

ENGLAND FORESTRY STRATEGY: THE FOREST ENTERPRISE CONTRIBUTION

Introduction

1. This paper has been prepared to inform the Forum of programmes proposed by Forest Enterprise to help implement the England Forestry Strategy. The Forum is invited to endorse the approach and targets proposed. The paper could also be considered as a template for other organisations who are members of the Forum to summarise their proposals for implementing the Strategy.

Background

2. Managing one third of England's forest, by far the largest timber production programme and the largest informal recreation resource in England, Forest Enterprise is a powerful vehicle for the delivery of a whole range of Government policies. This paper highlights the contribution Forest Enterprise could make to help implement the English Forestry Strategy, by reference to the priorities the Strategy identified. Targets are put forward to stimulate discussion. At present the financial outlook for Forest Enterprise is extremely tight as a result of the weak timber market. Whilst it may be possible to tap external resources, a commitment to some Forest Enterprise funding is likely to be a pre-requisite for success. More work is required to quantify this once the broad magnitude of programmes is settled.

Forestry for Rural Development

3. The Existing Forestry Commission Estate. The principal opportunities for rural development stem from the existing Forestry Commission estate, providing employment and business opportunities in rural areas and in the processing sector through the orderly marketing of our timber
4. *Targets:* Forest Enterprise will:
 - a) continue to bring timber to market in line with its published forecasts;
 - b) review the frequency and method of its sales to ensure that they are providing the best opportunities for a thriving timber industry;
 - c) enter into more longer term contracts to give continuity to supply and explore the sale of cutting rights;
 - d) support Forestry Commission in the development of new market opportunities;



- e) support new initiatives such as wood for energy generation and wood for traditional and craft uses as its resources allow.



5. New Woodland. There may also be opportunities to support rural development through the acquisition and development of new timber producing woodlands.
- a) economic fragility of agriculture, particularly on intractable soils;
 - b) potential for Forest Enterprise to lead in encouraging Forestry investment;
 - c) potential for economic diversification in thinly populated areas with limited employment opportunities;
 - d) high yield potential and high rate of return (in forestry terms).
6. *Funding and Mechanisms.* primarily direct funding by the Forestry Commission and freehold/leasehold purchase. It may be considered that the Forest Enterprise role here should be principally to lead the way in encouraging private sector investment supported by the Forestry Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme.
7. *Target:* Forest Enterprise will aim to establish 500 hectares of new woodland in the South West Forest project area over the next five years as a pilot project.

Forestry for Economic Regeneration

8. New Woodland. This is a new area for Forest Enterprise, but a real need for the organisations large scale and multi-purpose management skills has been identified in an area of work close to the heart of Government's social policies.
9. Trees and woodlands as the after-use for damaged land can play a vital role improving the, living and working environment in areas devastated by the decline of traditional industry, such as coal mining. Forest Enterprise's science and design base, and its ability to manage the large scale establishment and subsequent care of woodlands is valued by local authorities and owners and operators of damaged land. The Commission's Land Regeneration Unit is already established and developing opportunities.
10. *Funding and Mechanisms*
- a) this might be seen as the highest Forest Enterprise priority;
 - b) land value often nominal;
 - c) for recent/current working sites restoration at operators expense;
 - d) for old sites funding through Government regeneration partnerships;
 - e) generally leasehold, with Local Authority or other retaining freehold.
11. *Target:* to establish 3,000 hectares of new woodland on damaged land over the next 5 years.
12. It is considered that Forest Enterprise can most effectively contribute by concentrating its resources in a few priority areas at any one time. Initiatives are already under way in Thames Chase and the Mersey/Red Rose Community Forests and the National Forest. The aim would be to develop a partnership with local



interests so as to be confident of acquiring and planting at least 1,000 hectares in each area, thus getting away from the piecemeal approach to acquisition; justifying proper staffing; and creating large new areas of urban fringe woodland which can make a major contribution in terms of public access and environmental improvement.

Forestry for Recreation, Access and Tourism

13. Our principle target for recreation and access is to increase both the number of people visiting Forestry Commission land and their enjoyment by providing 'freedom to roam' across an increasing area of woodland and the additional services visitors want.
14. The Existing Forestry Commission Estate. Already the largest national informal access resource, we will seek further opportunities to improve the extent and quality of access to Forestry Commission land to even more people by:
 - a) opening up access to Forestry Commission land which is currently physically or legally restricted;
 - b) providing the services that people want;
 - c) sourcing a wide range of funding opportunities including lottery and private business finance;
 - d) reducing net costs whilst increasing visitor numbers and improving services.
15. *Funding and Mechanisms*
 - a) Forestry Commission direct funding for freehold purchases;
 - b) business partnership and Private Finance Initiative;
 - c) lottery funding and sponsorship;
 - d) direct charging at point of use.
16. *Targets.* Forest Enterprise will:
 - a) develop new access by purchasing 3,000 hectares of freeholds over 5 years providing new or assured public access to land currently held under lease;
 - b) develop at least 3 major forest centres and 4 new catering franchises through Private Finance Initiative partnerships over 5 years;
 - c) develop at least one major centre through Lottery funding over next 3 years;
 - d) develop at least two new major education centres (c 10,000 children per annum) over next 5 years;
 - e) improve access and community engagement for 10 woods accessible on foot from peoples homes each year for the next 5 years;
 - f) develop new agreements giving improved access with at least one specialist user group each year over next 5 years, commencing, with horse riders in 1998;
 - g) increase visits to Forest Enterprise woodlands by providing improved information on opportunities for recreation at site, local community and national levels.



17. New Woodland. There is also a need for new access woodland and Forest Enterprise is well placed to provide it because:
- a) lack of opportunity, either because there is no open access woods or because they are too heavily used close to towns where most people live;
 - b) the guaranteed provision of quality public access and recreation in new Forest Enterprise woodland;
 - c) Forest Enterprise skill and commitment to design, implement and manage multi-purpose woodland with access as a key component
 - d) the high cost of land and high priority of access make woodlands planted for people less attractive to commercial investors
 - e) supports the Government's Community Forests programme
18. *Funding and Mechanism*
- a) external/partnership funding wherever possible; Forestry Commission funding used to lever external funding;
 - b) includes land fill tax and other comparable funding;
 - c) requirement for Forestry Commission core funding to buy/lease and to plant key areas; scope for 'rollover re-investment through sale of low access potential land to reinvest in new community woodland projects;
 - d) freehold, leasehold or partnership purchase/ownership.
19. *Target:* to achieve 500 hectares of public access land (including existing Forestry Commission owned public access land) within each Community Forest and the National Forest within 10 years.

Forestry for the Environment and Conservation

20. The Forestry Commission's estate is a key biodiversity resource, with 180 Sites of Special Scientific Interest in England, including the New Forest, amongst the country's, most valuable habitats. Direct action through Forest Enterprise can give guaranteed delivery of many of the Government biodiversity targets for habitats including lowland heath, broadleaved woodland, pasture woodland and limestone pavement and species including Red Squirrel, Woodlark, Nightjar, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and many others.
21. *Funding and Mechanism*
- a) Forestry Commission core funding;
 - b) sponsorship and partnership with conservation bodies;
 - c) external funding, principally European Union LIFE funding;



22. *Targets:*

- a) to implement over the next 5 years actions planned in Forest Enterprise's Lowland Heath, Pasture Woodland, Limestone Pavement and Upland Oakwood Habitat Action Plans;
- b) to implement over the next 5 years actions planned in the agreed management plans for Sites of Special Scientific Interest on Forestry Commission land in England;
- c) to implement over the next 5 years action planned in the Species Action Plan, For Red Squirrels;
- d) to complete the Species Action Plan for Butterflies by 31 March 1999;
- e) to complete the £3.5million New Forest LIFE project programme;
- f) to implement the £300,000 LIFE project for the Border Mires;
- g) to seek, with partners, LIFE funding for Limestone Pavement woodland in Cumbria;
- h) to develop over the next 3 years a plan for lowland broad-leaved woodland, completing an inventory of the Forestry Commission estate and developing a plan for the enhancement of the habitat, including a programme of conversion;
- i) to convert approximately 2,000 hectares to semi-natural heathland and pasture woodland in the New Forest over 20 years.

Conclusion

23. The Forum is invited to the programmes and targets proposed by Forest Enterprise. to help implement the England Forestry Strategy.

**Forest Enterprise, England
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