



Agenda Item 5

26th November 2010

WNC 31.10

WOODLAND STRATEGY ADVISORY PANEL REPORT OF MEETING ON 19th & 20th OCTOBER

Purpose

1. To present an update to the National Committee on recent WSAP business and other matters of interest.

Report

2. The Woodlands for People theme of *Woodlands for Wales* was the focus of the first day's meeting and specifically the role of woodlands as a regeneration tool in the Heads of the Valley (HoV) area.
3. Three presentations provided a useful background for the field visits. Russell De'Ath of the Heads of the Valleys Partnership explained that the regeneration themes included education, training, job creation, improvement of health and encouraging a low carbon economy. He stressed that the environment has a crucial role to play in these activities. The Partnership has a pivotal role in ensuring different agencies (including FCW) work together to achieve the strategic objectives of the project. David Llewellyn explained that the Valleys Regional Park, which extends beyond the HoV area, aims to promote regeneration through environmental, heritage and tourism activities. Aaron Fortt (FCW) outlined the main features of the HoV woodland plan. Activities are focussed on the following activities:
 - improving existing woodlands;
 - creating new woodlands;
 - dealing with urban tree problems;
 - wood fuel production and supply chains;
 - tourism and outdoor activity.
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He explained the process of identifying the first 13 priority sites for these activities.

Field visits

4. Cwm Celyn Community Woodland (Alun Lewis and colleagues). The Cwm Celyn Tenants and Residents Association spearheaded the development of this community woodland, together with FCW, following windblow of some of the plantation in the 1990s. New paths have been created increasing community access. The project has produced publicity and interpretative material, installed way-markers and benches, involved local schools and youth groups in woodland related projects and generally aims to encourage greater use of the woodland. Issues raised in discussion included:

National Committee

- continuity of local involvement in the longer term. Who will take over from the present enthusiasts?
 - Ownership - local representatives favour continuing FCW ownership;
 - impact of woodland on local house prices and inward investment.
5. Rhosheyworth Community Woodland (Chris Engel and colleagues). This mixed woodland has been developed on degraded industrial land and is adjacent to a modern housing development. In addition to tree planting the project work included construction of woodland paths, installation of picnic tables and seats, and construction of an amphitheatre for use as an outdoor classroom. The area is now used for a range of community activities. Issues raised in discussion included:
- land reclamation - methods and problems;
 - extension of the woodland;
 - links with other parts of the Ebbw Fach Trail.
6. Cwmtillery Lakes (Chris Engel and colleagues). The lower lake was formerly a feeder pond to the Cwmtillery colliery and has now been transformed into an attractive leisure area. Issues discussed included:
- impact of environmental improvements on local property prices;
 - further woodland creation on surrounding land;
 - bracken eradication and water quality.
7. Six Bells Miners' Memorial (Aaron Fortt and colleagues). The memorial provided an excellent vantage point of the valley's woodlands. Issues discussed included:
- use of the woodlands for providing fuel for local communities - access to woodlands and extraction of timber, use of local contractors, development of supply chains, types of fuel use e.g. district heating;
 - recreational use of woodlands.

Business meeting on the second day

8. Presentations were made on recent developments with:
- The WAG review on environmental bodies;
 - The Natural Environment Framework (NEF);
 - Glastir;
 - Recent measures suspending felling licences for larch.
9. The Panel's discussions centred on NEF (*A Living Wales*) and in particular its relationship with *Woodlands for Wales*. The following points were raised by members:

National Committee

- countryside matters are relatively minor functions of the Environment Agency;
- there appears to have been a serious lack of private sector and stakeholder involvement in formulating the document;
- legal and regulatory systems will pose serious barriers to merger of the three bodies;
- there is no mention of the scientific and technological influences underlying the proposals;
- market considerations appear to have been ignored;
- the document raises many questions but provides few answers to these.

Newborough Management Plan

10. I attended a meeting of the Newborough Liaison Partnership on 21st October. The draft plan was well received by local attendees and an early start with thinning operations was welcomed. There was criticism that there was still no definite information on the terms of reference and the membership of the Arbitration Panel for the Science Review.

Roger Cooper
16 November 2010