement. In theory the new RDPE programme would begin in January but delays, primarily over agreement of voluntary modulation with the EU, and a six month period needed anyway for the EU to have the draft programme, meant that in reality it was not likely that the Programme would be approved until late in 2007.

The budget for axes 1 and 3 was £3.4 million, substantially reduced from the last programme, so there is a need to manage expectations accordingly. The next stage of the process was to work out how to make the delivery work.

Bill Heslegrave explained that axis 2 work had been straightforward, as forestry was an integral part of this work, and there had been close liaison with Natural England to ensure it continued to be so. However, axes 1 and 3 were being led by AWM, (replacing the former schemes run by RDS) and although there were potential new opportunities for forestry under these (for example, tourism, wood fuel as part of environmental technologies), it was necessary to provide effective hooks for the forestry sector included in the RIP.

Delivery of the funding would be centred through the Rural Hubs, which posed a challenge as Hubs had not encountered forestry businesses to any extent before. There was a need to build Hub capacity and make connections with the forestry sector. It was a two-way process of communication, which the FC would help facilitate.

Axis 2 covered EWGS and Environmental Stewardship funding. The delay in the RDPE Programme would therefore have implications for delivering grant funding. Therefore, the FC were working hard to approve as many EWGS schemes as possible before the end of December when the current ERDP runs out. Those schemes not approved could be processed to draft contracts but would have to wait for the approval of the new RDPE before being formally approved. As yet the full implications were not known, but in itself the delay should have relatively little impact on Woodland Owners and Managers. Disappointment was expressed that FC grants could be disrupted for a second time in a short period and one

view was expressed that this could finish the EWGS. Bill Heslegrave refuted this and assured the forum that the FC would work with woodland owners/managers and do all they could to minimise the effect of the delay in funding. The RDPE area of the Defra website was sign-posted to members, where there was a helpful question and answer section on EWGS and the likely impacts to it. David Howatson stated that a larger amount of money was going into environmental access, and that EWGS grants were enshrined within axis 2 and therefore it was wrong to suggest that this would mean the end of EWGS.

Disappointment was expressed that the RIP was being judged on current criteria and was not forward-looking enough. David Howatson explained that the new programme was more strategically targeted. The RIP was a flexible document which will need to be looked at again in the light of new strategic directions in late 2007.

The time-scale for the RIP was partly determined by Defra. The document going to Defra in December would not be static and at this time was seen as one for negotiation. If there were substantial changes in RES, the RIP document would be revised accordingly.

There was concern that forestry was mainly included in the annexes of the document. David Howatson explained that most of the detail was in the annexes, with only around 16 pages as the main document.

6. England Forestry Strategy – summary of responses to consultation plus

Draft Strategy headlines

Bill Heslegrave reported that Defra's forestry policy unit had been collating responses to the consultation, which closed on 9th August. They had now produced a preliminary draft of the strategy, which was put to the England Forestry Forum but was not yet in the public domain. A presentation was then given on the key points of the strategy. It was hoped that the strategy would be launched in Spring 2007, with a delivery plan attached, the preparation of which the FC would lead on. He stated that the connection between the Regional Forestry Frameworks and the England Forestry Strategy had been clarified.

It was felt that there was a need for Forest Research to give guidance on what constituted 'the right tree in the right place' (one of the key points) especially with climate change in mind. Bill reassured the forum that this would be a high priority for Forest Research.

7. Woodland Initiatives

Andy Grundy gave a presentation on Heartwoods 2 activities:

- ***Demonstration woodlands,***

The demonstration woodlands were ASNWs or PAWs sites, in a range of ownerships, private and public. Written case studies of the demonstration woodlands would be made, focusing on best practice and including and links with the Wyre Pathfinder project (woodfuel). Deer were a threat to the regeneration of woodlands and an important Heartwoods role is raising public awareness and understanding around deer management and the marketing of venison.

- **Woodfuel,**
Heartwoods was involved with publicity / promotion of woodfuel, linking with the Wyre pathfinder project, and with the AONB on a woodfuel survey, the FSC CoC group, signposting / networking (website, Marches Woodland Forum, Rural hubs).
- **Networking / signposting**
The Heartwoods virtual timber yard would be updated, and the MWI directory updated and merged with the website.
- **Project development**
Heartwoods was involved in promoting local products (Shropshire Hills AONB products) and also regional products. Bio-energy funding would be sought through the RRZ, and funding for the regional implementation of the England Woodfuel Strategy through FC / RDA. They were also involved in developing a UKWA standard for small woodlands, using the Heartwoods demonstration woodlands as a test bed.

Bill Heslegrave gave an update on the Forest of Mercia. Graham Hunt, who had been with the FoM since the beginning in 1989, was leaving to take up another post within Staffordshire. He explained that the partners to the FoM had signed up to continue their support, although with a reduced budget resulting from the end of FC transitional core funding in March 2007 there would now be less emphasis on strategic working and more focus on delivery on the ground. Close liaison with the Green Arc Project would help to cover necessary strategic work. Graham had also been involved with many other projects within the region including Heartwoods and the Wood Energy Task Group. The Forum thanked Graham for all he had done. Graham would be replaced by a Community Forest Manager.

8. **St Regis report and recommendations - info paper and Q&A**

Judith Webb gave a presentation on the report, which was based on the paper provided.

9. **Information papers :-**

- **RSS Phase II Revision**
Chris Blakeley said that the public consultation would start in January and run until mid March. Anyone could contribute views.
- **EWGS**
Andrew Woods asked how the transfer of FWPS to the FC was going as he had evidence that payments were late this year. Bill Heslegrave explained that these payments would be made shortly, the delay being due to late delivery of vital IT equipment at Natural England, who are responsible for the 2006 payments. The transfer of legacy FWPS and FWS to the FC would be administered by GLOS (new computer system developed to administer the EWGS scheme) and was now scheduled to take place in March in time to process the 2007 payments. Mapping issues would be dealt with by the FC in the future.

- **RFF**
Andrew Woods raised the point of how feedback from task groups to the forum should be managed. Sara Roberts agreed that communications needed to be improved. The task group update in the paper on this item gave a broad overview of the groups, and the minutes from the meetings were placed on the RFF website.
- **Natural England**
Nick Young made available the Strategic Revision document and a paper handout summarising Natural England's structure in WM region.
- **Biodiversity Delivery Plan**
Justin Millward introduced the paper. He reported that the first meeting of the new Woodland Biodiversity task group would be held on January 25th in the FC Worcester office. Anyone wishing to be on the task group should contact Sara Roberts. Terms of Reference were being drawn up for the group.

10. A.O.B./Next meeting

There was no other business.

The dates for next year's meetings would be Wednesday 27th June and Wednesday 21st November 2007.

11. The Woolhope Dome Project – presentation by Chris Stubbs, Woolhope Dome Project Officer

A presentation was given by Chris Stubbs, Woolhope Dome Project Officer. He gave an overview of this partnership project concentrating on priority habitats and species within this Biodiversity Enhancement Area: unimproved grasslands, woodlands, species rich hedgerows, rivers and streams, orchards (including 11 SSSIs).

David Lovelace then gave a short presentation on the SITA project which was funding the updating of the ancient woodland register in Herefordshire and looking at wood pasture and parkland. He gave a brief history of Haugh Wood which, in the past, was intensively managed, but with more wood pasture than high forest.

Following lunch, a visit was made to Haugh Wood, where Dave Sykes, Forest Enterprise, and Chris Stubbs, talked about PAWs restoration and the Woolhope Project.