

**WEST MIDLANDS WOODLAND & FORESTRY FORUM**  
**Social Forestry Task Group**

**Meeting of 24<sup>th</sup> February 2010**  
**at Forestry Commission, Worcester**

**1 Welcome & Introductions**

**Present:**

Judy Walker (JWk), Ewan Calcott (EC), Steve Morris (SM), Sara Roberts (SR), John Winterbourne (JW)

**In attendance:**

Gaynor Abel (GA) – *taking minutes*, Catherine Irvine (new secretary)

**Apologies**

Ferdinand Addo, Clare Neale, Stuart Phillips, Kate Tudge

Steve Morris introduced himself as seconded to Forest of Mercia (FoM) to cover Rebecca Banks' 12-month maternity leave. He explained the current funding position of FoM. Staffordshire County Council will withdraw its funding completely in 12 months time and there is concern that other funders may also withdraw from the partnership (£100,000 is core funding, £20,000 is other partners). The boundary and remit of FoM has not changed and Staffordshire County Council may still offer support by acting as the accountable body.

Catherine Irvine introduced herself as the new secretary for the task group, as Gaynor Abel will step down after this meeting.

**2 Actions from last meeting**

**AP 2.3** - SR reported back on 14-19 Diploma for ELBS. 53 Consortia have been approved to deliver in 2009 and a further 67 in 2010. From 2009 – Shropshire, Wolverhampton and Worcestershire and from 2010 Coventry, Halesowen, Lichfield & Burntwood, Solihull and Staffordshire also. Parts of Warwickshire and Herefordshire are excluded at the present time. There are 41 applicants for delivery in 2011.

**AP 2.4** - actioned.

**AP 2.5** - JW will follow up in KE's absence. He would like to know who to approach at AWM in relation to Care Farming and will seek advice from Simon West.

**Apprenticeships** – covered under agenda item 4.

**6.2** – covered under agenda item 7.

Amend third bullet under Social Forestry WIG page 2 to • *Strong partnerships with referral agencies*

**3 Funding opportunities**

**Natural Assets:** February 15<sup>th</sup> was the deadline for the latest bidding round. SWA has put in bid to create a woodland work team and machinery group linked to economic improvement in Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire and Worcestershire.

**HLF Skills Fund:** Offers placements/practical heritage skills development within specific types of industry. SWA will bid into this as a holistic environment project, i.e. not just focusing on coppice work, but include management of hedgerows and single trees in woodland management. JWk asked if there were any other examples of this type of approach.

- JW said something similar was happening in Kinver, working with young offenders and probationers from the Birmingham area. Maurice Clothier was the lead. It involves a holistic process of felling trees, making charcoal and then using the charcoal to make tools to fell more trees.
- South West, near Stroud there is a school for those with learning difficulties, where Roger Duncan is adopting this approach.

- EC said this could be done through existing grants/funding sources on a woodland by woodland basis. Subsidised and free courses could offer skills development through the forestry woodland improvement grant (WIG). The Woodland Bird WIG for example already offers this and includes coppice work and hedgerows in its suite of funding. Forest Enterprise and Grow with Wyre are already delivering on this, with a programme of hands on training, including a hedge-laying course.

**Action Point 3.1 – EC to ask if the skills workshops at Wyre are joined up.**

A review is underway to look at how HLF and FC grants compliment each other. However, the general consensus is that it is private money and no issue is expected. Even HLS can share funding with EWGS, provided they are for different outputs.

EC said FC and the Deer Initiative are giving consideration to deer and landscape heritage issues, for a project to upskill stalkers and local game merchants.

**AP 3.2 – EC to send senior ecologists report/email on deer population to JWk.**

FC is also in discussion regarding the Energy Crop Scheme, which Defra have failed to deliver and are seeking other opportunities to spend the funding available. They are looking to secure some of this Axis 1 funding to make significant improvements to woodland access across the region, through thinning, ride widening and coppice work. The budget was originally devised to deliver miscanthus and high yield willow coppice. Due to additional resources required to deliver it, there is a scale and opportunity balance to be struck.

**LEADER:** RDAs have been put in charge of the third Leader phase, with Axis 1 and 3 funding opportunities. There are eight leader groups (LAGs) across the region and each have a different approach. Although allocated, AWM have not yet put out any money to them. Clare Fildes of SHAONB is the leader for their joint regional meetings.

FoM's main projects are Forest Schools Pilot & under 5s (Twiglets). The common ground is a focus on mental health recovery and fitness agenda. Funding is received through EcoMind and Lichfield District Council. There is already a foot in the door with North Staffordshire PCT and possible opportunities with South Staffordshire PCT also. This could be something with a focus on woodland management within FoM and would fit with the County Council's regeneration programme, though not lose the social inclusion element and adding in elements of climate mitigation/CO<sup>2</sup> reduction.

#### **4 Apprenticeships feedback**

- Level 2 approval has been secured and Level 3 is under development. NVQs have evolved to become work-based diplomas and are more flexible.
- SWA is running an apprenticeship pilot in the West Midlands and have two people at Wyre Forest, one with Duchy of Cornwall and one with Pryor and Ricketts Silviculture. In the Wyre FC are trying to refocus to allow blocks of work with partners – Bewdley Development Trust, Natural England and FC. The other apprentices are doing very well.  
In September two more will be appointed at Wyre and will be following the new framework. The two existing apprentices will remain on the old one. There will also be two Coppice Apprentices at Holme Lacy College. Holme Lacy is developing good skills to deliver forestry apprenticeships and would be good advocates for other colleges to deliver forestry courses.
- FoM was a registered body to deliver NVQ Level 1 and 2. SM originally set this up and is an internal verifier for environmental qualifications. He would need to check if this is still valid.

- LSC are to become the Skills Funding Agency. There are some structural changes and they are losing pre-19s to local authorities.
- SWA would like to get LSC recognised accreditation for delivery. They are already accredited for OCN.
- A consultation on aspects of delivery of apprenticeships will take place from the 1<sup>st</sup> March to 1<sup>st</sup> April and will include:
  - Knowledge base
  - Functional skills
  - Additional employer requirements

## 5 Good practice guide

JWk explained that two more elements (listed below) were missing from the guide and presented a list of what might be required and asked for feedback.

- Policy Framework
- List of employment and related policies that organisations ought to have in place before delivering social forestry activity

EC suggested that *Personal Development* be used instead of *Personal Training* and that Investors in People might be used as an indicator.

JWk also presented a paper from 2007 on Social Forestry, which shows where development has come from and where it is going to, alongside possible delivery and government agendas. All agreed that the focus on headings was good and the inclusion of ETWF and RFFs was proposed.

**Action Point 6.1** – EC to feedback on paper to Helen Townsend

**Action Point 6.2** – GA to provide JWk with the reworded elements of tree felling within the practice guide that JW has completed.

## Social Forestry Woodland Improvement Grant

Funding/grants need to be allocated at a woodland level - i.e. specific woodland must be identified where the activity will take place. This need not necessarily be a silvicultural activity. EC is relaxed as to where this group sees opportunities for delivery are best placed.

A land manager would need to be on board and the identified woodland would ideally be on the RLR (Rural Land Registry) and hence have an SBI (Single Business Identifier). Applications could be made by organisations in partnership with the landowner. A tenure situation would also be appropriate. Access to one SBI from the visible partner is necessary or the delivery body may need to apply for this themselves.

The WIG has a suite of standard costs, which could be available as part of a social forestry application. Creation of new costs is also possible, but would require justification. An example would be costs for training or upskilling – which would need to be on site (in a woodland) and of a practical nature.

EC has no guidance to say he cannot agree 100% funding, though 80% would be suggested as it fits with the GLOS operating system. Match funding could come from any source other than other HM Treasury funding.

He expects the WIG would fund 8 to 10 projects a year, which may involve protracted negotiations with a Woodland Officer to fit the applicants' requirements with the correct grant. Other grant mechanisms could deliver site safety, set up costs of silvicultural activity. This will be determined on economy of scale.

The grant would preferably be allocated on a first come first served basis. Guidance will need to be robust and refer to multiple grant applications. In order that smaller scale (less complex) projects do not swallow up the funds a score system should be considered to assist the application process.

EC is happy to agree discussion from the previous minutes that the grant should target over 14s and be inapplicable to schools. Insurance may not be included, as the FC funding mechanism will not allow it.

**Action Point 6.3 – EC** to check if CRB checks (ISA) were included as part of Forest Schools, or could be for the Social Forestry WIG.

Deliberation to develop the guidance and grant will involve a Q&A process to set the building block and meet the rules of FC funding streams. There are some 60 questions.

**Action Point 6.4 – JW** in consultation with SM, SR & JWk to go through the Q&A and look at mechanisms for delivery for the Social Forestry WIG.

Health WIG and Forest School WIG reports will demonstrate the viability to deliver forestry through FC grants, with the possibility of it being rolled out to other regions. Allowance for an internal project review or QBE (Quality Benefit Evaluation), which is being developed would be helpful. Evaluation by Health WIG applicants fed into its external independent review, though the quality of feedback was hit and miss. Evaluation could link with the partner referral agencies and monitoring of the benefit accrued by them and individuals. The standard costs for a professional agent could be given to an evaluation process.

## **7 Evaluation pilot feedback and Silvanus research project**

Silvanus has a successful bid to the lottery to run a five-year research project into the use of QBA (Quality Benefit Analysis), which was developed by SWA. The system of monitoring student/apprentice progress measures where the individual is starting from and sets milestone to track improvement. SWA are also tentatively beginning to use it for their social forestry projects. JWk presented a paper on the project. JM suggested it would be good to see its use as an evaluation tool for grant funded projects. SM strongly agreed.

## **8 AOB**

**RFF Refresh** – SR presented the final draft of the theme for *Fostering Social Inclusion*, which had received several comments – noted in colour. Further change to FS11 were agreed by the group – *To promote, demonstrate and raise awareness through examples of participation in woodland activity, inspring people about the benefits of trees and woodland for social inclusion*

SR also reiterated that people do need to complete the case studies by the end of February/early March to allow time for proof-reading and publication.

*Action Point 8.1 – GA to send out template.*

As it is almost then end of another year of implementation of the RFF, there will be another monitoring exercise shortly.

The role of this group once the Good Practice Guide is published, was identified as continuing to watch the progress on forestry apprenticeships and to engage in the development of the Social Forestry WIG, score form and guidance, plus evaluation post delivery.

**9 Date and venue of the next Meeting**

To be arranged for late May early June. CI to trawl for available dates and invite Helen Townsend to the next meeting.