

**Woodland & Forest Industries Task Group  
Meeting 28<sup>th</sup> September 2007  
9.30am at the Green Wood Centre, Ironbridge**

In attendance

Mike Bradbury (MB), Steve Cresswell (SC), Martin Glynn (MG), Andy Grundy (AG), Bill Heslegrave (BH), Sara Roberts (SR), Graham Taylor (GT), Judy Walker (JW)

Apologies

Will Bullough, William Jackson, Ian Hickman, Simon Wallis, Gordon Wyatt

**1. Introduction – aims of meeting**

GT reminded all that the original aim of this meeting was to engage with Ian Baker (IB) and gain more insight into Advantage West Midlands (AWM) understanding of forestry and encourage more private sector interface. As IB genuinely was unable to attend thanks to BH were extended for facilitating the amended agenda.

**2. Minutes of last meeting/ matters arising**

Further encouragement of Forest Enterprise (FE) engagement needed. Official response received from EFIP and SR to update in later agenda item. The West Midlands Climate Change leaflet was completed and distributed. GT has yet to hear back from Confor – meeting scheduled for early November. GT has been asked to chair this, but has yet to be voted in.

**3. Opportunities for Forestry in RDPE and summary of progress to date**

Simon West (SW) has been seconded to AWM until the end of the financial year and will mainly be working on the RDPE Environmental Technologies Cluster plan, with implications for woodfuel. Amanda Pearce from Natural England (NE) will join the FC West Midlands team on the 8<sup>th</sup> October to take over some of what SW was working on.

RDPE is unlikely to be approved before January 2008 and more likely to be April 2007. Axis 1 and 2 & LEADER are AWM controlled. Axis 2 still has issues for Environmental Stewardship and English Woodland Grant Schemes (EWGS). BH continues to be involved in the development of the West Midlands Regional Implementation Plan (RIP) and for FC the current outcomes are moderately satisfactory, given the constraints and AWM agenda. Axis 1 – Economic Development has 3 priority clusters being taken forward.

- Food & Drink – this includes non-food products and services such as biomass. Opportunities for deer are also found.

- Environmental Technologies - this is the main cluster of interest to our sector for bioenergy supply chain development and support for innovation. Wood waste management and recycling, woodfuel activities and woodland products and services all have opportunities under this.
- and Tourism – strand for sustainable tourism with links to environmental improvement
- AWM is developing action plans under each cluster, including social and community under Axis 3. There are great demands on this, so it is particularly tight.
- LEADER, which goes across all axes, has its own manager and action plan and is aimed at community and social development. It has some openings for forestry.
- NE and FC lead axis 2 and our key grant schemes come under its umbrella, with links to projects under other axis, particularly woodland management.

Funding proportions are as follows: 80% is going to Axis 2 (EWGS is getting 10% of that), 10% to Axis 1, 10% to Axis 3, with all being top sliced to cover the LEADER programmes. Axis 1, 3 and LEADER are regional and Axis 2 is national. Paul Hill-Tout is responsible for negotiating any improvement for EWGS as 10% of Axis 2. Money should be spent 2007-2013. Money not spent will roll forward as part of the whole budget. AWM are putting together five action plans for annual targets, which will be ring-fenced. There are 8 LEADER packages for each Shire County.

#### **4. Industry Engagement in RDPE agreeing way forward**

FC will sit on the wider RDPE Group. There will also be a wider stakeholder group and there is a place of another Forestry Sector representative under Confor.

*Action Point 3.1 – This group to give careful consideration to whom could best represent the sector on this.*

AWM sees working with Rural Hubs as key funding mechanism to delivering the programme, but Defra is reluctant to say whether they could be used to as a facilitator for this. Rural Hubs work at county level as a gathering of appropriate businesses. Each differs widely in its perspective and interaction with the forestry sector. Some are fit for this purpose, but many have resource issues.

In BH's view there is an early opportunity to put in the regional woodfuel bid. Martin Glynn (MG) has prepared a scoping paper for this, which will be submitted to AWM as precursor to regional bids. AWM have asked for a concept paper by the end of October. They will give a formal reaction to this and set the way for a formal application to arrive with them by April 2008 and coincide with the start of the programme. Mark Pearce and Jamie Ingles are high-level supporters within

AWM with interests in woodfuel and forestry sector respectively. The relationship with SW should be nurtured also in respect of the Environmental Technologies Cluster.

Sufficient baseline evidence needs to be gathered. AWM have already commissioned a market-based study on biomass and they will be looking for us to do the same on resource side. Key elements of this have been covered by past work. These need to be reviewed and gaps plugged to make a convincing argument in terms of need.

MG discussed his scoping paper and sought further discussions and questions to be put to him before its submission to AWM. It is hoped this early bid for Woodfuel in the West Midlands will help the sector to engage with AWM and understand the bid process for RDPE. This region is unique in its focus on CHP. This is both a challenge for the industry and contradicts the focus on local heat within the England Wood Fuel Strategy (EWFS). The table in the paper replicates what measures are available and potential interventions, though there is still some debate under eligibility and issues in terms of implementation and rural hubs/business link engagement with sector.

GT asked if the bid would be put forward under Heartwoods or not? He would like to see better engagement with farm woodland owners and contractors and asked who would be the main beneficiary and how best to facilitate. BH said that the overall bid requires focus on the supply chain and how key elements will hook into RDPE, building on the Wyre Pathfinder Project.

3<sup>rd</sup> October should see the results of the FC Woodfuel Challenge Fund - £20-£30,000. This will connect with Heartwoods, build on Wyre work and has natural links to RDPE engagement. In other regions FC has been the lead for proposals. BH not convinced FC ought to be the lead for this. JW suggested a shared lead between Heartwoods and FC. MG the supply chain and market co-operations need to be shown in the bid. GT asked about top-up funding. MG said that funding from different sources for certain aspects of projects can be sought, but double funding is not possible. Private sector match funding is essential, as AWM will only ever fund a small proportion. In 114 the profile of funding is very steep with 50% in the first year and then dropping off, so seeking other funding sources may be necessary.

JW advised that in the South West woodland ownership is moving away from farmers to private landowners. The money could be used to either block or promote this trend in our region. Either promoting woodland ownership to farmers or supporting private owners who are interested in environmental issues and promoting the value of woodland management.

AG said that the Heartwoods (HW) database could be used to pose questions about the interest in collaborative work.

*ACTION POINT 4.1 – AG to circulate questionnaire to this group to be sent to those on HW database.*

*ACTION POINT 4.2 – BH to gather a group of key members from this group and Wood Energy Task group (WETG)*

*ACTION POINT 4.3 – All to read scoping paper and feed thoughts or pose questions to Martin Glynn as soon as possible.*

## **5. Wood Energy – update**

- The FC Woodfuel Challenge bid will be judged on 3<sup>rd</sup> October.
- A meeting of the supply chain for Bishop's Castle has now happened and wood waste is being considered. The business price for CHP is set too low.
- The Eccleshaw plant is using the bigger parts of home composting particles rather than miscanthus.
- AG visited the Biojoule mobile plant in Nottingham. The Short-rotation Coppice (SRC) price is a bit low but the processing seems to work.
- Shortage of pellets is a continuing pinch point.
- Talbott's are still carrying out lots of installations – 1 or 2 new ones each week.
- BH said that in terms of EWFS things ought to go up a scale.
- The woodfuel market is still improving.

## **6. Wyre Update**

SC reported that local community engagement was increasing as the project development builds to the start date in 2008. Equally the funding gap was narrowing as well and it was hoped that the Challenge WIG Funding would contribute as well. £60,000 per annum had been earmarked at 75% grant funding for work contributing to the project. It was proposed to let a contract to consultants so that they could pull together applications for woodland work in the 2008-2009 financial year.

## **7. EWGS Update**

The slippage in RDPE implementation should be regarded as not as frightening as it sounds. There were no 2007-2008 monies available for distribution so holding until April 08 will not affect potential recipients. Woodland Regeneration Grants had been agreed; Woodland Management Grants were perhaps the most difficult as there had been no spend this year; Woodland Creation Grants – it was hoped that "conditional" contracts might be issued offering some confidence. However payments against these would be held over until 2008-2009.

## **8. EFIP Regional Data Development**

Following representation made on behalf of the WMWFF and this Task Group in particular, EFIP had commissioned Peter Wilson to appraise the organisation and to put together an Action Plan for strengthening and development of

England's forest industries from a business perspective. An interim report had been prepared in which it was acknowledged that it is essential to employ a partnership officer, in particular to take forward project work. It was also acknowledged that was a significant role for EFIP to play at a regional level but this also posed significant resource implications.

With this in mind SR had approached Simon Hodgson - EFIP Chair. Agreement was attained in principle for EFIP to fund a piece of work that would extrapolate the Jaako-Poyry Data mapping and gapping across the West Midlands and put together a regional interpretation of the Woodland & Forestry Sector in England study, including interpretation against regional priorities. The project brief had been prepared and it was hoped that the work would begin shortly.

#### **9. Date of next meeting**

It was agreed that a watching brief be kept on the progress towards submission of the Concept Paper to AWM. A meeting of FWI Members with AWM was then advocated to take forward the bid to full submission stage.