

DIRECTOR FC WALES REPORT – JULY 2009

WELSH WOODLANDS AND TREES

FC Wales' Corporate Plan – Performance Management

1. We have produced a monitoring framework for our new Performance and Business measures set out in the Corporate Plan. This approach will bring closer alignment to the woodland strategy and also clearly differentiate between performance measures looking at what has been achieved 'on the ground' and business measures - looking at our organisational efficiencies. Reporting frequencies will vary for different measures.

Woodlands for Wales

2. Work has begun on developing an action plan for the strategy, which we intend to publish by December 2009. Actions for both FCW and other organisations are being developed, and we will need to work with other organisations to agree their inclusion in the strategy action plan.

RESPONDING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Harvesting & Marketing - Programme 1: Establishment and silviculture

3. Both April and May have shown a substantial improvement on level of trading with a total volume of 162km³ (m³ overbark standing) achieved against the planned programme of 770km³. This represents circa 5% above planned profile.
4. Improved activity by our customers is seen across Wales in the traditional sectors of construction, fencing and particleboard manufacture but in addition the biomass activity is particularly buoyant. Customers other than those in the biomass sector urge caution and report that the increased demand for Assembly Estate wood is due to the lack of material from the private sector and the stocking of DIY outlets for Spring and early Summer retail demand. The actual construction industry remains flat, therefore the sustainability of the current increased demand will be closely monitored.
5. The second of six open market tender sales was successful, however it is worth noting that timber prices have fallen by circa 35% on this time last year.
6. The Port Talbot and Shotton biomass energy plants remain buoyant for woody biomass material. The supply chain for these developments is becoming increasingly established.

7. We are currently procuring a service contract for provision of services on operational harvesting sites across Wales through the Wayleave agreement with the principal power companies Western and Scottish Power. This will bring about better implementation of services and higher safety standards on operational sites across the assembly estate.
8. We are finalising a Harvesting Resource strategy that will look at how best we deliver the harvest on the Assembly estate up to 2016. This report will form the basis and rationale for many of our plans over the coming years and is a welcome response to the Value for Money study's recommendation on improving our longer term planning.

Better Woodlands for Wales - Programme 1: Establishment and silviculture

9. Demand for Better Woodland for Wales (BWW) remains strong with new areas being added into the scheme. To date more than 1000 BWW cases have entered into the scheme and are at foundation stage or beyond. Of these 454 cases have been approved totalling over 16,000 hectares. The recent *Glastir* announcement caused some confusion within the sector over which agri-environment schemes have been closed. In response, my staff have informed stakeholders that BWW remains open for business.
10. A streamlined approach to BWW, known as BWW Smallwoods will be launched at the Royal Welsh Show. This is aimed at landowners that want to plant or manage woodland up to 20 hectares and provides access to the full range of BWW grants.

Wales Rural Development Plan: Axis 2 Review - Programme 1: Establishment and silviculture

11. FCW has been fully involved in all the developments throughout the consultation, providing a secondee to lead on the development of *Glastir*. I have offered our continued support and advice to the *Glastir* Programme Board.

Better Woodlands for Wales - Programme 2: Tree protection and health

12. We have introduced a grant for rhododendron clearance in areas of Wales where *Phytophthora* has been identified during 2009/10 and an initial £100k has been ringfenced towards this. Initial enquiries indicate that this will be allocated quickly.

National Forest Estate Wind Farm Programme - Programme 3: Renewable energy

13. The review of developers' layouts continues as they prepare their planning applications. Proposals for Planning Gain and Mitigation on WAG land are being prepared by developers for submission with their planning applications. The developer in South Wales has identified several locations where they would like to apply to FCW for permission to open quarries that could provide 0.5 million tonnes of stone to upgrade existing roads or build new roads. A minerals consultant is being appointed to assist with these transactions.

WOODLANDS FOR PEOPLE

Affordable Housing - Programme 4: Public involvement and enterprise

14. The site at Dinas Mawddwy is progressing with the expectation of the houses being occupied before the end of the year. Discussions are ongoing with the Rural Affairs Minister to attend a ceremony on site later on this year. At Dolwyddelan, site investigations are ongoing but looking evermore positive that a sale will be concluded. Ceinws is ongoing, however Gwalia's representative resigned recently and we are engaging with the new officer to move forward.

Wildfires in Wales Project - Programme 4: Public involvement and enterprise

15. Wildfires in Wales is a two-year project jointly funded by FCW, Mid & West Wales and South Wales Fire and Rescue. It seeks to address the issue of deliberately started wildfires in South Wales by exploring the motivations that drive people to set fires and the assessment and testing of methods currently used to prevent such behaviour. Information about this project and progress to date can be seen at the project website: <http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/fr/INFD-7RZH6B>

Garwnant Visitor Centre - Programme 5: Recreation and access

16. The refurbishment project of Garwnant Visitor centre is ongoing, with substantial progress being made over the recent months with the aim of an official ministerial opening before Easter 2010. The site will be opened for the summer holiday period. FCW recreation staff will be present throughout the summer, with public access to the car park, trails and play area. Toilet facilities and a temporary refreshment facility will be available whilst final construction takes place on the visitor centre and the education building, which has been jointly funded by a partnership with FCW and the Heads of the Valleys Initiative.

Aerial Ropeways - Programme 5: Recreation and access

17. After a prolonged tender exercise, Go-Ape has been awarded the contract to build four high ropes courses on FCW land. The first two will be open by Easter 2010 and the second two by Easter 2011.

Mountain biking - Programme 5: Recreation and access

18. Our contribution to Cycling is recognised in the Welsh Assembly Government's "Walking and Cycling Action Plan for Wales" published in March 2009. We are cited as one of the key partners for the action: "Ensure that the strategic development, maintenance and promotion of walking and mountain bike trails is supported" seeking the outcome "Increased contribution to the Welsh economy from walking and cycling."

IMPROVING ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Tintern Landslip - Programme 9: Restoration and management of native woodlands and open habitats

19. The difficult weather conditions on site and an unforeseen underlying geology identified during February resulted in a re-design of the stabilisation programme. This has now been concluded and good progress is maintained with the target for completion by mid-July 2009. Enquiries are still underway with questions from the local MP David Davies, leading to a stabilisation report from specialist consultant engineers Halcrows being provided. Draft legal advice has been received from our solicitor in preparation for litigation, but some of the facts on which the advice is based are in the process of being verified.

Newborough Forest Design Plan - Programme 10: Site based biodiversity, heritage and landscape

20. We are required to bring this Special Area of Conservation (SAC) into favourable condition so that we comply with the EU Habitats Directive. This is complicated by other stakeholder interests, such as public access and non-SAC related nature conservation issues. In April I chaired a meeting involving the Countryside Council for Wales and the Newborough Forest Liaison Partnership to explain the action that is required to comply with the Directive, and accommodate the other interests. A further meeting is scheduled for late June to finalise the scope and format of the management plan, setting out how the sand dunes will be brought into favourable condition. This management plan will be completed by October, and will enable FCW to amend the Forest Design Plan. The timetable for felling has been agreed with WAG, allowing work to begin in the coming months when approval for a felling licence has been granted. Current indications are that the felled timber will be used for biomass.

BUSINESS MEASURES

People Issues

21. As part of the *Amnawdd* Scheme, four undergraduates are undertaking five-week summer work placements at Forest Districts and the Woodlands for Learning team. FCW has participated in a successful GB Woodland and Forest Officer recruitment scheme, with candidates confirmed to start working in Wales. The First Minister has been asked to attend the re-launch of *Natur* at this year's Royal Welsh Show.

Welsh Language Scheme

22. I have decided to establish and chair a new Welsh Language Monitoring Group in FC Wales. The Group will start its work at the end of the summer. The new arrangements are modelled on CCW's approach to this work. CCW is regarded as a top-performing organisation by the Welsh Language Board.

Trefor Owen
25 June 2009