

CHAPTER 16 - Employment and Economy

Aims:

- Assist in the regeneration of the Forest area by improving the environment and attracting investment.
- Attract investment to create and manage the Forest.
- Assist in creating sustainable jobs in relation to the Forest's implementation and long term management.

16.1 The South West Regional Development Agency's (SWRDA) Regional Economic Strategy identifies the environment as a Strategic Driver for the region's future. It recognises that as well as being of value in its own right, the environment is a sector with its own economic importance and accounts for more than 12% of the region's GDP. The Forest partners are creating a new, high quality environment within which people will live, work and play, helping regenerate both land and communities. The opportunity exists to market the Forest as a key asset for the sub-region, particularly in terms of inward investment.

16.2 The Forest will, over time become an asset to rank alongside the AONBs in terms of quality and crucially is on the doorstep of the biggest urban area in the region. The Forest partners will need to ensure that the Forest is recognised as not only a key contributor to the Region's development but also as a model for sustainable development processes around other urban areas.

16.3 Creating the Forest will also directly create opportunities for business growth and job creation. Already, a considerable amount of new resources have been brought into the area, much of which has been put back into the local economy. Tree nurseries, fencing suppliers, forestry contractors and consultants have all benefited from the increased rate of planting and management work due to the Forest's implementation. This benefit and its knock-on effect into the local economy will increase into the future. The Forest offers a wide range of training opportunities for people seeking employment, upgrading skills and developing vocational training.

16.4 There also exists a current asset of woodland, wildlife and countryside sites which can generate benefits to the local economy. Again, local firms are

engaged to carry out work, some of which maintain traditional skills such as hedge-laying which improves biodiversity whilst enhancing the visual attractiveness of the area. In addition, many people new to, or re-entering the labour market are introduced to work skills and vocational qualifications through environmental work through New Deal and similar schemes.

16.5 The production of timber and useable wood from our existing woodlands has huge potential to form the basis for new businesses. Adding value to the currently low quality timber found in most woods is the aim and by using specialist techniques and adding value to suit local retail markets, genuinely sustainable businesses can be developed. Locally grown wood can be converted into saleable products by local crafts people for sale to local people. The Forest of Avon Wood Products co-operative has started to develop this 'virtuous cycle'.

16.6 As farming becomes increasingly difficult, the development of the Forest will produce opportunities for diversification and alternative employment. Although diversification through development is constrained by planning and green belt policies, opportunities for providing services to other landowners and managers, for example visitor management, access management and conservation work will grow as the Forest's infrastructure develops.

16.7 Recent work carried out in the context of the Regional Economic Strategy has made the link between direct and indirect economic benefits from the environment sector.



Wood Products Co-op constructing new building (Photo: Forest of Avon)

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Timber is still an important economic asset (Photo: Forest of Avon)

Other research links property prices and willingness to invest with the quality of the environment. This work needs to be refined, particularly in terms of indirect economic benefits and the Forest is an ideal focus for substantiating these links through further research.

Proposals

16.8 The Forest partners will aim to:

- Ensure that the Forest's contribution to the local and regional economy is recognised and work with economic and regeneration agencies to realise the benefits brought by environmental and community development;
- Develop ways to grow local businesses and train local people alongside the Forest's growth;
- Further promote the use of local timber by local businesses for sale to local markets as a keystone of Local Agenda 21 delivery;
- Develop amongst local people a skills base relevant to both traditional and 'mainstream' forestry, agriculture and countryside work and to encourage employment and business development.
- Promote the Forest as a base for further environmental-economic research.