

the value of

*rees*

in our changing region



## **Executive Summary**

of the Regional Forestry Strategy  
for Yorkshire and The Humber Region

July 2005

## Executive Summary

**'The Value of Trees in Our Changing Region'** provides a Strategic Framework for the future management of trees and woodlands in Yorkshire and The Humber region. It marries national priorities with local aspirations and identifies where a regional approach can add value. Above all, it demonstrates how we can help secure a more sustainable future for our region by maximising the benefits that trees and woodlands offer.

The document outlines the national and international policy context within which tree and woodland issues have to be considered. These major policy agendas are reflected in the thematic approach adopted and the strategic aims that the framework defines. The objectives within each theme reflect the priority issues identified in the developing regional agenda and the desired outcomes that flow from these indicate how trees and woodlands can help contribute to the delivery of many of these regional priorities.

### Headline Facts – Woodland Cover

- Our region contains over 90,000 hectares of woodland and over 2 million individual trees
- Average woodland cover stands at 5.8%, and ranges from 13.6% in Ryedale to 0.3% in Hull
- The European average is over 30%, and the figure for England currently stands at 8.4%

NORTH YORK MOORS NATIONAL PARK

### Key Issues

The Strategic Framework highlights the relatively low woodland cover across the region and the limited knowledge we have about that tree and woodland resource. The importance of building our understanding is emphasised, and the wider educational opportunities offered by woodlands as both a valuable environment for learning and a setting for personal development are stressed.

Potential timber production within the region is increasing but currently most of this is exported outside the region for processing. The fluctuating price of timber has served to increase the volume of wood and wood products coming in through the Humber ports but, again, most of this is also then transported out of the region for processing.

Woodland based leisure and recreation is becoming increasingly important, and woodland management for this and other non-timber-related objectives has started

to open up new woodland-based employment opportunities. Tourism is an important economic driver in many rural areas and the role of woodlands in supporting the growth of this sector is of increasing importance in areas like the region's three National Parks and four Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

### Headline Facts – Economic Issues

- Timber production in the region stands at 270,000m<sup>3</sup> a year and has the potential to increase to 340,000m<sup>3</sup> a year
- In 2001/02 the forestry sector supported approximately 320 businesses and over 1840 jobs
- The non-market benefits of our trees and woodlands are estimated to contribute over £80m a year to the region's economy

FORESTRY COMMISSION

The importance of an attractive woodland setting is mirrored in the more urban and industrial areas of the region where there is increasing recognition that a well-treed, attractive environment is imperative if the region is to compete successfully for inward investment.

The importance of a healthy natural environment is now widely accepted but the document calls attention to the region's mixed progress in delivering the woodland related targets of the England Biodiversity Strategy. While woodland bird populations are increasing nearly a quarter of woodland Sites of Special Scientific Interest are in unfavourable condition and we continue to suffer losses of our irreplaceable Ancient Trees and Woodlands.

### Headline Facts – Environmental Issues

- 27% of the region is designated for its national or international landscape or wildlife value
- Over a quarter of our woodlands are designated as Ancient Woodlands, but that percentage rises to over 50% in parts of West and South Yorkshire
- By 2080 summer temperatures are predicted to increase by 4°C, summer rainfall to decrease by 60%, and winter rainfall to increase by 30%. This rate of change poses a serious threat to our trees and woodlands, and to the wildlife that depends on them

COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY, SIMON WARNER

Trees and woodlands are a vital component of the wider landscape scale biodiversity of the region but our ancient and semi-natural woodlands are often relatively small and isolated. Our climate is changing and there is an urgent need to improve the functioning of the region's woodland habitat networks and make them more resilient for the future.

Trees and woodlands also offer potential benefits in helping to reduce flood risk across the region by reducing rainfall run-off in the upper catchments, and helping to slow the passage of flood peaks as they move downstream. Trees can also help reduce the region's net greenhouse gas emissions through carbon sequestration, the substitution of woodfuel for other non-renewable energy sources, and the greater use of timber as a sustainable material.

The document stresses the health benefits to people of a well-treed local environment. Trees and woodlands near to where people live and work can help reduce stress by providing contact with nature, and woodlands have been shown to be excellent venues for helping people to increase levels of physical activity to address problems like obesity. Trees also provide significant air-conditioning benefits by reducing pollution, providing shade in summer and shelter in winter, as well as helping to regulate humidity levels.

### Headline Facts – Social Issues

- Our region is near the bottom in many of the national league tables for issues like obesity and life expectancy
- The incidence of circulatory disease in Hull, Barnsley and Rotherham is 60% higher than in Ryedale
- Increasing physical activity is key to addressing these health inequalities and more accessible woods are part of the solution

COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY, JOHN MORRISON

These and other non-market benefits from the region's tree and woodland resource are estimated to be worth more than £80million per year to the region's economy. However, in the past, much of the investment and management activity that helped provide these wider benefits was underpinned by income from sales of timber. The recent decline in timber prices has undermined the financial viability of many of the region's established forestry businesses. This has serious implications for the region's ability to continue to sustainably manage the tree and woodland resource and maximise their value in the future.

## Priorities for Action

The development of the Strategic Framework has been guided by a Steering Group and informed by an enthusiastic Regional Woodland Forum that drew representatives from across the region. It has also been subject to a detailed public consultation exercise that resulted in one of the largest responses to any regional policy. The resulting document can therefore claim real authority for the priorities it advocates.

These include the need to:

- improve knowledge and understanding about the value of trees and woodlands amongst the region's policy makers and decision takers;
- improve skills and business expertise within the forestry sector;
- increase woodland creation in the reclamation of derelict and underused land;
- protect and improve woodland Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Ancient Woodlands;
- increase accessible woodland near to where people live;
- increase the use of wood in sustainable construction and as a source of renewable energy;
- increase tree and woodland planting to help reduce flood risk.

## Taking the Process Forward

The Strategic Framework advocates an inclusive, co-ordinated and partnership approach to the delivery of its aims and objectives. It defines a common agenda that will contribute to many of the emerging regional policies in areas like the economy, spatial planning and sustainable communities.

The Strategic Framework is intended to have a lifespan of 15 years, but will be reviewed every five years to ensure it remains relevant. Progress will be monitored on an annual basis and the Action Plan will be re-assessed periodically to ensure that all the desired outcomes are being addressed.

**No one plants a tree and expects to gain the full benefit in their own lifetime. The planting of a tree is an altruistic act and represents an investment in the future for our children and grandchildren. That philosophy underpins the whole Sustainable Development agenda. The Strategic Framework for Trees, Woods and Forests sets out an agenda for action that will secure a sustainable future for generations to come.**



Copies of the full Strategy are available from:

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