

GROWING OUR FUTURE



BRIEFING WEST MIDLANDS WOODLAND & FORESTRY FORUM July 2008 Issue 7

Woodland & Forestry Forum

At the July Forum meeting we were welcomed to the new NFU Headquarters at Stoneleigh. An all day meeting, there was a very full agenda with presentations on the West Midlands Forestry Framework, the National Forest Company, Rural Hubs in the West Midlands, the England's Trees, Woods and Forests Strategy Delivery Plan, RDPE and the Woodfuel Supply Chain, the Trees & Timber Sector Skills Council, and Ancient & Native Woodlands Guidance. 30 Members were in attendance. Papers and full presentations can be obtained from: Julia.hall@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

National Forest

Sophie Churchill gave a presentation on the work of the National Forest to date and its plans for the future. Since its inception, tree coverage across the area had leapt from 6% to 18% and an investment of £3.5 million Defra funds per annum levers in a total of £62 million from elsewhere. They have just launched a consultation on the future of the forest in the Midlands to 2014 and beyond. This runs until 30 September 2008 so if you would like to take part, please complete the online survey at www.nationalforest.org.

The Changing Landscapes Scheme (CLS) launched by the National Forest Company aims to encourage the creation of woodland and habitats in the Forest's 200 square miles. Closing date for the 2008/09 funding round is 30 September. Full details are at www.nationalforest.org/woodlandcreation.

Rural Hubs

Henry Lucas, the Chair of the Warwickshire Rural Hub gave a presentation on the work of the organisation, which was set up in 2003 and consists of members from rural businesses only. There are five hubs across the region and their work concentrates on making a difference to the whole rural infrastructure. With their priorities being Food, Rural Tourism, Bio-Energy, Non-Food Crops, Resource/Waste Management and Agriculture, the Hubs hope to expand the work through the help of RDPE funding to provide capacity building, training, on-farm demonstrations and the creation of a farming and food centre.

Rural Hubs have little history of contact with forestry businesses but this is gradually changing and some good projects are developing, especially those related to biomass and wood fuel.

For further details: www.ruralhub.org.uk

GROWING OUR FUTURE Annual Report 2007-2008 – Headlines

- Over £1.324 million distributed under the Forestry Commission Grant Scheme; £0.47 million under the Environmental Stewardship Scheme for woodland creation and management in the region;
- The Regions Woodland Opportunities Map (Version 2) comprising 6 themed maps: Woodland Creation, Ancient Woodlands, Landscape, Access, Biodiversity & Cultural Heritage was launched; Version 3 under development;
- Wood fuel is still the fastest growing renewable energy alternative in the West Midlands with exponential growth in wood heat installations and expanding network of fuel depots covering the whole region;
- Equivalent to 100 tonnes of conifer timber removed from ancient woodland sites every working day of the year by Forestry Commission Public Estate;
- There has been an estimated four million visitors to Forestry Commission woodlands in the West Midlands – most involving physical activity/mental stimulation;
- A series of national case studies of projects led or supported by the Forestry Commission feature no less than four West Midlands' exemplars: Wye Wood, Chase Cycle Trails, Route to Health and National Forest's Get Active;
- Education visits are increasing and sites in National Forest, Wyre Forest and Cannock Chase have hosted upwards of 30,000 schoolchildren visits; FC Forest Schools Challenge Grant Launch: 27 successful bids obtaining £90k across the region;
- Over 800 training days delivered through the regional workforce programme; pilot apprenticeship programme under development;
- Using the information gleaned thus far, the rolling three-year Action Plan 2008-2011 for the West Midlands Regional Forestry Framework has been developed;
- The breadth of stakeholder interest and active engagement has continued; the specialist task groups have been busy developing and implementing action plans and agenda in support of the Framework:
 - Woodland Opportunities Mapping
 - Woodland & Forestry Industries
 - Wood Energy Task Group
 - Workforce Development Group
 - Green Infrastructure Planning Task Group
 - Trees, Woods and Forests Biodiversity Task Group
 - Social Forestry Task Group

Delivery Plan Launch

The refreshed Growing our Future three-year rolling Delivery Plan 2008-2011 was presented at the Forum. This reflects this year's monitoring responses and research carried out indicating what lead partners and stakeholders will be doing in order to meet the Framework objectives. An electronic version can be downloaded from www.growingourfuture.org

England's Trees Woods & Forestry Delivery Plan

The ETWF Strategy was published last year; and work progressed to the Delivery Plan. There had been much input from the West Midlands during the consultation period and this, together with comments from other regions, has resulted in significant changes to the document. The revised draft has been signed off by the National Committee and submitted to Ministers this month. It was hoped to get Ministerial endorsement prior to the Parliamentary recess and publication organised for the autumn. Further details from bill.heslegrave@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

Ancient & Native Woodlands Guidance - Consultation

New guidance has been developed to express 'Keepers of Time', the government policy on native and ancient woodland launched in 2005. The consultation runs for 12 weeks until 22 August 2008. During this period the draft Guidance is available to download as a .pdf from the Forestry Commission England (FCE) website link : <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-7f3ben> Forum members and practitioners are invited to respond.

Lantra – Trees and timber

Ros Burnley, West Midlands Regional Partnership Manager, and UK Partnership Manager for Trees and Timber, gave a description of Lantra's work in the region and its work with trees and timber nationally. A sector skills council, ensuring that businesses have the skills they need to be competitive, they carry out labour market research, developing national occupational standards ensuring that they remain "fit for purpose", liaising with government and other agencies particularly on skills policies and strategies.

Job profiling and the review of the National Occupational Standards will be taking place before the end of the year and help from businesses in the sector is required. Further details: ros.burnley@lantra.co.uk

Rural Delivery Programme for England – delivering in the region

The first 3 years of RDPE expenditure has been approved and all Action Plans for Axis 1 & 3 agreed with a one-stage application process. £25 million out of a total of £55 million has now been committed; £8.8m to livestock, £7.5m for legacy projects and the rest to Environmental Technologies, Food & Drink and to Tourism. Grants that may become available through these funds were outlined. Most of the opportunities for the woodland and forestry sector would be in low carbon / biomass projects.

The first of the Leader development strategies will be in place by the end of July with the others by the autumn. There are now 8 Local Action Groups covering 70% of the rural parts of the region. The Leader network supported by AWM will co-ordinate training and networking across the region. Further details from simon.west@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

Woodfuel Update

Andy Grundy outlined the West Midlands Woodfuel Supply Chain Project and a bid for RDPE funding through Axis 1 Environmental Technologies has recently been submitted. The project seeks to develop the woodfuel industry through cluster activity across the whole region, reducing the carbon footprint of the area and helping the rural economy, whilst contributing to the regional target of bringing an additional c 230,000 tonnes of woodfuel into production; the national target is 2 million tonnes. Further details from andy@heartwoods.co.uk

The government has published a consultation document on renewable energy www.berr.gov.uk/energy/sources/renewables/strategy/page43356 the consultation continues until September and Forum members are encouraged to respond.

The Biomass Energy Centre and IEA Energy are jointly organising a woodfuel workshop at the University of Warwick from 15-19 September. 'The Woodfuel Supply Chain - Sharing Experience' is a week-long event that will include technical sessions, field trips and an 'industry day' at the APF Exhibition at Cannock Chase. Full details are at www.biomassenergycentre.org.uk.

RSS Phase 3

The Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Three Revision is well underway. Phase 3 covers quality of environment issues including trees, woodlands and forests. A small task group led by the Forestry Commission has been convened for refreshing and updating if necessary the text, the policies and the monitoring indicators. Further details: bill.heslegrave@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

EWGS Update

The Forestry Commission is still waiting for final 2009-2010 budget details but EWGS is open for applications. Meanwhile, new EU regulations that came into force last year mean that all land entering into any of the RDPE land management schemes must now be registered on the Rural Land Register prior to entering any scheme. Further details: steve.cresswell@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

Dates for your diary

18-20 September 2008	APF Forestry Exhibition (Cannock Chase)
12 November 2008	West Midlands Rural Affairs Conference (Bromsgrove)
19 November 2008	Woodland & Forestry Forum Meeting (Ludlow)

For more information on the Forestry Framework, Woodland & Forestry Forum and the Task Groups contact:

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