

South West Woodland Renaissance

Helping to conserve the region's woodlands



South West Woodland Renaissance is a wide-ranging three-year project inspiring investment in woodlands, timber processing and associated goods and services predominantly for economic, but also for social and environmental gain. It is steered by a public/private sector partnership and, through a project facilitator, supports a grants programme which is used to fund targeted schemes that support regional development throughout the South West. As the project moves into its last year, the partnership seeks to create a single voice for the region's forestry sector and solve some of the long-standing issues that have led to its fragmentation.

objectives

- To gain public recognition and support for woodlands, forestry and its associated products and services as important, sustainable land-use industries.
- To increase the value and contribution of the industry to the regional economy, society and environment.
- To increase economic, technical, business and market knowledge within and about the industry.
- To identify and roll-out best practice across the region.
- To seek, support and, where appropriate, implement further diversification initiatives in the land-based industries resulting from EU and UK government reforms.

actions

- Appointment of a South West Woodland Renaissance Facilitator to bridge the gap between industry and potential funders from the public and private sectors.
- Setting up a regional web-based directory of products and services in the region, designed for both the industry and consumers (www.woodland-directory-sw.org.uk).
- Independent Economic Studies to guide future investment from both the public and private sector, including studies of the potential for off-road cycling and alternative markets for wood following the closure of a major processing plant.
- Programme of Woodfair South West events throughout the region to establish a regional brand and target urban markets, tourist markets and seasonal selling opportunities through events across the South West.
- South West Coordinated Woodfuel Initiative – Increasing woodfuel usage and showcasing the region's existing woodfuel installations. Provision of advice and grant support (SDF) for 66 installations in the 'South West Protected Landscapes' areas with a total installed capacity of 2470kW.
- Woodworks Project to assist woodland-related businesses employ and train new staff.
- A series of exhibitions and events with the Centre for Contemporary Arts and the Natural World to promote and explore the use of wood and timber in new buildings to architects and builders.

achievements

- Representatives from the public and private forestry sectors in the South West are working together for the first time to share their ambitions for development.
- The Woodland Renaissance Partnership is establishing a regional platform for brokering development of the sector's assets, skills and business.
- The project has won recognition for forestry interests from the South West Regional Development Agency and other players in regional arena.

background

The timber industry in the South West of England is worth an estimated £575 million per year including processing and leisure activities. The traditional industry suffers from fragmentation, lack of an overall marketing strategy and competition from cheap imports.

In just 18 months South West Woodland Renaissance has established a forum and process to attract investment into the region's woodlands and forests. By supporting forestry-related industries, including timber and tourism and leisure, it aims to use all three drivers of sustainability - economic, social and environmental - to secure a productive long-term economic future for the region's woodlands.

The Woodland Renaissance Partnership has become a major delivery partner for the South West Regional Woodland and Forestry Framework especially under its "livelihoods" theme. It will continue to identify new investment for the sector once initial funding ends in 2008 and is currently exploring a possible role in the emerging Rural Development Programme for the South West Region.

quotes

"The South West Regional Development Agency recognises the importance our woodlands have to our economy, and is pleased to support this innovative region-wide partnership with sustainable development and the local economy at its heart."
Heidi Bates, Rural Development Adviser (SWRDA).

partners

Charltons Sawmill
Clinton Devon Estates
ConFor, Euroforest Ltd
Forest of Avon
Forestry Commission
Great Western Community
Forest, Norbord Ltd
South West Forest
Silvanus Trust, Tilhill Forestry
Wiltshire County Council
Woodfuel Solutions

funding

Brickfield Forestry & Conservation
Cornwall County Council
Dorset AONB Partnership
Exmoor National Park
Forestry Commission
South West Regional Development Agency
Tamar Valley Service
Woodland Trust

lessons learnt

- Establishing a new partnership to deliver the scheme took longer than expected. There was a long process of learning and understanding what was needed.
- The project has tapped into the enthusiasm of a wide range of people and organisations that have contributed time, skills and money.