Friends of Thetford Forest

Progress Update for National Stakeholder Forum 29 January 2014

Friends of Thetford Forest is a voluntary organisation set up in 1995 to help increase understanding, knowledge and enjoyment of Thetford Forest and to encourage the involvement and support of the community in its development. Each year, it seeks to fulfil those aims and in 2013 it focused on how timber is produced and on the conservation of a medieval warrener's lodge, using wood from the PFE in East Anglia.

'The Working Forest' on 28 June 2013 was attended by 40 volunteers and corporate members who visited planting, harvesting and experimental 'tree species for climate change' sites to see forest operations in action. Forestry Commission staff hosted the event as an opportunity for local people to learn about timber production in Thetford Forest.

The conservation of Mildenhall Warren Lodge took place throughout 2013. On the 'Heritage at Risk' Register because its flintwork had been damaged by the recent harsh winter weather, Friends of Thetford Forest secured funding totalling £81 600 from English Heritage; the Forestry Commission and Forest Heath District Council for a new roof to protect it, modelled on a photograph of the 1930s. As one of only two such standing buildings (the other being Thetford Warren Lodge) to survive as evocative reminders of the warrening industry of the Brecks where rabbits were farmed commercially for their meat and their fur, it has special archaeological significance.

Linking to the initiative to encourage sustainable use of British wood products, Douglas Fir from Forestry Commission woods in Norfolk formed the timber frame for the roof and ensured that the project was locally resourced and had a low carbon footprint

The 'Lessons Learnt' are that there is a high level of interest among communities to learn more about their local working forest and there is a general willingness to be involved in a variety of projects that benefit the nation's forests.

Anne Mason
Chair, FOTF.