

# **RWFF IP Event – ASHTON COURT 21<sup>ST</sup> APRIL 2009**

## **Natural Environment** theme

Facilitator: Roger Griffin, NE and RWFF Delivery Group member  
Scribe: Peter Harrison, Forestry Commission

### **1<sup>st</sup> GROUP (MORNING):**

Phil Stone – PS, Somerset County Council  
Jonathan Burgess – JB, Woodland Trust  
Phil Tidey – PT, Small Woods Association  
Susan Stangroom – SS, North Somerset Council  
Mark Connelly – MC, Cotswolds AONB  
Norman Healey – NH, Deer Initiative  
Matthew Woodcock – MW, Forestry Commission  
Tony Phillips – TP, Cotswolds AONB

### **2<sup>nd</sup> GROUP (AFTERNOON):**

Mark Smith – (MS), FWAG  
Rob Guest – (RG), Forestry Commission  
Matt Hamilton – (MH), Avon Biodiversity Partnership  
Mark Minkley – (MM), Bath & NE Somerset  
Steve Russell – (SR), Wiltshire County Council

### **Objective 1:**

#### **Increase contribution to natural resource protection and biodiversity**

- Concern was expressed that FC was not recording BAP priority habitats and that was causing problems for LA's recording of priority habitats.
- The point was made that half the woodlands of native species are not BAP habitats but are covered under ASNW.
- In time we could review the provisional ancient woodland inventory but how much of our resources do we devote to this exercise? Improve baseline of info on ASNW or all woods?
- A recent report has estimated the harvested volumes for SW woodlands as much higher than expected - based on felling licence and grant scheme figures. Not all approvals go ahead with the work agreed, so FC figures do not always reflect work on the ground.
- The more sophisticated the recording system, the more errors we can get.
- Maybe it's not appropriate to measure everything? Do we need to measure so much – is it not progress made towards targets that matters?

#### **ACTION: To develop a simple effective reporting system for all woodland habitats – baselining.**

#### Other points:

- How are we going to use the information and who should be involved? - FC, FWAG, NE, LA's. We need to identify owners, woodlands and issues we want to record.

- It's important that we define management objectives – for example, forestry for birds.
- **1 POST-IT note:** “Increase recognition by public and some environmental groups/organisations, that sustainable economic management and biodiversity enhancement, are not mutually exclusive. Necessary if more BL woodlands are to be brought into management to meet increased demand for woodfuel.”

### **Ref Objective 1.**

- ASNW is a catchall category for woodlands - only half of all woodlands in the SW are BAP habitats.
- Measuring what woodlands we have below 2ha, an extra 10% was identified in Cranborne Chase.
- What scale do we want to go down to; what do we want recorded? Important to be consistent.

**ACTION: Develop a simple and robust plan we can report on and achieve.**

### Objective 2

#### **Increase contribution to landscape quality, culture and archaeology:**

- Need to bear in mind the planning policies, which relate to landscape planning. We have Landscape Character Assessment. We need to develop the use of this method to avoid any potentially negative effects of tree planting – 30% of the SW is Protected Landscapes – whilst still managing change. Not all areas of SW have LCAs and existing ones are not consistent. Danger that could be used as constraint on woodland establishment rather than enabler?
- Climate Change studies will look at what impact species change/ climate change mitigation will have on the landscape.

**ACTION: Explore use of Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) to inform woodland's contribution to landscapes and apply other similar assessments, as they are developed/refined – example, the Cotswolds Study.**

- Historic assets in woodlands – covered in FC Archaeology Guidelines
- LIDAR has been used in Forest of Dean to identify woodland archaeology.

**ACTION: Use of LCA as recommended by 1<sup>st</sup> (morning) group.**

**ACTION: Important to establish links to Green Infrastructure planning agenda. (MM).**

### Objective 3 (from ETWF)

#### **Contribution of woodland to providing Ecosystem Services (ES)**

- Floodplain management using woodland can assist with the provision of Ecosystem Services. Parrett Catchment Project was useful pilot project.
- It is important to increase our knowledge of ES, based on sound science, particularly around carbon sequestration. Find/use pilots to demonstrate trees' value in ES.

**ACTION: Increase knowledge of Ecosystem Services, using a sound scientific basis and disseminate information in a simple way. (FC, EA, NE).**

- Need to plant trees in the right soils and identify other relevant soil issues such as podsolisation (very specific issue)
- Use of opportunity mapping; difficult to be strategic in such a dynamic situation of climate change.
- ES – trees for shelter, shading, Green infrastructure, erosion control, increased rainfall percolation, protecting communication routes.
- ES includes shading, flood plain planting, access, recreation; aspects which fall outside biodiversity.
- ES boils down to public / society / community benefits from trees and woodlands.

**ACTION: Provide simple, basic ES information / exemplar projects to demonstrate the value of trees and woodlands to the community. Could fit in with GI provision; 3 years to influence planners, would be achievable. (FC, EA, LA's, NGO's).**

Objective 4 (from ETWF)

**Ensure woods and veteran trees are resilient to climate change and provide opportunities for people to enjoy woodland wildlife**

- Explore implications of using tree stock from further south, used to warmer conditions
- Reaction to expected climate change; Cotswolds not now planting Beech.
- More survey needed to identify locations of non-woodland veteran trees – aerial photos useful.

**ACTION: Develop procedures for ensuring a succession of Veteran trees and build on the work of the Ancient Tree Forum.**

- Parish Tree Warden Schemes – engagement with children, planners, providing guided walks.
- There are a lot of private individuals out there, who can provide support to LA's and FC.
- Veteran trees – very important need for management, ensuring the succession of trees and thinning to provide resilience to climate change.
- Where are our Veteran trees?
- There is more of a focus on individual trees, in the ETWF delivery plan.

**ACTION:** The group felt that the objective wording should be split to create two objectives. Split where Italics start.

**ACTION:** Use Ancient Tree Forum example and link into the Parish Tree Warden scheme, although it was noted that this scheme does not fully cover the SW yet; (possible Woodland Trust lead?).

Objective 5 (from ETWF)

**Conserve and enhance the biodiversity associated with non-native trees, woods and forests, and non-woodland habitats and species:**

- Important to have a range of species which are resilient to change. A variety of species will help ensure that biodiversity is maintained even when natural problems arise.
- A successional, matrix approach, avoiding too narrow a view of woodland management will help optimise biodiversity benefits.
- Modern woodlands have a balance of open space and other species and can accommodate important non-woodland biodiversity; e.g. heathland.

**ACTION:** Encourage the highest standard of woodland design in relation to biodiversity management.

**ACTION:** Essential need for good deer management. A balanced approach, which takes account of other biodiversity interests.

**ACTION:** Encourage increased awareness of the positive and negative effects of deer in woodlands.

- Value for the environment is not only provided by Native Woodlands. It is useful to have a focus on non-native trees and their biodiversity.

**ACTION:** Recognise and promote the biodiversity associated with non-native trees, woods and forests, through:

- Dissemination of information.
- Demonstration events on PFE land for non-native Douglas Fir areas; structure of woodlands, e.g. continuous cover. The provision of exemplar sites, eg Stourhead?
- Urban / street trees are also important habitats and are often non-native.

**Peter Harrison**  
23/04/09

**Additional points noted by Mike Edwards:**

- i) Need to identify and promote the historic assets in woods – need guidelines and knowledge of where they are.**
- ii) Link enhanced landscapes to woods and forests.**
- iii) Be clear about difference between aspirations and achievables.**