

**WEST MIDLANDS WOODLAND AND FORESTRY FORUM  
MEETING AT GREENWOOD CENTRE, IRONBRIDGE  
27<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2007 AT 10am**

**MINUTES**

**1. Introduction from the Chair**

Attendees introduced themselves.

**2. Minutes of 22<sup>nd</sup> November meeting**

These were agreed as an accurate record of the last meeting.

**3. Matters arising**

Sara Roberts reported that the EFIP partnership had met recently and had engaged a consultant to draft an action plan which should develop greater links and value for the regions. Sara has also been invited to join the EFIP steering group.

**4. England's Trees Woods and Forests – post-launch views and forward to delivery.**

Rod Leslie (Head of, Programme Group, Forestry Commission, England), gave a presentation on the new strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests.. Copies of the document were available to take away.

- The strategy is published by Defra and provides the Government's mandate for its involvement in forestry in England. It is a high level strategy.
- It was launched by Minister Barry Gardiner on 20<sup>th</sup> June with a community group at an early brownfield restoration site.
- Development of the strategy took over 2 years and involved wide stakeholder engagement, ranging from a core steering group to full public consultation, attracting over 200 responses.
- The strategy includes a major shift in emphasis from more traditional rural recreation to a new social agenda.
- There is now a much clearer definition of goals eg SSSI targets, Keepers of Time, Woodland Bird Index
- Climate change features prominently as does woodfuel.
- There is increased focus on support for woodland businesses.
- The delivery plan will now be developed, led by FC and Natural England. This will mainly be regionally based and outcome-led.
- The strategy is for 10 years, with a time horizon of 50 years, reflecting the long timescale in forestry.

The Chairman thanked Rod and there followed a discussion.

It was felt that the strategy had raised the profile of forestry within Defra, and a greater general awareness and backing for what forestry can deliver. It was emphasised that the delivery plan would need to be smart. Rod Leslie said that, although the strategy should influence the Regional Forestry Frameworks (RFFs), the RFFs should also influence national policy. Regional differences would need to be taken into account, for example half of undermanaged woods in England are in the two southern regions. On a regional basis, he advised the Forum to look at other organisations' agendas and at multipurpose land use, with trees being included as part of the delivery mechanism (for example, recreation, flood defences, renewables (woodfuel), biodiversity etc).

Nick Young reported that good progress had been made in addressing these issues in some regional strategies but this needed to continue through responding to other regional consultations.

## 5. Regional Forestry Framework delivery plan and monitoring report

Sara Roberts, the RFF Action Plan Manager, gave a presentation and distributed a summary paper.

- There was an excellent geographical and sectoral spread to the 54 responses, including more responses from the private sector (possibly in part due to the existence of the Industry Task Group).
- The task groups had driven their own programmes, for example, the Woodland Opportunity Mapping project
- For the first time, the process had tried to quantify resources.
- The Forum had contributed greatly, especially with responses to strategy consultations, to become a voice for forestry in the region. Sara thanked members for their commitment, enthusiasm and investment.
- There would be a major review of the Framework after five years
- The summary and new delivery plan would be available from the website, as well as a fuller annual report next month.

The Chairman thanked Sara Roberts.

## 5. Regional Economic Strategy

Claire Robinson, AWM, gave a presentation and made available to the meeting a few copies of the RES consultation document.

- The GVA for the West Midlands is behind the national average, 80% of which was due to economic structure and productivity and 20% to economic exclusion.
- Some of the key messages of the consultation draft were: addressing climate change, the need to be aligned with other strategies, the approach to be balanced between investing in success and tackling need; skills issues, infrastructure and quality of life, and to build on the zone, corridor and cluster approaches.
- Although the vision of the strategy had not changed significantly, the structure had been altered to focus on business, place, people and a powerful voice, with actions for each:
  - Business: growing businesses, improving competitiveness, exploiting knowledge.
  - Place: sustainable communities, improving infrastructure and Birmingham competing as an international city.
  - People: sustainable living, raising demand for skills, developing skills for employment.
  - Powerful voice: improving the evidence base for policy, engaging with UK, EU and international decision-makers, improving our image and marketing in the region.
- Six core indicators are proposed to measure progress towards achieving the vision – these include carbon emissions and GVA.
- The spatial focus will remain primarily on existing targets eg regeneration zones, but doesn't differentiate between urban and rural. There is inclusion of an indicative action that recognises the importance of the land-based sector.
- The consultation on the draft WMES closes on 31<sup>st</sup> July and the launch of the new Regional Economic Strategy should take place in November.
- A sustainability appraisal is ongoing (information is available on the website: [www.advantagewm.co.uk/phase-4.html](http://www.advantagewm.co.uk/phase-4.html))
- Questions to answer when responding to the consultation include:
  - Are the vision and objectives right?
  - Include any ideas for indicative actions.
  - Is the balance of objectives correct?
  - Has the right focus for the strategy been identified?
  - What role should regional, sub-regional and local partnerships play in delivering this strategy?

There followed a discussion on the consultation document. It was felt that the hooks in the document which could be used as links to forestry in the action plan, were tenuous (a mention of 'natural assets').

The Chairman thanked Claire for attending meetings and explaining the issues. He summed up the views of the Forum by stating that the Forum would like stronger links and acknowledgement of the importance of the role of forestry within the region. There should be a clear hook on which a set of actions to be included in the action plan could be hung.

**Action:** Bill Heslegrave and Sara Roberts to write a response to the consultation on behalf of the Forum, to be distributed to members for comments (there will be a short response time on this).

## **6. England Woodfuel Strategy**

Rod Leslie gave a presentation on and made available the England Woodfuel Strategy.

- The FC had been commissioned by the Government to produce this strategy which was launched at the end of March, at Blaise Nursery, Bristol by Minister Barry Gardiner.
- There is a potential for an additional 2m tonnes of woodfuel from management of woodlands and a similar amount from recovered wood and arboricultural arisings, but it would require a doubling in area of non-FC woodland in management and a major programme of awareness, community engagement and skills and capacity development
- There is a strong regional emphasis – for funding, local delivery, working with RDAs and regional / sub-regional partnerships. There is already a lot of enthusiasm and activity but this needs to be harnessed to achieve the best results.
- The Government will not subsidise the industry but will invest through capital support (boilers and supply chain), technical support (Biomass Energy Centre website run by Forest Research which is struggling to keep up with demand) and by raising awareness.
- Initial activity will come from owners of managed woodlands who are underachieving. Many undermanaged woodlands are situated in the SE and SW regions, although there is potential everywhere.
- Most of the resource is located where energy choice is limited ie where there is no mains gas.
- Work is ongoing on demonstration woodlands together with NE to show woodland at various stages after felling showing regeneration. A poster has also been produced to send to schools (RL invited members to take copies with them).
- The opportunities are to expand existing businesses, realise the full potential of woods already in management and the skills of experienced woodfuel businesses and to join up the supply chain for new end-users.
- There was potential to increase wood production by 60% in England.

The Chairman thanked Rod Leslie for an excellent presentation.

## **7. Woodfuel – progress on implementation in the West Midlands**

Andy Grundy, of Heartwoods gave a presentation based on the paper distributed with the agenda.

The lack of Short-Rotation Coppice planting as compared to Miscanthus was pointed out. Rod Leslie replied that new planting of woodland / short-rotation coppice for woodfuel was not being pushed at present as there was a large amount of under-managed woodland which could supply the sector.

Judy Walker informed the meeting of a Green Wood Centre / Royal Forestry Society scoping seminar the next day, "Opening the Woodland Gate", which was a national campaign to remove the barriers to woodland management to be launched in the autumn.

She asked anyone who was interested in attending this to see her after the meeting.

Judith Webb expressed concern that the industry didn't have the skills and capacity to cope with any significant growth in demand for woodland management activity, and that forestry & business training & support needed to be appropriate and forward looking enough for such new demands

## **9. Rural Development Programme for England – delivering in the region**

Claire Robinson updated the meeting on the RDPE.

- The launch of the national programme is expected autumn / winter, with an allocation for the West Midlands of approximately £8m per annum.
- Best opportunities for forestry will come under the environmental technologies, food & drink and tourism clusters.
- Contacts:
  - Lead for Bioenergy WM, Biomass, RDPE II  
Nick Maskery (leaving in August)
  - Lead for Environmental Technologies  
Ralph Hepworth ([ralphhepworth@advantagewm.co.uk](mailto:ralphhepworth@advantagewm.co.uk))
  - Head of Rural Renaissance: Ian Baker ([ianbaker@advantagewm.co.uk](mailto:ianbaker@advantagewm.co.uk))

Bill Heslegrave explained that there would be both a RDPE Partners Group and a Stakeholders Group. FC would be represented on both groups but the Stakeholder Group would also have the opportunity for another representative from the forestry sector to take part. This might be a ConFor representative or someone else from this Forum.

**Action:** Bill Heslegrave to discuss with Judith Webb.

#### **10. Items for Information - Papers**

- a) EWGS update
- b) RFF task group reports
- c) Woodland Opportunities Maps
- d) Heartwoods

These were taken as read. There were no further comments on these papers.

#### **11. Forum Chair – thanks to the outgoing Chairman, welcome to the new.**

##### **Proposals for Vice-Chairman**

Bill Heslegrave told the meeting that David Ritchie had chaired the forum for five years, from its inception, progressing it to become an important group in the region. He thanked David on behalf of the members for his enthusiasm, commitment, expertise, time and support. A presentation was made to David in recognition of his work.

David thanked the members and felt that they had come together as a team.

Bill Heslegrave then handed over to the Chair of the RFF Delivery Plan Steering Group and Forum Management Committee, Nic Cole, who explained the process undergone for filling the vacancy of Chairman. Nominations had been requested, from which two strong candidates came forward. They were asked to provide evidence of their competencies and skills, against a specification for the role, which the management committee had discussed and reached the decision that Judith Webb should be offered the position, subject to the agreement of the Forum meeting.

David Ritchie asked for ratification from the meeting and with no dissenters he duly declared Judith Webb as the new Chair of the Forum

There had been no nominations for the vice-chair position but Bill Heslegrave said there were some negotiations pending.

**Action:** BH to update the forum on the position of vice-chair at the next meeting.

#### **12. A.O.B.**

Justin Millward reported that the next meeting of the task group for trees woods and forest biodiversity, may be of interest to more forum members. It would take place on 1<sup>st</sup> October and would concentrate on parkland, woodland biodiversity and ancient trees. If anyone was interested in attending they should contact Gaynor Birbeck ([gaynor.birbeck@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:gaynor.birbeck@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)) or Justin Millward ([JustinMilward@woodland-trust.org.uk](mailto:JustinMilward@woodland-trust.org.uk)) by 13<sup>th</sup> July.

#### **13. Date of next meeting**

21<sup>st</sup> November – venue to be confirmed

Meeting closed at 1.30pm

In the afternoon, there was a tour of the Greenwood Centre new development and woodfuel boiler.