

WEST MIDLANDS WOODLAND AND FORESTRY FORUM
Meeting 19th November 2008
At the Ludlow Food Centre

Minutes

1) Welcome and Introductions

The Vice-Chairman, Sophie Churchill, welcomed members to the Forum and introductions were made.

2) Progress against Actions arising from last meeting

Sara Roberts went through the actions paper from the last meeting, adding that BSI was planning a second consultation after which they would decide if they would progress, so there was still opportunity to feed into the process.

3) Chairman's Report

The Chair, Judith Webb, who was unable to attend this meeting, had asked that the tree safety issue (see above) was raised, informing members that the process was in abeyance at present, pending further consideration.

4) England's Trees, Woods and Forests and the Regional Forestry Framework

- ***Update and national perspective – John Vaughan FC National Programme Group***

John gave a presentation on the ETWF strategy, which was published in July 2007, and the delivery plan, which is yet to be published due to the cabinet reshuffle.

The strategy has 5 aims: (sustainable resource, climate change, natural environment, quality of life, business and markets), 4 principles (long term sustainable management of trees, woods and forests, the right tree in the right place, effective use of public investment, synergy with other Govnt policies) and is grouped under 3 main themes (communities and places, land and natural environment, working woodlands).

The strategy extends from 2007 to 2020, with the delivery plan covering 2008-2012. It will be dependent on a wide range of partners engaging with the strategy, and on the successful embedding of objectives into other national and regional strategies.

The delivery principles of the strategy are:

- a landscape scale approach and a more dynamic approach to landscape change,
- more emphasis on market mechanisms and more diversified income streams, protecting irreplaceable assets,
- making the most of diversity,
- innovation and individuality.

- ***A Project Plan for refreshing the RFF in alignment with ETWF***

Bill Heslegrave introduced the paper. He felt that more consultation was necessary with the private sector than with other sectors in this process.

The RFF Delivery Plan Steering Group would take a lead in this process, with the FC's input, in liaison with NE partners. In conjunction with this review, there would also be a review of the 'Growing our Future' website.

- ***WMRFF Update – Sara Roberts (paper)***

Discussion:

- Ways of getting involved with ETWF: a web-based action list is being developed under the delivery plan. This will be divided into those actions already funded and those where interested parties would like to take an action forward. Most of the delivery of the ETWF would occur at a regional or local level, and so it was vital that the RFF was aligned with the strategy.
- The way of communicating with senior planners was discussed as they were more likely to respond to guidance from CLG than from Defra / Natural England. Bruce Collinson is currently on secondment from the CLG to the FC helping to forge a close national relationship with CLG. The FC also works through Defra and their connections. In the South and Midlands, a planning consultancy offers a service to FC on planning matters, linked to FC's 'sustainable growth group'.
- There is a good relationship between the FC and the AONBs at a regional level, two of which have consultations out at the moment on management plans. The FC will comment on these plans and they will likewise comment on our strategies.
- Natural England has been closely involved with ETWF. Senior FC and NE managers in the WM plus some national colleagues had met the previous week to discuss the delivery of ETWF in the region and the link with the Regional Forestry Framework.
- Evidence was needed to take the ETWF delivery framework forward, to give more direction on where the deficit lies in woodland creation, how the industry can be improved, and what can be done on the social side.
- There has been some disappointment that although the ETWF delivery plan is a government document, it was left to the Defra family to put it together without the important connections to, for instance, quality of life, economy etc. It must be made clear to these other Government departments that it is worthwhile investing in ETWF in order to deliver targets across Government. Some concern was expressed that the developing SNR work was not embedding environment issues satisfactorily. It was felt further effort was needed to make the environment case including the forestry dimension.
- Those people interested in continuing a discussion on this subject were: Sophie Churchill, Sara Roberts, Bill Heslegrave, Martin Sutton, Chris Hastie, Gesa Reiss, Judy Walker, Amanda Pearce. John Vaughan wished to be kept in touch with any progress on this subject in the region.
- It was felt that there needed to be more emphasis on trees in the refreshing of the Regional Forestry Framework to bring them on a par with woodlands and forests. This would be a way of engaging with government.
- Sara Roberts reported that the London RFF officers were working on Trees for Cities. They had put together an Interreg bid on woodfuel, were working with the London Tree Officers' Association on insurance matters, and on the tree safety issue, and undertaking a major project on the capital asset value of trees. It was suggested that the WM could learn from them as 80% of the region's population live in the city regions.

The meeting endorsed Bill Heslegrave's approach to the RFF consultation and review process.

Action: anyone with any further comments on the RFF review process to contact Bill Heslegrave as soon as possible.

5) RDPE – Progress and Opportunities by the Forestry Sector

• **Launch of Heartwoods Business Directory**

The Vice-Chair introduced Andy Grundy, who would be launching the directory. Andy gave some background to the development of the directory. The Marches Woodland Initiative had originally produced a paper directory covering the RRZ area. Heartwoods 1 then developed a web-based directory to which businesses could upload their photos and details, but this was found to be too complicated for many people to use. The new directory is on the website; it has 16 categories of business ordered by postcode. There are 240 businesses in the directory, 90 of which are woodfuel suppliers. Businesses can either register online or through Heartwoods. A paper version will be produced, though it is envisaged that most will use the on-line version. It is a tool for anyone who receives enquiries for local suppliers in the forestry sector (heartwoods.co.uk).

• **Woodfuel Supply Chain bid – Andy Grundy Heartwoods**

Andy Grundy reported that this bid had been appraised in September and responses to all queries raised had now been given. One element was gauging the level of interest in the region.

Other items:

- The AWM capital grant scheme (Rural Enterprise Grant) had been launched but forestry processing is currently excluded from this as a result of the measures which have been used. AWM is going to look at introducing measures allowing forestry processing during 2009.
- Andy reported that the Bioenergy conference in Warwick had been very interesting with a variety of different presentations which could be found on the following website: www.biomassenergycentre.org.uk.
- The Marches Energy Agency had held a woodfuel-specific event for 70-80 people in Church Stretton.
- Wood for Heat – Andy was providing a telephone advice and signposting service for woodfuel installations.

Discussion:

- Disappointment was expressed that the England Woodfuel Strategy Delivery Plan had not yet been published. Angela Duignan is leading FC's woodfuel delivery and has formed a Woodfuel Advisory Group with key representatives from the FC regions. Angela is meeting with all the RDAs in the following week. It was suggested that members needed to work together for effective engagement in the region on woodfuel.
- Claire Robinson pointed out that there were opportunities at present for forestry micro-businesses under the Rural Enterprise Grant. Work is also progressing on a strategic investment grant for bids over £62k, although it was felt that this was too large a sum for most forestry

businesses and would likely only benefit those building a sawmill or a pelleting plant, or buying a forwarder for example. Funds are needed to help engage with landowners to get their woodlands into management to prevent major sourcing of woodfuel from outside the region.

- **Natural Assets, case studies and opportunities**

Claire Robinson (AWM) distributed this document which had been produced to show the links between the environment and the economy as part of an evidence base. It contains case studies on projects which have actually delivered an outcome. This builds on the environment supply chain work carried out 3-4 years ago and includes case studies from organisations such as Heartwoods and individuals, for example a contractor. Claire then took the members through the Heartwoods case study.

The document underpins the natural assets programme which is being developed with Natural England (with FC assisting) to make strong practical connections between economy and the environment. It is an important tool for liaison with other Government departments to demonstrate these links. Another presentation would be put together to include all the case studies in the document for future presentations in the region.

Discussion:

- Andy Grundy pointed out that farmers / landowners needed a degree of hand-holding to take them through the process of applying for grants and adhering to regulations and suitable advisors are needed to seek them out as they rarely come forward of their own accord.

- **EWGS update (paper)**

Bill Heslegrave introduced this paper and added that the decline in uptake of WMG would be addressed in various ways. He invited members to contact him or members of his team if they wished to clarify or explore further any aspects of the paper.

6) **Social Forestry - SWA Partnership work featuring case studies**

Judy Walker (Small Woods Association) is the Chair of the Social Forestry group in the region which has met twice to date.

Judy gave an overview of the SWA's work and their aim of achieving sustainable management in all small woods in the UK. They deliver training, promote networking and produce a quarterly magazine. They are running 3 national programmes at present.

Judy then gave a presentation on social forestry which is defined as "forestry that delivers an intervention with a social outcome" (volunteering, health projects, education programmes, work with alienated groups). SWA works with the last group mainly.

Outcomes: the participants benefit through learning skills including working in the woods, cooking and healthy eating; forestry benefits through skills being passed on and hopefully some participants going on to new apprenticeship schemes; and the community benefit as well.

The WM is the first region to set up a social forestry task group to look at evaluation, good practice and networking.

Judy distributed a paper on Qualitative Benefit Analysis for Social Forestry. The emphasis is not on the level reached by the individual but the improvement they have made. The group want this to be rolled out nationally to those delivering

social forestry to obtain a body of evidence to be able to influence Government thinking.

Two case studies were also distributed. More case studies were being sought to produce a booklet on this. Sara Roberts had been compiling a list of social forestry activities in the region.

Action: To inform Sara Roberts of any additional projects which may not have been captured so far, and also of any agencies who want to get involved with a programme.

Discussion

- Rebecca Banks felt this Quantitative Benefit Analysis (QBA), including emotional and behavioural benefits, would be very useful with the group working in the Forest of Mercia (14-16 year old excluded children) and that it would also be a useful tool to influence funders.
- Judy added that although agencies do monitor the individuals, the QBA also monitored the effectiveness of the project. It therefore became possible to put a cost on the rehabilitation of an individual.

7) Update and Direction: EFIP and Lantra – Gesa Reiss EFIP

Gesa Reiss (England Forest Industries Partnership) explained that at present, EFIP were focussing on skills, developing the market, and providing information for the industry:

- Skills: a Lantra workshop was held in October with the aim of looking at job roles (a list can be found on the Lantra website) and how they feed into development of National Occupational Standards. The job list was reduced to 12 profiles to be published on the website, 3 of which were chosen to identify skills to (trainee apprentice, forest craftsperson, and foreman levels). These skills will be attached to the NOS standards, and a group will be set up to look at the other jobs on the list. It was hoped that the large quantity of work still to be done on this would involve the trees and forestry sector as much as possible.
- Marketing: information on economic development initiatives in the sector had been collated, and it was hoped to build evidence by looking at one of the projects EFIP has outlined. They would also be producing technical papers but were waiting for confirmation on funding.
- Information: at the moment, EFIP was just answering queries and signposting; they are trying not to duplicate existing work.
- Lantra's governance: a letter had been sent out from the Chairman of Lantra asking for responses to questions on how Lantra works. This has been put out to the partnership and Gesa will be collating responses to feed back by the deadline of 17th December.

Action: Any feedback on Lantra to Gesa Reiss (Gesa.Reiss@confor.org.uk)

- EFIP partnership meetings would be held on 15th January (Watford), 12th March (Newcastle) and 23rd June (London).

8) Forestry Proofing — update on policies/strategies/delivery frameworks

Referring to the Phase Two revision of the Regional Spatial Strategy, Chris Blakeley warned that the region was facing its largest development phase ever

over the next 20 years and that members would need to keep up to date with what was happening in their area. A further Government-commissioned study is suggesting even higher housing numbers in rural areas.

For the RSS Phase Three revision, which includes Trees, Woods and Forestry policy, policy options are being developed and would be out to consultation in June 2009.

With regional restructuring and the abolition of Regional Assemblies in 2010 there will be opportunities offered through the developing Single Integrated Regional Strategy and its Implementation Plan.

Bill Heslegrave distributed a paper showing the woodland policy options developed so far and invited comments. He said that it was likely the options would need to be condensed to around three.

Actions: Any comments on this, and thoughts on the woodland options to Bill Heslegrave

Discussion:

- The options should be revised to include 'trees' more, as discussed earlier in the meeting. It was noted that trees also come under other sections in the suite of policies to which they are better suited. To that end, it was suggested that the other sections of Quality of the Environment should be forestry-proofed. Bill Heslegrave said he has engaged with the Green Infrastructure and Landscape task groups but a wider engagement was needed.
- In response to a query regarding the balance between woodland creation and management, it was noted that in ETWF there was a greater emphasis on woodland management, although this varied around the country. This would need to be addressed in the refreshment of the RFF. It would be discussed at task groups.
- The woodland options should be evidence-led.
- It was noted that the Trees Woods and Forests' Biodiversity Working Group were very involved with work on parklands and wood pasture. It was unclear under which heading orchards were classified and this needed to be clarified.
- The Woodland Opportunities Maps were being developed further (e.g. for ancient woodlands and woodland birds). It had originally been envisaged that they would be used for a more targeted grant scheme, but this has not been developed as yet, although the maps are being used by woodland managers when appropriate. More effective ways of using the maps needs to be found and awareness of them raised. Bill Heslegrave would be pleased to hear from anyone who has ideas of how they could be linked to other spatial systems or better used.

Other regional strategies in progress:

- *Delivery Plan for Regional Health and Well-Being Strategy* (forestry case studies were used in this).
- The *Severn River Basin Management Plan* (Environment Agency) would be in consultation in December.
- The *Wye and Usk Catchment Flood Management Plan* was also out for consultation.

Action: The Sub-National Review (SNR) to be included on the agenda of the next meeting

9) A.O.B

- It was felt that the region was relatively weak in its evidence bases, and that it was essential to do research in this respect in order to formulate policies. It was hoped that as part of the ETWF, evidence bases could be evaluated, and listed so that duplications do not occur.
- A list of attendees with e-mail addresses was requested.

Action: A list of attendees with e-mail addresses to be distributed

10) Date and location of next meetings

Meetings would be held on 17th June and 25th November 2009; venues to be announced.