

FORESTRY EXEMPLAR PROJECT UPDATE

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Introduction

Following publication of the phase one report in May 2007 Government policy has moved on significantly. Trees, woods and forests have moved further up the agenda on a number of fronts. There is a growing emphasis in using trees throughout the urban environment to provide a range of services for new and existing communities including shade, shelter, leisure and improved air quality. Although lots of useful work has been done over the last year, challenges still exist to mainstream trees, woods and forests into broader policy and delivery over the long term.

In order to maintain momentum it is important to capture progress against the original aims of the project. This update report 12 months on is intended for CLG, Forestry Commission and Local Authority colleagues operating across the three exemplar project locations.

Phase 1

The first phase of the project was an information gathering exercise for the Forestry Commission and Communities and Local Government (CLG) to see which specific activities could take place at three selected locations to make greater use of trees, woods and forests in relation to growth. These locations were Burton upon Trent, Thetford and Urban South Hampshire (PUSH).

The full report can be found at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-74XCSY>.

Legislation/Policy Update

Key pieces of legislation and policies are being developed, backed by emerging national programmes, bolstering the Government's response to the sustainable communities agenda. This includes new legislation to drive

forward the Government's target to provide 3 million homes by 2021 through the Housing & Regeneration and Planning Bill's. In addition all new homes by 2016 will be zero carbon (Code for Sustainable Homes Level 6) fulfilling commitments made in the Climate Change Bill and Housing Green Paper.

Web site for more information: www.communities.gov.uk/corporate

The local government agenda also continues to evolve with the introduction of the Local Government and Involvement in Public Health Act 08, which enables local authorities to take more control of the services they deliver. This is further strengthened by the ongoing Sub National Review being undertaken by CLG and the Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR), which provides a stronger role for Regional Development Agency's (RDA) in supporting the economic development of local areas through regional co-ordination and support.

The Forestry Commission has continued input into the Government's thinking across all these areas of work through the development of Defra's England's Trees, Woods and Forests Strategy published in June 07. Defra has asked the Forestry Commission and Natural England to produce a delivery plan which complements all the emerging legislation, policies and programmes. The delivery plan will be published in autumn 08. The continuation of the Forestry Exemplar Project will feature as an element of the delivery plan.

A full picture of all these strands of activity including their fit within this project is provided in annex 1.

Phase 2

This report provides a summary of the work that has taken place across all three locations, one year on from the Phase 1 Report.

The information provided in this report is based upon four aims drawn from the Phase 1 Report. These aims are:

1. To establish what further opportunities, trees, woods and forests can provide to support growth and regeneration at each of the locations

2. Work with key stakeholders with an interest in green infrastructure to draw on good practice from other areas experiencing high levels of growth
3. To capture lessons learnt and identify 'quick wins' for each location drawing on existing growth area experiences and activity from across the public forest estate
4. To agree long term monitoring arrangements to track progress on specific sites within each of the locations to see how trees, woods and forests have been managed to reflect the levels of growth being experienced

Location updates and conclusions

Over the past year each of the selected locations have involved their own growth plans within a framework provided by Government under the Programme of Development process introduced to capture growth locations vision, objectives, housing trajectories and funding programme. On the basis of Government's assessment funding was awarded in December 2007 to these locations to support housing delivery. Press release can be found at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/corporate/573909>

Location	Growth Point Funding Settlement
Burton upon Trent	£6 Million
Thetford	£6 Million
PUSH	£21.5 Million

CLG funding settlement 2008-11

Much of the work which has been undertaken at all three locations has been associated with the production of the Programme of Development documents which had to be submitted to Government in October 07. This process resulted in the production of technical and feasibility studies supported by the statutory planning documents required under the new planning system.

A summary of these activities at each location with supporting commentary is provided below:

Burton upon Trent, East Staffordshire

A whole range of activity has been undertaken and completed over the last 12 months at this growth location to provide the evidence base from which decisions can be made about the scale, direction and type of growth that is required. A number of key stakeholders have been involved with the production of this work through small technical working groups.

Commissioned pieces of work include:

- Housing Land Availability Assessment
- Sub Regional Housing Market Assessment
- Employment Land Study
- Retail and Leisure Capacity Study
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and Water Cycle Study
- Green Infrastructure Study
- Transport Study

The Trent Washlands – Burton-upon-Trent, East Staffordshire



Of most relevance to the Exemplar Project is the Green Infrastructure Study which was undertaken in January 2008. A decision was made to produce a strategy that covered the entire East Staffordshire area including Burton-upon-Trent and Uttoxeter, which are the main urban centres. The study is supported by the local authority's assessment of landscape and environmental character. The Forestry Commission influenced the decision to include the entire local authority area in view of that fact that growth was occurring in neighbouring locations. Recommendations from phase 1 have

also brought the integration of the National Forest's Urban Programme into growth planning and delivery.

The Green Infrastructure Study is currently in draft and out for consultation with the editorial group, which consists of the key green infrastructure stakeholders Natural England, Forestry Commission, Environment Agency, National Forest Company, Staffordshire County Council and East Staffordshire Council. The study will be published in the summer and followed up with a formal strategy later in the year.

The editorial group is usefully evolving into what could form the basis of a green infrastructure partnership at a future stage. One substantial step forward was the inclusion of the National Forests Urban Programme into the Programme of Development for Burton, which allowed greater integration of the both streams of work and paved the way for the National Forest to take more of the lead in the improvement and delivery of green infrastructure.

The local level link with the National Forest Company will encourage stronger links with the other Growth Points and Eco Town proposals across the National Forest Area. Providing clarity and consistency to public and private sector partners who are seeking to invest in the area. Burton-upon-Trent has aspirations to become the 'capital' of the National Forest.

Conclusions

Overall progress is being made, but it has been hampered by the need to complete essential feasibility work. The National Forest Company has been and remains a major player in the planning and delivery of green infrastructure associated with growth. Early green infrastructure projects will flow from the Programme of Development, providing a platform for stronger alignment of activities between the local authority and the National Forest Company. Further planning and delivery of green infrastructure will rest with the Green Infrastructure Study. Some exciting proposals are starting to form within both urban centres and in the wider countryside, especially in the National Forest Area and Needwood Forest. No major changes in current

working arrangements are required until the study has been completed later this year.

Over the next 12 months the Forestry Commission should be:

1. Encouraging local partners and regional stakeholders to create a formalised partnership structure with responsibility of developing a Green Infrastructure Study and associated Implementation Plan.
2. Looking at the Needwood Forest area to establish what functions it can provide at the moment in response to growth and what changes could be put in place to enhance and protect it over the longer term. This would include the department's view on the areas relationship with the National Forest Programme.

Thetford, Norfolk

Breckland Council and its growth partners have been involved in a huge amount of activity since the publication of the Phase 1 Report. Key achievements include the publication of Thetford's Area Action Plan to support Breckland Council's Local Development Framework, which will be signed off in May/June 08. Due to the direct relationship between Thetford Forest Park and the growth of Thetford highlighted in the Phase 1 Report, the Forestry Commission has been engaged with much of the thinking and influencing the design of the town.

A series of studies / projects have already been completed which provide an early vision and foundation for the growth agenda in Thetford. They include:

- Breckland Retail and Town Centre Study
- Thetford Town Centre Vision and Development Plan (Moving Thetford Forward)
- Breckland Urban Housing Capacity Study
- Green Infrastructure Study
- Water Cycle Study
- Thetford Transport Strategy and Bus Station Study
- Employment Land Review and Sub-District Projections

- Breckland Community Economic Regeneration Package
- Cultural and Museums and Heritage Package
- A11 Multi Modal Study (Highways Agency)
- Rev Business Plan
- Breckland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
- Breckland Landscape Character Assessment

Moving Thetford Forward (MFT) is the key partnership for change at Thetford. They are using the work streams listed above to inform their own structure and future Business Plan. More information about the local delivery vehicle (LDV) can be found at www.movingthetfordforward.com

The activities associated with the publication of the Green Infrastructure Study have gone a long way in ensuring that the planning and provision of green spaces are taken seriously within the growth agenda. Natural England, Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission are a part of the Moving Thetford Forward structure.

Natural England and Breckland Council organised a series of green infrastructure events over the last 12 months, which culminated in a major event on 9th January 08, which explored the findings of the Green Infrastructure Study and looked at the value of trees, woods and forests within the growth agenda. This was important because it identified that stakeholders want to see Thetford become the gateway to Thetford Forest Park.

Engagement with the Thetford Growth Point has also supported the Forestry Commission's wider strategic interests in other growth locations across the East of England region. Importantly the Forestry Commission with others has also started to consider the amalgamation of other pieces of green infrastructure visioning work from across the region to formulate a more consistent approach. Sub regional green infrastructure work is coming together under the Regional Spatial Strategy.



**A11 Green Bridge
Concept
Illustration**

One of the major issues for Thetford is connectivity with the wider countryside, especially across the A11. Stakeholders broadly accepted that the growth and redevelopment of the town is a great opportunity to address this, but there is a broad range of opinion about what the solution might be. One solution, the green bridge concept is being taken to MTF in June for further discussion as part of this project. Feedback from this meeting will determine what happens next, but with broad acceptance by the key stakeholders the concept could be worked up to become the bones of a feasibility study.

In addition the Forestry Commission has taken possession of the redundant gravel extraction pits at Lynford, which could potentially become a second visitor hub for the Forest Park. Any recreational development work here will be closely linked with the growth of Thetford.

Conclusions

Of the three growth locations Thetford has made the most progress in 12 months. This has been due in part to the presence of a strong governance structure through MFT, coupled with a general willingness to embrace the growth agenda as a positive opportunity for the town. The green infrastructure agenda is gaining momentum at this location and the Forestry Commission continues to be a major player in providing new and existing communities with essential services. This project will continue to concentrate on the development of the green bridge concept as the foundation for positive action on green infrastructure is well established.

Priorities

Over the next 12 months the Forestry Commission should be:

1. Developing the green bridge concept further, including closer more detailed work with the East of England Development Agency and Highways Agency to establish a project framework
2. Working with partners to influence the formation of a green infrastructure partnership and get 'quick win' projects off the ground within this Comprehensive Spending Round period.
3. Continuing to develop Lynford as a 2nd visitor hub for the forest. Directly associating MFT branding with Lynford. This will enable local communities to see the direct link between the development of this site and the redevelopment of the town. This could include merging the Forestry Commissioning Recreation Strategy with the Local Development Framework. Joint events or workshops might be useful in communicating this message.

Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH)

Growth and regeneration in the PUSH sub-region remains a hugely complex prospect, although over the last 12 months a series of studies have been completed that start to clear the fog and steer PUSH in the right direction.

These studies include:

- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
- Green Infrastructure Strategy
- Integrated Water Management Study
- Advanced Feasibility Studies on the Strategic Development Areas
- 3 Transport Studies – initial reports to inform refreshing of Regional Funding Allocations

In addition the submission of the Programme of Development in October 07 provided a strong position from which the partnership could lobby Government for further investment to support the delivery of 80,000 homes by 2026. The Programme of Development formed the basis of the Business Plan, which is now available in draft on their website (www.push.gov.uk). This

View towards Portsmouth from Ports Down Hill



sets out the partnerships structure and formal creation of a Joint Planning Committee, which will take responsibility for the major development sites across the PUSH sub region. This is a crucially important step for the partnership as they move from an informal grouping of Chief Executives and Council Leaders to a formally constituted body.

The Green Infrastructure Strategy has formed an important component of the growth work. It has been a particular challenge at this growth point to produce a strategy that is meaningful and accepted by the vast array of stakeholders involved. In fact the process is still not complete nearly a year on. Nevertheless good progress has been made in engaging stakeholders through local meetings and 3 sub regional events. A consensus is starting to emerge and other regional partners are using this work to help guide a regional strategy on green infrastructure being led by Natural England.

The result of the work so far is a strategy that is not directly owned by PUSH, but in fact presented to them by consultants called 'Towards a Green Infrastructure Strategy'. It is for PUSH to formally respond to the strategy in due course in one of two ways. Either by producing a public statement outlining which actions they will and won't be taking forward or produce a more comprehensive action plan outlining how priorities will be delivered and who's in the lead. In support of these next steps Hampshire County Council is undertaking gap analysis work to pick out what the realistic position of the strategy is and where the gaps in evidence and information still exists. This work will be completed by the end of June 08.

Capacity and resource availability feature as a major concern of the green infrastructure planning process. Up to now Hampshire County Council and a small steering group have been leading this work. This is clearly not sustainable over the longer term and PUSH will need to take a view how they fit green infrastructure into their wider work. Such decisions need to be taken as the PUSH structure evolves. For example a Green Infrastructure Champion within PUSH might be a helpful way of keeping such issues high on the partnerships agenda.

The majority of PUSH members and officials understand the nature and remit of the Forestry Commission through work that has been conducted with each relevant local authority on the development of PPG17 Strategies. The Forestry Commission has produced a very useful document linking the department's activity with service delivery at the local authority level. This work has also made a significant contribution to the development of the draft Green Infrastructure Strategy. This work is also being shared with other regions as good practice. A copy of the document can be provided on request.

Joint working between the Forestry Commission and Natural England has started to emerge in response to the Strategic Development Area proposals. Relationships between colleagues in both organisations are still being formed, but they are starting to work together to influence the planning process. Scope exists to further galvanise this relationship, thus forming the basis of a sub-regional response on growth and green infrastructure. It is important that any joint working is backed up with longer term resource commitments to make such working arrangements meaningful.

Conclusions

Good progress has been made across the sub region towards the development of a joint response to the green infrastructure agenda, although the Green Infrastructure Strategy has not been signed off by PUSH at this stage. This means PUSH still has some work to do to get this piece of work finished and shared with stakeholders. Green Infrastructure partners will need

to ensure that PUSH form a robust response to green infrastructure issues associated with growth, this should include a short list of priorities for partners to work towards. Fortunately a reasonable amount of breathing space still exists across the sub region, as the majority of growth to 2016 will occur within existing urban centres. This time should be used wisely by stakeholders to crystallize their own thinking, align policies, join resources and propose future actions to PUSH.

Priorities

Over the next 12 months the Forestry Commission should be:

1. Continuing to influence the green infrastructure strategy development process where capacity allows
2. Helping to steer the implementation of a robust green infrastructure governance structure, which can interact effectively with the PUSH structure.
3. Responding directly to PUSH on the value of trees, woods and forests within growth. The benefits of the public forest estate should be marketed more strongly to the 'movers and shakers'.

Next Steps

Activities associated with all three locations are still ongoing with much work still to do. Therefore the conclusions made in this update report are merely a snap shot of current progress and should not be considered as the end result of the project. Good practice will continue emerge from all three locations over coming years, which both the Forestry Commission and CLG can benefit from and share with others. Information should continue to be captured in further update reports produced on an annual basis.

The priorities provided in this report provide the basis from which the Forestry Commission can do further work, continue to record good practice and share it with other regions.

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POLICY UPDATE TABLE

ANNEX 1

Item	Description	Project fit
ETWF Strategy – June 2007	Update of Defra's 1998 strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests. It sets out their contribution to environmental, social and economic outcomes.	Provides the basis for the Forestry Commission's engagement in the sustainable communities agenda. Activity at the three selected locations will help inform the department's wider involvement at other locations.
Housing Green Paper – July 2007	Supports Government aim to provide 3 million new homes by 2021, which includes a drive for zero carbon homes by 2016. Eco Town and Growth Point programmes feature as a key delivery component.	The push for higher environmental performance fits very well with the Forestry Commission's aim of demonstrating good practice in green infrastructure at the selected locations.
National Statement on Growth – October 2007	Being developed by the Forestry Commission in order to respond to the growth agenda nationally. A formal statement should be produced within 12 months	Work at the three locations will help inform the development of a national statement and seek to provide a co-ordinated and consistent approach to the growth agenda.
Housing and Regeneration Bill – November 2007	This Bill provides a better environment for housing targets to be reached, this includes the creation of the Homes and Communities Agency	Good fit with proposed objectives of the Homes and Communities Agency in supporting local authorities providing places where people want to live and work.
Climate Change Bill - November 2007	The Government is committed to addressing both the causes and consequences of climate	Proposals with the Bill include improving the environmental performance of development. This fits well with the Forestry Commission's

	change and has therefore introduced a Climate Change Bill. The Bill will create a new approach to managing and responding to climate change in the UK	objectives on woodfuel, sustainable construction and the development of high quality urban environments that can adapt to climate change.
Planning White Paper and Planning Bill – November 2007	Both the White Paper and Bill continue further reforms to the planning system, including a fresh look at the way major infrastructure is delivered and the introduction of an infrastructure tariff (Community Infrastructure Levy).	Links to planning delivery and green infrastructure need to be strengthened. Emerging lessons on embedding GI projects with planning tariffs and/or levy's will be very useful to other locations beyond the exemplar project.
Local Government and Involvement in Public Health Act – Dec 2007	A wide ranging piece of legislation that devolves more power to local government including more powers through the local area agreement process	This project provides a good opportunity to test the new local government arrangements coming online from June 2008. Lessons learnt can be shared with Forestry Commission colleagues in other regions, supporting the pilot work that has already taken place in the north west. PUSH also provides an insight into the Multi Area Agreement process.
CLG Draft Green Space Action Plan – January 2008	In response to the NAO report on urban green spaces CLG has produced an internal action plan to better align departmental priorities on urban green space.	CLG's priorities can be neatly tied into this project to secure some level of departmental commitment.
Trees in Towns 2 – February 2008	An update of the tree	The development of local authority

	<p>conditions survey. It also provides ten recommendations, which includes the production of Tree Strategies at the local authority level</p>	<p>Tree Strategies will be useful in supporting the aims of the exemplar project. It will be interesting to see if selected locations decide to adopt this approach and produce a strategy that reflects wider green infrastructure priorities.</p>
<p>Code for Sustainable Homes – March 2008</p>	<p>Provides the standard assessment framework and performance ratings for all domestic buildings. Mandatory ratings will come into force from May 2008. A code level six home represents the highest level of environment performance.</p>	<p>The project can potentially explore the roles that trees, woods and forests can play in supporting the delivery of the code in the design and layout of development sites.</p>