

In February 2008 the first county-wide strategy for Trees, Woods and Forests was launched in Dorset, the first of its kind for the county and for the South West. The strategy highlights the importance of Dorset's woodlands, which if managed effectively will help towards a social, environmental and economically sustainable future.

The strategy has been written by David Rees, the Dorset Woodlink Officer. Dorset Woodlink is an initiative of the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership in association with the Forestry Commission, Natural England, Dorset Wildlife Trust, Chalk & Cheese (Leader+) and Cranborne Chase AONB. The aims of the project are to improve the management of the county's woodlands and trees for social, environmental and economic benefit. This will be achieved through promoting a strategic and joined-up approach to forestry in Dorset, and developing the local woodfuel industry.

The strategy deals with the issues of climate change, biodiversity and healthy living and recognises that an intelligent and co-ordinated approach is needed to protect and bolster the management of the county's trees, woods and forests whilst getting the best for the local economy, community, wildlife and landscape. Social, economic and environmental policies are highlighted in the strategy with recommendations and actions set out for lead partners to take forward and promote the contribution that Dorset's trees, woods and forests can make.

Dorset Woodlink is a county-wide project that brings together a number of partners with woodland interests. It aims to bring a lasting environmental, economic and social gain to the county through the development, establishment and co-ordination of a sustainable woodfuel and woodland product industry working with producers, woodland managers, contractors, suppliers and consumers.

Dorset has approximately 28,000 hectares of woodland and forest cover, and the project aims to encourage re-instatement of woodland management on undermanaged and neglected woodlands, as well as large areas of other habitats such as heathlands and grasslands, a large proportion of which are declining or in unfavourable condition. Many of these habitats are undergoing restoration and quite often a direct result is the production of wood, in varying forms, which currently has little or no economic value.

Woodlink aims to bring woodland management back to neglected woodlands by creating a market for the wood – which in turn should bring big biodiversity, environmental, social and community benefits to those woodlands as well as reducing carbon dioxide emissions. It is envisaged that this project will not only secure the sustainable management of Dorset's woodlands, forests and trees but also encourage the management of other habitats.

For further information go to
<http://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/text01.asp?PageId=305>

