

WEST MIDLANDS WOODLAND AND FORESTRY FORUM
Meeting 15 December 2009
At the Business Link Offices,
Quinton Business Park, Birmingham

Draft Minutes

1) Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed members, who introduced themselves.

2) Progress against Actions arising from last meeting

Sara Roberts reminded members that the full minutes of meetings would be on the Growing our Future website (<http://www.growingourfuture.org>) with a summary of the key points to be circulated after the meeting.

Actions from last meeting

These had all been carried out or were on the agenda for this meeting.

Judith Webb reported that the Tree Safety website was still not live. The guidelines would probably be launched in September 2010, to tie in with National Tree Week.

3) Business Link

David Ledbury, the Business Link director for land-based and rural sectors, welcomed members to Business Link West Midlands. Business Link WM employs about 260 staff across the region, with around 60 advisers in the field visiting businesses on a one-to-one basis. They expect to have contact with 78,000 businesses this year and are keen to work with the organisations represented at the forum meeting. David offered to update members at the next meeting on progress.

The Going for Growth tender went out last week, looking at business mentoring, feasibility studies and financial appraisals.

Action: Document to be distributed to members.

Action: Members to contact David if they wish to engage with their supplier's database.

There was a discussion about supporting small businesses in gaining grants. Small Woods Association was helping in this process, teaching people how to apply for grants, rather than just doing it for them. These people can also be directed to Business Link for additional skills that they can offer.

4) Regional Forestry Economic Baseline for the West Midlands

Claire Robinson explained that the evidence base needed to be refreshed as, since the last report, the Regional Forestry Framework had been refreshed, the EFIP report had been produced and more evidence gathering within the forest industry was needed. The South-West region had carried out the same exercise using the same consultants, so there are now two comparable reports for regions. The report is restricted to the timber market, with a quick look at tourism; it does not deal with other subjects such as biodiversity (the South-West report did look at this to some extent).

The work included an exercise to find companies involved in the forestry sector. A workshop was held to share the findings of the report and to get feedback. One finding was that a lot of the primary and secondary processing of wood is happening in the urban area of the region. There are clear differences between how the sector feels they are represented in the South-West and the West Midlands. There was a request from the private sector in the West Midlands to have more meaningful engagement.

The recommendations of the report fall under three headings: the need for further evidence / research, recommendations around market opportunities, and Once the report is final, it will be on the website so that it can be seen in more detail. It will be used to inform the RFF refresh, and to improve regional structures to aid linkages with the supply chain, as well as informing future regional strategies. The directory could also be released to Heartwoods to improve their directory.

- A discussion followed on the large number of self-employed people in the forestry sector who were not included in this report. It was suggested that the APF was the ideal event to engage with them. Claire explained that the work done on finding small businesses in this sector during the compilation of this report was important as national statistics for contractors are not available. Another part of the sector which had not been looked at was arboricultural businesses, although forestry nurseries had been included.
- Nic Cole reported that a strong message had come out of an RDPE meeting that smaller grants needed to be available with less bureaucracy involved because of the fragmented nature of woodlands and woodland ownership in the region.
- There was a request that the report make clear the importance of other aspects of forestry (ie in addition to timber and tourism) and refer back to the earlier study, which was still useful.
- Bill Heslegrave was keen to find a way to supplement the report with these other dimensions and including new ones such as Green Infrastructure's economic benefit. He thanked AWM for taking the lead on this study.
- The discussion then turned to woodfuel and the study's ability to inform the growth of this industry in the region. Nick Maskery reported that he had offered to talk to Natural England advisers about woodfuel so that they were aware of the opportunities when meeting with farmers. It was felt that private woodland owners needed more advisers they could trust to help them, rather than more grants.
- Steve Vaux informed the meeting that Biojoule would be looking to provide a market for low grade timber in the region for local use, but that this would only be driven by the higher price of oil and renewable heat obligations and incentives. Karen Russell pointed out that on the processing side of the sector, there are some businesses which have a tradition of importing timber and are unlikely to change this practice and so will not engage with the local market.
- Some rewording of the document needs to take place to clarify the figure for the annual cut relative to the annual increment.

Members were encouraged to look at the full report which would be put onto the AWM and FC websites, and circulated to members.

Action:	Any further thoughts on this discussion to be e-mailed to , copied to Julia (julia.hall@forestry.gsi.gov.uk).
Action:	Full report to be circulated to members.

5) **West Midlands Regional Forestry Framework – Refresh**

Sara Roberts informed the meeting that the refreshed framework and a new delivery plan would be live from April 2010. It will be web-based, so there is no limit to the number of case studies which can be included.

Meetings with key stakeholders had been held, including the Regional Advisory Committee and the Delivery Planning Steering Group, although wider engagement will be discussed.

Action: Members were invited to comment on the aims, objectives and themes (deadline of 22nd January). Send these to Sara Roberts or Julia Hall (julia.hall@forestry.gsi.gov.uk).

7) **Climate Change – Resilience and opportunities**

Mark Broadmeadow (Forestry Commission) gave a presentation on climate change and the way in which the forestry sector could engage with this subject. He explained how woodlands would bring abatement in the long term which other measures can't deliver.

A discussion followed on how landowners would be persuaded to plant trees; it would have to be economically viable to invest in a long-term crop.

Sophie Churchill said that the National Forest would find it helpful if they could lease the land for carbon benefits to private companies.

Planting new woodland was discussed, but bringing unmanaged woodland back into management would reduce the carbon sink and would appear as a carbon cost, so there were issues in pursuing this line of action.

Action: Mark's presentation will be made available to forum members

8) **Future Forest – European perspective**

Helen Cariss (Forestry Commission Wales / Futureforest) gave a presentation on an INTERREG 4c Project looking at how trees and woodlands can adapt to the effects of climate change. She outlined the project which involves seven regions from Europe exploring seven themes with the idea being to be able to cope with the effects of climate change by learning from each other. The project's objective is to influence policy development. Phase 1 had involved visits to the different regions to discuss the methods they use in forestry. Phase 2 is now starting to pull together all the information into guidelines. Further information can be found on the website www.futureforest.eu.

9) **Trees and Woodland in the Built Environment**

Green Infrastructure

Bill Heslegrave explained that, although a lot of work on GI was ongoing at the sub-regional level, it was not being recognised in terms of the value that it could bring to the economy and regeneration, and to climate change mitigation. There was a need to influence and strategically co-ordinate and develop Green Infrastructure. The Defra Agenda Group – consisting of Natural England, the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission with AWM and GOWM as a senior grouping in the region were developing

leadership in the region to take the agenda forward. Stoke-on-Trent may be used as a pilot project.

Trees and Woodland in the urban environment

Bill reported that Birmingham City had agreed to be the pilot for this partnership.

Action: Bill Heslegrave to report back to the next meeting on progress.

The evidence base on the economics of green infrastructure was discussed. There had been some studies, for example John Handley's work from Manchester on cooling effects, a study on pollution, NUFU's work, and Ciria (?) had been commissioned to carry out a study on the impact of large canopy forest trees in the urban environment, but co-ordination of the information was required.

Mark Broadmeadow stated that he would send Bill's paper to the UK Climates Impact Programme to encourage them to use Green Infrastructure.

Nic Cole had circulated the document to the DAG, and broadly supportive comments had been received. Once the paper has been revised, the next stage was to commission work on the subject.

Sophie congratulated Bill in getting this chapter included in the 'Fit for the Future' book. She reported that the National Forest was working within both the West and East Midlands in terms of Green Infrastructure.

10) Information Papers – Questions by Exception

- WMRFF Progress Report & Task Group Updates
- Regional Updates

There were no further comments / questions regarding these papers.

11) A.O.B.

Nick Maskery brought up the subject of RDPE grants. The majority of applications for these grants were for small amounts, and he was concerned that the need to deliver the grant could mean that applications for small amounts would miss out in favour of larger applications. He reported that the South West had produced a leaflet to inform potential applicants that they were looking for projects in the region of £10k. It was decided that Sara Roberts and Bill Heslegrave raise this concern at an RDPE partners meeting.

Action: Sara / Bill to raise at RDPE partners meeting.

Date of next meeting: 30 June 2010