

## **RWFF Implementation Plan event at Ashton Court, April 2009**

### **Business and Markets group**

Facilitator: Nick Hoare

Scribe: Ian Briscoe

Participants (morning): Gesa Reiss, ConFor; Angela Pollard, Small Woods Association; Rob Guest, Forestry Commission; Stephen Green, Regen SW; Nigel Howe, Chelvey Designer Makers; Mark Smith, FWAG; D-J Gent, EA; Nick Fackrell, Somerset County Council

Participants (afternoon): John Waltham, GreenSpirit Fuels; Susan Stangroom, North Somerset Council; Mike Moser, FC Regional Advisory Committee; David Pengelly, Agent; Howard Vater, Woodland Improvement & Conservation; Michele Kerry, Silvanus; Kevin Lindgaard, consultant

#### **RWFF Aims and Objectives**

- 1. Increase volume, quality and sustainability of wood and wood products consumed and grown within the region.**

#### **AM Workshop – Discussion points:**

Certification is generally viewed as meaning sustainability. It is difficult for small woodlands to achieve certification. Certification threshold for entry into Woodland Management Grant (WMG) has been increased from 30ha to 100ha, which may help.

Government Procurement rules (ref. CPET) adds an additional burden. Woodfuel is included which could be a particular problem for small woods. New WMG template may address this.

Can contractors/agents play a part? Group certification can work for small woodlands.

Quality - Are we looking after our woodlands? Again problems with small woodlands and lack of silvicultural and marketing knowledge.

Market pull – we need a market requiring quality product to justify the extra input in growing.

Do farmers have the knowledge?

St Regis pull has been replaced by woodfuel.

Are woodland owners put off by the paperwork?

Forest of Avon offered a service to farmers, risk that this can bring them into conflict with Forest Managers.

What about co-operatives? Could membership fees pay for services, machinery rings, producer groups. There is a pilot co-operative group operating in Cotswolds. Specialist industry needs 'experts'

Can FWAG/Silvanus provide support?

What is the critical mass? Supply is likely to reduce. There is currently no incentive for growing conifers.

Is there sufficient market pull, is there any way to stimulate output?

Long-term nature of timber growing makes it difficult to attract investment for new woodland planting.

Timber is likely to be a good investment for future lack of fossil fuels etc.

### **PM Workshop**

Raising consumer awareness

What products are available? Softwood – Structural, pallets, fencing.

We need to match species to products

Structural timber is generally not milled within the SW region but is shipped out of the region for processing.

There is a lack of mills processing hardwoods

Information is needed for landowners to stimulate interest in woodland management.

We need to create a greater demand for woodland products

Should RDA be encouraging processors to invest?

There are lots of 'unmanaged' woods we need to create a market pull.

Push = Government incentives

This year's high demand for firewood has brought some additional woods into management.

Pump priming is needed to enable 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> thinning of woods.

With food you can find locally produced food but it is not so easy to find information on locally produced timber. People are more concerned about the timber being local rather than certified. There tend to be gaps in the supply chain.

Can we create a branding for South West produced timber?

Coed Cymru provided storage facility based on a co-operative for drying of timber

Stable supplies of reliable product is needed (guaranteed supply) to encourage investment. Mills will always buy from a small number of trusted suppliers if they can.

FSC is used in a negative way in that rather than attracting a premium for FSC timber, non-certified supplies are discounted.

Could we use clearing houses as a way of marketing timber?

Is CPET an issue?

Marketing, who should be doing it?

Splitting of woodland ownerships can make management more difficult, more costly and less economically viable.

Small woodlands generally lose money

Lack of adequate access to woodlands to carry out management can be a real stumbling block.

We have to accept that there will be some woodlands that will never come into management.

We need to increase grants.

Subsidising wood burner installation would increase market demand for low quality wood.

Are woodland owners being put off by red tape and form filling?

A Silvicultural Grant is required to encourage high quality management to produce a high quality product.

## **2. Increase contribution of woodfuel to renewable energy supplies in the region, measured by installed capacity.**

### **AM workshop**

There is a 'lag' between planting and harvesting, how do we get to the point where new woodlands SRC are producing an income?

By 2025 there will be a massive market for biomass boilers, we need to plant now, how do we achieve this?

We shouldn't consider woodland management to be a one off, i.e. thin it once and leave it, there needs to be a continued input.

Big installers worry about a lack of supply in 10 years

How about creating a renewable heat obligation on public bodies?

Is there a danger that we move away from traditional High Forest management to wards shorter rotations? (People do not take a walk in SRC). We could lose some of our most valuable assets. We should be promoting/practising multipurpose woodland use.

Supply currently tends to be 'point to point' i.e. estate's own log supplier straight to end user rather than being distributed by specialist 'energy suppliers'

Farmers are showing more interest in supplying renewable energy.

District heating needs to be in at the planning/development stage.

We need to stimulate demand in areas where there is a good supply of local wood.

Need to be more providers, processors, and end users to stimulate competition.

We need a more entrepreneurial approach to supply chain

End users need security of supply.

You are entering an existing market where buyers are already taking timber for other markets, woodfuel will need to compete.

We should not sell ourselves short, why should woodfuel be cheap - we need to track alternative fuel costs but remain competitive.

Is there need for training in the supply chain, how to get tree from forest to grate?

There appears to be sufficient knowledge regarding log supply, although supply failed to meet demand this winter. There is a lack of knowledge about chip/pellet supply.

The 'IGNITE' programme has been a source of information.

### **PM workshop**

We appear to be focussing on woodchip and have taken our eye off logs, what is the annual throughput of logs, do we know?

Grant aid tends to favour the big installations.

Woodlands can be improved through thinning/management, therefore there are increased benefits from using biomass from woodlands rather than SRC

Plant spacing at 1100 stems per hectare leads to poor quality and should be avoided.

Woodfuel will not drive woodland management but may tip the balance between managing or not managing.

## **3. Woods and Forests contributing to leisure/tourism economy of SW**

### **AM workshop**

How do we get people to pay?

Forestry Commission mountain bike trails are a good example of how to bring in extra revenue both to the woodland owner through franchising the operation and to the local economy through associated businesses and increased tourism.

Other examples of woodland activity franchises are cycle hire/repair, Go Ape, Climbing walls. This should not however be seen as 'easy money'.

Has NHS voucher, GP referrals, woodland gym idea been developed. Could woodland owners get money from this?

There is potential for smaller woodlands such as adding value to Bed and breakfast business.

Can grant be less dictatorial re straight lines if we want to encourage people into the woods. (This was generally not seen as a problem from the perspective of people coming into the woods or from the FC grant aid in community woods.)

We shouldn't just be thinking about trees that will be there for 150 years. We need to create interesting woodlands.

Other ideas:-

Woodland funerals

Struggle to get income from forest schools

Government to target health issues get people who need to walk in the woods into the woods.

Plays. Use the woods as an auditorium

Non-woodland products eg nuts, fungi.

### **PM workshop**

Riding permits

H&S may have reduced activities

Barbecue sites, especially next to tourist honey pots, franchise or co-operative type management.

FC Woodland Management Grant to recognise tourism element in justifying public access.

## **4. Increase Knowledge and Skills**

### **AM workshop**

Is there a big problem? Yes!

Ageing workforce is a big problem

Does the forester have the knowledge to get the timber into the market?

Recent Graduate from National School of Forestry did not cover utilisation, is this a failing of the modular nature of current courses?

Is Business management missing?

### **PM Workshop**

There is an ageing workforce and it is very difficult to get young people interested

Contractors cannot afford to train new staff

Much smaller pool of FC trained chainsaw users so no cross-over into private sector

LANTRA courses are unreliable, never know if there is funding or courses are cancelled

Lack of availability of courses for owners, useful for engaging owners.

Funding is currently hard to come by.

Small woodlands tend to be secondary to main business i.e. farming.

How do you enthuse owners of small woodlands?

ELS has raised the profile of woodlands to a certain extent by providing points for ELS applications.

We do not have a long cultural heritage of woodland management/ involvement in the wider community

We need to be able to provide good advice

SW Forest raised the bar with free/cheap seminars

Is there a way of having a Consultant 'no win no fee' type approach?

There may still be a perception that tree felling/woodland management is a bad thing.

What about training workshops, seminars etc. in FC priority areas?

Group management, put together by Government body and farmed out to private sector

### **Top Five Priorities**

1. AM. Advice, knowledge understanding of balanced product stream  
PM. SW hardwoods under utilised, local branding , clearing houses
2. AM. Security of supply, competitive supply chain
3. AM. Sharing best practice esp. between FC/private sector. Access to leisure industry  
  
PM. Market research into how tourists would like to use local woodlands. Co-operative booking/management agency for barbecues, riding permits etc
4. AM. Improve Business and Marketing skills