

GROWING OUR FUTURE

Briefing

West Midlands Woodland & Forestry Forum

December 2006 - Issue 4

Compliments of the Season & Best Wishes for a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year

DELIVERY DEADLINE

The implementation of the three-year rolling Delivery Plan 2006-2009 and ongoing work with lead partners and other stakeholders has continued apace. Our next monitoring point is 31 March after which we have the opportunity to refresh and update our Delivery Plan for 2008-2010. So, watch out for the monitoring pro-forma which will be sent to you early in the New Year.

NEW TASK GROUP

The first meeting of the Trees, Woods and Forestry Biodiversity Group will be held towards the end of January; terms of reference have been drafted taking into account the requirements for alignment of the Forestry Framework and the Regional Biodiversity Strategy. Forum members are being contacted for nominations to the Task Group.

Woodlands with their diverse habitats support a wide range of species, some of which are national priorities for protection. The WMRFF's Enhancing Biodiversity Theme and the Regional Biodiversity Strategy both endorse the desire to increase biodiversity, protect and enhance ancient semi-natural woodland, manage current woods and restore the ecological value of planted ancient woodland sites. These issues are also key to the Regional Spatial Strategy and local Biodiversity Action Plans, requiring resources for effective and co-ordinated delivery.

LESS RED TAPE

Both Defra and the Forestry Commission are really entering into the seasonal spirit... They have separately published their "simplification plans" for 2006, which are designed to help reduce red tape.

Subtitled "Maximising outcomes, minimising burdens", Defra's document explains how it intends to remove unnecessary administrative burdens, change the way it works, and even remove regulations. See www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/regulat/regulat.asp#reform.

A study that examined national "administration burdens" calculated that the total administrative burden placed on Forestry Commission stakeholders by forestry regulations amounted to £1.5 million each year, excluding business as usual (i.e. those things that businesses would do whether regulations were in place or not).

In total, across government, over 500 simplification initiatives have been announced, which should save more than £2 billion.

NEW LEAD

Nine Regional Committees who advise the Forestry Commission locally on the many ways in which trees and woodlands can benefit the English regions, were renewed and re-launched earlier this month.

They advise on the implementation of existing regional plans for trees and woodlands (drawn up in Regional Forestry Frameworks), and will be taking forward the Government's anticipated new national plan for trees and woodlands. This strategic planning alongside regional partners strengthens forestry's role in delivering social, economic and environmental benefits to both rural and urban areas.

Here in the West Midlands - Andy Sharkey, Operations Director, Central and Northern England with the Woodland Trust, takes the chair, whilst new members Bill Evans, John Swift, Andrew Woods and Barbara Yates will join Graham Hunt, Russell Rowley and Helen Woodman.

MORE TREES

320,000 more trees will be planted in the National Forest over the coming planting season, thanks to the success of this year's National Forest Tender Scheme. The percentage of woodland cover throughout the 200 square miles of the Forest stands at an impressive 17%

Trees absorb carbon dioxide from the air. 20% of the world's carbon emissions are a result of deforestation....but not here in the West Midlands. Here, trees and woodlands are important in combating climate change and reducing carbon emissions - so anything we can do to keep trees planted, rather than the soil being used for less carbon-friendly things is a plus.

WOODLAND OPPORTUNITIES MAPS – VERSION II

The technical work and data required for completion of Version II maps is very nearly complete. We have also attained Steering Group representation on the West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership's Landscapes for Living Group, thus ensuring parity of approach between WOM and their Landscapes for Living mapping processes. At the next meeting, 09 February, we hope to have the draft maps available and anticipate a Version II launch event in March using the occasion for an informal consultation on regional scoring.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE IS THE REGION'S LIFE-SUPPORT SYSTEM

Green infrastructure is the network of green spaces and natural elements that intersperse and connect our cities, towns and villages. It is the open spaces, waterways, gardens, woodlands, green corridors, wildlife habitats, street trees and open countryside - providing multiple benefits for the economy, the environment and people.

With the help of consultants, the Green Infrastructure Planning Task Group have put together a prospectus for the West Midlands Region. Copies will be available early January and can be downloaded from the website www.growingourfuture.org

HIGH LEVEL REVIEWS

With the important messages coming out of the Jaako Poyry Study and recommendations, it was good to have the regional perspective emphasised at the last Woodland & Forestry Forum Meeting. It showed that the industry was of national, regional and local importance, but that regions had not taken advantage of what the sector could provide, using only 39% of the resource potential and using only 16% home-grown timber.

Therefore the sector needed to grow as a whole. The main conclusions were:

- The sector was worth supporting and developing
- Need to improve partnership working.
- Need to engage at regional and national levels
- Initiatives that support market development to be developed.
- There were multiple benefits across industry and into quality of life, economic and social agendas.

Backed up by regional data and statistics we aim to build on the proposals and feed this into both the RSS Phase II & III Revision and the RES Review consultations. With the implementation of the West Midlands Forestry Framework well advanced some of this work is already being done but, with increased buy-in at the highest level, there is room to develop the following:

Regional Economic Strategy Phase III consultation:
10 November - 28 February 2007

Regional Spatial Strategy Phase II Policy Options:
08 January - 05 March 2007

DATES

11 January	WMRFF Delivery Plan Steering Group
24 January	Woodland & Forestry Industries Task Group
25 January	Trees, Woods & Forestry Biodiversity Group
09 February	Woodland Opportunities Mapping Task Group

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

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