

**WEST MIDLANDS WOODLAND AND FORESTRY FORUM**  
**MEETING 29<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER**  
**INNOVATION CENTRE, CHASEWATER**

**MINUTES**

**1. Welcome and Introduction from the Chair**

Judith Webb introduced herself and the vice-chair, Sophie Churchill, this being her first meeting as chair. Members were welcomed and asked to introduce themselves. A total of 31 members were in attendance.

**2. Minutes of the meeting of 27<sup>th</sup> June**

These were agreed to be a true record of the last meeting.

**3. Matters arising**

3.1 Those who had contributed to the forum's response on the RES Policy Choices consultation were thanked for their prompt action.

3.2 *Regional Economic Strategy Update* (paper distributed prior to meeting for information)

Chris Blakeley informed the forum that the launch of "Connecting to Success" on 10<sup>th</sup> December would be a joint launch between the RDA and Regional Assembly, and that this pattern would be repeated in future in respect of planning issues.

Sara Roberts anticipated that the forum would want to part of the process of consultation on the delivery framework (website:

[http://www.advantagewm.co.uk/wmes/articles/Images/Draft%20WMES%20Delivery%20Framework\\_tcm15-8382.pdf](http://www.advantagewm.co.uk/wmes/articles/Images/Draft%20WMES%20Delivery%20Framework_tcm15-8382.pdf)).

Bill Heslegrave said that the revised Economic Strategy was better from a forestry (also environmental and rural) point of view, than the last. The draft delivery framework could be viewed on the AWM website

**Actions:**

- website link to be circulated to forum members ([http://www.advantagewm.co.uk/wmes/articles/Images/Strategy%20atest%20draft%20081107\\_tcm15-8383.pdf](http://www.advantagewm.co.uk/wmes/articles/Images/Strategy%20atest%20draft%20081107_tcm15-8383.pdf)).
- Sara Roberts to co-ordinate a response from the group late January to the delivery framework.

3.3 Chris Blakeley reported the launch of the Phase 3 draft project plan of the RSS on 27<sup>th</sup> November by the Planning Partnership. Comments on this can be made until 18<sup>th</sup> Jan. It sets out the process that the regulatory planning body is going to go through in phase 3 (looking at quality of environment issues including flood risk, energy, green belt and minerals) and critical rural services; this can be found at [www.wmra.gov.uk/rssphase3](http://www.wmra.gov.uk/rssphase3).

Forestry and woodland policies will be revised as well and there will be opportunities down the line for wider consultation.

3.4 *RDPE update* (paper for information)

Bill Heslegrave reported that a lot of work had taken place over the last year to achieve effective hooks in the programme for forestry. He felt that the end

result was satisfactory. The programme was unlikely to be approved before January and possibly even later. The implications for grant funding under Axis 2 were potentially difficult if delay in approval continued beyond January. Negotiations were taking place between the FC, Defra and the EU to ensure that forestry programmes (in particular Woodland Creation Grant and Woodland Improvement Grant for SSSIs) could go ahead this winter.

Simon West was on secondment to AWM until end March as one of their Rural Development managers, focussing on the delivery plan for RDPE Axis 1 Environmental Technologies cluster. Amanda Pearce from AWM was backfilling his post with FC, on secondment from Natural England. Sara Roberts added that the Leader programme was concerned with social community activity at a local level and that expressions of interest for Leader groups were being put forward at the present time. There is a need to highlight the opportunities with Leader for trees, woods and forestry.

#### **4. England's Trees, Woods and Forests Delivery Plan**

(paper for discussion)

Bill Heslegrave introduced the paper. There would be opportunities for stakeholder engagement in the delivery plan, which was in outline at present, and an important role for the task groups to input into the process. Nic Cole (Chairman of the RFF Delivery Plan Steering Group) and Chris Blakeley, from our region contributed to the recent Issues Workshop in Bristol.

It was imperative that the plan did not constrain the delivery of the RFF and to that end there had been a meeting focussing on the plan's synergy and connections with RFFs.

Sophie Churchill said that Paul Hill-Tout had indicated there might be slight delay with the delivery plan due to staff sickness, but this would be minimised. Chris Blakeley reinforced the point that the strategy was as equally focused on urban areas as rural. The strategy was not wholly owned by Defra, and not wholly delivered by FC, showing the shift towards multi-government department policies, which reflected the spatial planning system.

<b>Action:</b> Bill Heslegrave to keep Forum updated with progress.
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#### **5. Woodfuel development progress**

5.1 Bill Heslegrave informed the forum that the West Midlands had taken an opportunity to bid into the new FC Woodfuel Challenge Fund (a national fund) and had been successful in securing £50k over two financial years (starting this year). This grant would be shared with Forest Research who would be looking into the technical side of woodfuel harvesting. The bid was focused on taking forward the Woodfuel Pathfinder Project at Wyre Forest. This work would help to inform both the bid being prepared for the RDPE programme and the 'Grow with Wyre' HLF project.

5.2 The RDPE bid, currently in the form of a concept paper, would chiefly address support for and development of the woodfuel supply chain. When the full bid was developed, it would be shared with a range of stakeholders. The aim is a successful bid to produce a step-change in the activity on woodfuel in the West Midlands. Appropriate references and hooks for the

forestry sector would be included so further bids could be sought (with an approach similar to *Woodland Renaissance* in SW).

- 5.3 Andy Grundy provided more detail for the Wyre Woodfuel Pathfinder project. Woodfuel training would be developed for private sector woodfuel 'champions' who would then be able to cascade a consistent message to woodland owners in the wider Wyre. They would assess the woodfuel resource in the area and look to engage landowners using local knowledge, information from old FC grant schemes, forestry workers etc. There would also be dissemination events, and web pages linked to the Heartwoods website.

The Pathfinder had close links with *Grow With Wyre*, which overall includes many project strands, one of which is Re-energise the Wyre, promoting woodfuel installations. There are strong links with the Shropshire Hills AONB team and its work on woodfuel.

The woodfuel group in Warwickshire is focusing on developing markets. Barriers to installations would also be investigated. There was a need to be involved at the design stage of new developments to ensure the architects and planners were informed. One Local Authority has made progress by stating that any new installation should be biomass-powered unless there was a good reason for an alternative.

#### 5.4 Discussion:

- 5.4.1 One challenge identified was the lack of awareness amongst the general public on woodfuel installations combined with opposition from community action groups, who perceive detrimental environmental impact.
- 5.4.2 Another was the lack of flagship projects in the region to prove that the technology works and that the fuel is readily available and there is a reliable supply.
- 5.4.3 Once the knowledge base has increased, large energy companies could become interested.
- 5.4.4 It was felt that woodfuel would create competition at the bottom end of the market which at present is only served by Kronospan, enabling them to pay low prices, usually at a loss to the woodland owner. This competition should push prices up, enabling woodland owners to bring woodlands back into management. However, there would need to be confidence in a long-term market.
- 5.4.5 Bill Heslegrave informed the Forum that there was not as much publicity on woodfuel as for other fuel sources. A DVD had been prepared nationally on woodfuel, and rapid progress was being made in the regions. Andy Grundy said there was movement in the right direction as the prices for other fuels were rising.
- 5.4.6 Chris Blakeley thought that the region had a good opportunity to get the market linked into supply chains with CHP, as the region was heading for its largest growth rate in housing and infrastructure in the next 20 years. He felt the Forum had a role in persuading policy-makers and councils to install CHP in new developments. There would also be ten eco-towns nationally (3 sites had been identified in the West Midlands).
- 5.4.7 There was some concern that management of woodlands could be dominated by the woodfuel agenda, which needed to be seen as

only one marketing opportunity within woodland management solutions.

- 5.4.8 Chris Blakeley suggested that appropriate Forum issues could be taken to regional advisory/working groups to facilitate further action.

**Actions:**

- Chair, Bill Heslegrave, Sara Roberts and Task Group Chairs to discuss the approach of taking issues from the Forum to regional advisory groups.
- Warwickshire Biomass Market Development document to be distributed with minutes.

**6. Task Group Updates**

- 6.1 Sara Roberts explained how the task groups and work programmes contributed to delivering the objectives of the RFF. The delivery plan was reported to be working well with good feedback. Information on the delivery plan and the RFF can be found on the website [www.growingourfuture.org](http://www.growingourfuture.org). The progress of the task groups was outlined in the paper distributed. The Chair thanked Sara and the chairs of the task groups for their work.
- 6.2 The Wood Energy Task Group was looking for someone from the private sector to sit on the Woodfuel Pathfinder and Heartwoods Steering Groups. It was felt that confusion could arise from the different woodfuel groups and the number of projects in existence and that it may be difficult for members to engage with all those of interest to them.
- 6.3 Judy Walker reported that the Workforce Development Group was running a £300k programme called Woodworks. Courses are VTS funded courses available to all working in forestry or woodland related businesses in the West Midlands Region. For information on courses see the Green Wood Centre website <http://www.greenwoodcentre.org.uk> or contact the providers:  
Walford & North Shropshire College – Helen Perry - 01939 262154  
Green Wood Centre - Mary Lewis - 01952 432769

**Action:** e-mail Woodworks web-site address to members soon after the meeting.

**7. Initiatives**

**7.1 Heartwoods**

Andy Grundy gave an update on the progress of Heartwoods, reporting that there were five areas of work currently being concentrated on:

- Heartwoods Directory update (anyone wishing to be added to this should contact Andy)
- Production of an E-Newsletter (which members can sign up to receive)
- Woodland biodiversity case studies (which should be uploaded onto the website by Christmas)
- Woodfuel
- Chain of custody certification of small woodlands (an FSC programme – for details see [www.fsc-uk.org/about/news/45/new--fsc-standard-for-chain-of-custody-certification/](http://www.fsc-uk.org/about/news/45/new--fsc-standard-for-chain-of-custody-certification/))

## 7.2 Forest School

Susannah Podmore, Forest Education Initiative (FEI) Co-ordinator for England, gave a presentation on Forest School and the FEI.

There are 35 FEI cluster groups in England. In the West Midlands, there are currently clusters in Worcestershire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Herefordshire, Birmingham and the Black Country.

[www.foresteducation.org.uk](http://www.foresteducation.org.uk)

Forest School is based on a Scandinavian idea brought over in the mid-1990s, offering young people regular opportunities to visit a woodland and do practical activities to promote confidence and self-esteem. The new FC West Midlands Forest School WIG grant will spend £180k over the next 3 years (2008-11). It was launched on 5<sup>th</sup> October, with a wide range of organisations attending a seminar. Workshops in 5 counties were then held with a consultant who is available to help with the application process. The aim is to involve every county. The grants will pay for training costs, supply cover, capital costs, equipment, tree work and insurance. The deadline for grant for 08/09 is 31<sup>st</sup> Dec 2007. The applications will be judged in January 2008, with the work of successful applications to be completed by Feb 2009.

### *Discussion:*

- 7.2.1 Chris Hastie said that a play strategy was being developed in one of the Warwickshire district councils and asked if this could tie in. Susannah would put him in touch with the Warwickshire Forest School co-ordinator.
- 7.2.2 Judith Webb gave an example in Wales where the woodland owner started the process and had invited schools to use the wood.
- 7.2.3 Nikki Davies reported enquiries from schools in the Black Country wanting to use sites where trees had been planted recently.
- 7.2.4 Judy Walker reported on the success of a scheme in Telford which was working with children at risk of exclusion, raising their confidence so that they are willing to learn when back in the classroom.
- 7.2.5 Charles Bridgeman felt it was important within the Forest School programme to inform children of why woodlands are managed.

<b>Action:</b>	Application forms for the Forest School WIG are available from Wendy Edgerton (01584 877544) or from the forest school website ( <a href="http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-76QBUIW">www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-76QBUIW</a> ) – closing date for applications 31 <sup>st</sup> December 2007.
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## 7.3 Gaining Added Value for Timber in Europe (GATE)

Following the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding by the Welsh Assembly and the West Midlands Regional Assembly, Bill, Judith and Sara had held a joint meeting with Welsh FC colleagues. Looking at potential closer collaboration, Mike Over and Chris Edwards had been invited to the Forum meeting to provide an insight into their successful INTERREG project, Gaining Added Value for Timber in Europe (GATE).

More information on GATE website [www.gate-project.org](http://www.gate-project.org)

**7.3.1 Discussion:**

7.3.1.1 David Thorpe pointed out that in some European countries there was considerable public / private sector ownership of timber and processing companies, making for stronger viability.

7.3.1.2 Chris Edwards said that it was important to think of wood fibre as a whole, and not hardwood / softwood when deciding on focus of a group such as this.

7.3.1.3 Charles Bridgeman felt that this approach would greatly benefit the private sector in this region.

7.3.1.4 Diane Roberts added that she had attended a meeting with EU Connects (Julia Speight), based at the Regional Partnership Centre in Birmingham. They provide a regional resource to support the development of bids into European funding programmes; providing a co-ordinated approach to trans-national funding in the region. The centre aims to build the capability and capacity of organisations in the West Midlands to develop, win and manage good projects. Chris Blakeley reported that there was also a regional office in Brussels.

**Action:** Members gave endorsement for the Chair, Sara Roberts and Bill Heslegrave to explore such collaborative work further.

**8. The National Forest – a presentation by the Chief Executive**

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

**9. The Innovation Centre – a brief introduction**

Hilary Foxley, Development Officer for the Innovation Centre, gave a brief presentation on how she is hoping to develop the centre to its full potential. The Centre had already run children's workshops, family learning days and temporary exhibitions. Hilary left some conference packs for interested members.

**10. A.O.B.**

10.1 Minutes – members to think about how they would like the minutes presented for discussion at the next meeting. It was suggested that a list of members should be included with the minutes. And that a briefing note system would also be developed – especially to help those unable to attend the forum meeting.

10.2 The agenda of this Forum had been put together covering business issues and giving a flavour of the range of different activities and projects that were going on in the region. The Chair invited presentations for future meetings.

10.3 Chris Blakeley stated that the Forum would also need to consider how it would fit into the emerging regional structure, post Sub National Economic Review.

10.4 Charles Bridgeman thought that access to information to get up to speed on topical issues would be useful.

10.5 Richard Hammersley reminded members of the People's £50 Million bid for the Black Country Urban Park and asked members to consider voting for it ([www.thepeoples50million.org.uk](http://www.thepeoples50million.org.uk)) and to spread the word in their organisations.

10.6 Judith Webb reported that she had been to the FC seminar in London on climate change. A pack including a CD had been produced, and the information would be available on the FC website shortly.

**Action:**

- Anyone wishing to give a presentations at future meetings to contact the Chair
- Sara Roberts to produce up date /briefing note for forum members which could be easily distributed by them to others within their organisations
- Bill Heslegrave to distribute climate change packs to forum when available

**11. Future meeting dates and venues**

Meetings would be held in June and November 2008 – dates to follow.

The aim was to hold meetings in different parts of the region.

The June meeting would be held in Warwickshire and in Shropshire in November.

Following lunch, David Thorpe gave a presentation to members on Treenergy Ltd, and breaking down some of the barriers surrounding woodfuel solutions.