

Secondment brings new skills

Bruce bolsters work on housing growth



Bruce Collinson joined Forestry Commission England from the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) on a two-year secondment to strengthen links between the two departments. He focussed on strengthening the Forestry Commission's policies and programmes associated with housing growth, sustainable communities and green infrastructure. The loan usefully coincided with the publication of the Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests in 2007 and associated Delivery Plan in 2008, which prominently featured the growing importance and role of street trees and urban woodland.

objectives

- To strengthen CLG's understanding of the role of trees, woods and forests
- To act as technical support and mentor to staff housing on growth and green infrastructure at a regional and national level
- To inform and advise the Forestry Commission on new legislation and policies being introduced by CLG.

actions

- Strengthening linkages between CLG and the Forestry Commission Supporting and advising members of the internal Sustainable Growth Group
- Speaking and presenting at key events
- Briefing Forestry Commission colleagues on Government policy/programmes
- Developing and sharing good practice on green infrastructure
- Inducting new members of CLG and the Forestry Commission staff into the growth and green infrastructure agenda
- Strengthening links between the Forestry Commission and key stakeholders
- Revising and updating Forestry Commission intranet
- Developing and delivering the Forestry Exemplar Project

achievements

- Regional staff have benefited from increased support from the national team and an insight into the workings of CLG, helping them to prepare and react to change at the regional and local level. Examples include early Forestry Commission engagement on Green Infrastructure Strategies, local governance arrangements and input into Local Development Frameworks.
- Forestry Commission England has benefited from being more closely aligned to CLG's policies and programmes. This knowledge has enabled it to react more proactively to emerging work and contribute its expertise and guidance to the Government's wider agenda.
- New links are emerging with non-traditional partners on the growth and green infrastructure planning and delivery at the national level including CABI Space and the Homes and Communities Agency.
- The sustainable communities message has been embedded in the Forestry Commission's work at all levels, leading to the development of a Communications Strategy for Sustainable Growth and a closer look at how and where Forestry Commission policy could be used to support this agenda.

background

The revision of the Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests in 2007, provided an excellent opportunity to strengthen links between the Forestry Commission and CLG, which included - for the first time - a stronger focus on housing growth and sustainable communities.

To support this a two-year loan to the Forestry Commission was secured in January 2007 to provide a conduit between CLG, Forestry Commission and key stakeholders developing the remit of trees, woods and forests within the green infrastructure agenda across the Growth Areas, Growth Points and Eco Towns Programme.

The loan supported the continued development and maintenance of crucial links in policy and delivery between the Forestry Commission, CLG and CABE Space, following high level and ministerial meetings between the three organisations.

The Forestry Exemplar Project provided an opportunity to investigate the Growth Point Programme as confirmed by Government in October 2006, which identified twenty-nine Growth Points. Three locations were selected by the Forestry Commission and CLG to establish what key benefits trees; woods and forests could contribute to the growth agenda. These locations were Thetford (Norfolk), Burton upon Trent (Staffordshire) and Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH).

quotes

"The opportunity to strengthen links between both departments on the housing growth agenda has been of great benefit to my team, demonstrating that loans of this kind can work successfully to improve cross government collaboration at the local level."
Henry Cleary, Deputy Director Housing Growth Programmes Team, CLG

"Bruce has brought a valuable new perspective to our engagement with the Sustainable Communities agenda. We have developed a more focussed role for trees, woods and forests and there is no doubt that this has been of real benefit to us"
Gareth Price, Policy and Programmes Group, Forestry Commission

partners

Department for Communities and Local Government
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Natural England
English Partnerships
Homes and Communities Agency
Environment Agency

funding

Funding was provided by the Forestry Commission, with an additional £15k from the Department for Communities and Local Government in 2007.

lessons learnt

- **Joined up working:** the greatest strength of the loan has been to increase the level of joined up working between both departments.
- **Mainstreaming:** knowledge and direct contact with changes to central and local government legislation over the period of the loan on planning, climate change, funding and housing has enabled the Forestry Commission to have more influence in mainstreaming its own policies and programmes.
- **Sharing information:** information and data exchange is critical to a greater level of successful partnership working. It also provides a useful springboard to promote your own objectives and find common ground with a range of partners.