

## CHAPTER 7 - Woodlands and Forestry

### Aims:

- **Improve people's quality of life by bringing the benefits of new woodlands close to where they live and work, enhancing the environment and regenerating land for investment, leisure and wildlife.**
- **Increase access to woodlands, improve the quality of information about access and promote better understanding of woods and forestry.**
- **Protect existing woodlands, promote the environmental benefits of trees and woodlands and use biodiversity action plans to guide nature conservation.**
- **Promote a sustainable woodland economy through the management of existing and the establishment of new woods in the countryside.**

### Regeneration

- 7.1** Woodland and tree planting can play a significant role in regenerating towns, cities and their surrounding areas. The benefits of trees are well documented, particularly in relation to their visual, wildlife, pollution absorption and filtering roles. In addition they create a sense of well being, shade and tranquillity. The appearance of an area is often a key factor in investment decisions and the presence of substantial areas of trees and woodland is of tremendous benefit. Land however is in short supply and in urban areas is of high value; in addition to planting achieved through permitted development, there is great potential for towns in the Forest to develop urban forestry strategies, using highway, housing and leisure land, to achieve the feel of an urban forest. One of the greatest benefits of urban and urban fringe woodland is that it is close to where people live and therefore has the greatest impact on their quality of life, whilst achieving a high degree of sustainability by minimising the need for car based travel to reach it.
- 7.2** Sites likely to suffer from vandalism will need extra thought, drawing on best practice from other initiatives e.g. the National Urban Forestry Unit (NUFU) where planting in cities and on the urban fringe has been achieved successfully. Small stock, planted as unobtrusively as possible with

community involvement, may be the key, though there is no guarantee of success. Expensive large trees with expensive guards are rarely effective, particularly where woodland is the final objective, as they can become targets for vandalism and may grow less well than small trees at close spacings, which also produce a closed canopy.

- 7.3** In regenerating derelict, damaged and abandoned land where growing conditions are particularly difficult, a wider range of species, including pioneers, should be used and establishment techniques carefully chosen to ensure maximum success. The Forestry Commission has particular expertise in this area and carries out extensive research into establishment techniques. Some of these sites, usually close to or within urban areas, can provide recreation, amenity and wildlife space near disadvantaged communities.
- 7.4** Much land around industrial areas and land awaiting development can be used to grow trees and short-rotation energy crops. When the development takes place, some trees or the energy crop can be removed and the final development is placed within the setting of mature trees. This approach offers a means of phasing planting and development so that tree cover is established in advance of development rather the reverse, in which case it may be 20 years before marketing images are realised.

### Rural Development

- 7.5** Woodland industries and forestry have potential to provide significant rural employment, particularly when a critical mass of woodland can be achieved. As the reform of agriculture through the Common Agriculture Policies (CAP) of the EU take effect, woodland and forestry based enterprise can help create the opportunities for diversification and employment. The creation of the Forest of Avon will assist in this process.
- 7.6** The pace of reform through CAP is uncertain and whilst the development of the Rural Development Plan as Part of the Rural Development Regulations takes place, it is clear that a shift towards agri-environment schemes is taking place. Forestry will have a key role to play in helping create a new, vibrant rural economy.
- 7.7** To achieve the Forest Plan, most woodland will need to be established on farmland, and the lower grades of agricultural land will be given priority. High-grade land will be considered if occupiers wish, as this land

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is potentially returnable to agriculture from woodland should national priorities shift in future. Grants, especially DEFRA's Farm Woodland Premium Scheme, encourage new woodland on arable and improved grassland, thus reducing agricultural production. Extensive woodland planting is only likely on land withdrawn from productive agriculture such as on the farmer's retirement or when land is to be used for non-agricultural pursuits. In some cases only minimal planting may be expected as productive farms may only be able to provide shelter for livestock and sporting cover.

**7.8** Woodland establishment on land previously used for arable crops will present its own problems, particularly in terms of weed control. Soil is often very fertile due to the use of artificial fertilisers, and the cessation of weed treatment can be a recipe for rampant growth, suppressing young trees. Techniques to deal with these problems are being researched by the Forestry Commission, DEFRA and others. Both the Forestry Commission and DEFRA publish guidance and give advice to farmers.

**7.9** The Forest area has great potential for tree growth and a key aim will be to produce high-value, large-dimension timber. Careful management of some species can provide substantial income in the long term. The creation of new woods will incorporate some conifer species. It is unrealistic to rely totally on broadleaved species; choice will depend on site conditions, priorities of the owner and the need for an economic return in the medium term. Conifers are quicker to mature than broadleaves, can realise cash flows sooner and act as a nurse for valuable broadleaved species, though the use of conifers is not permitted on ancient semi-natural woodland sites. Mixed woodland is also valuable silviculturally and environmentally. This does not mean, however, that the Forest will resemble the relatively large, single-species, even-aged conifer plantations of upland Britain. Some of these new woods will need to be large, i.e. over 20 ha, in order to help generate economies of scale and a critical mass of economic forestry as well as maximising non-timber benefits. Adjacent landowners may be able to link into larger existing woods or to create woods of over 20 ha together.

**7.10** Existing and new woodlands offer an opportunity for the creation of value

adding enterprises, often at a specialist, small scale level, but as volumes of timber increase, local businesses will be able to take advantage of the market on the doorstep, over 1 million people, within easy reach. Enhanced tree planting may be associated with diversification or farm visitor enterprises. The establishment of marketing schemes, e.g. Forest of Avon Wood Products, can help kick start these enterprises and link demand to supply. Certification, through the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme will assist not only in ensuring the best management of woodlands but also raise consumer confidence in the products they buy.

**7.11** There is also potential for growing energy crops on farmland, e.g. short rotation coppice, providing an alternative source of income to farmers whilst reducing dependence on fossil fuels for energy (see Chapter 8). Wood fuel and forest residues from local businesses, e.g. woodchip may also be integrated into the energy cycle when a local power generation facility exists. The eastern part of the Forest is within the catchment of the proposed Cricklade power station and incentives are available from MAFF.

### Recreation, Access and Tourism

**7.12** Using the Forestry Commission guides, including figures for the area of existing community woodland and the population, 1656 ha of woodland with free and open access on foot will be needed, leaving 1126 ha of new woodland to be created with access on foot. Forestry Commission guidelines give an indication of the number of visitors that woods of different sizes can be expected to accommodate; for example, a woodland of more than 75 ha may be able to absorb over 100,000 visitors per year.

These woods will need to be created close to communities; some land acquisition by local authorities, the Woodland Trust, the Wildlife Trust, Forest Enterprise and others may be the most effective way of ensuring that this happens quickly. Other grant supplements will assist in achieving these objectives where land remains in private hands. There should be a concentration on creating woods over 20 ha in size, and in the Forest of Avon these woods should ideally be located where woodland cover is lowest, where they are close to people and where adverse environmental impacts are minimised.



Exploring the woods, Leigh Woods  
(Photo: Forest of Avon)

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Manor Road, Keynsham 1993 (Photo: Forest of Avon)



Manor Road, Keynsham 2001 (Photo: Forest of Avon)

**7.13** The benefits of woodlands, both large and small, for recreation and access have already been identified. Improving the quality of access in existing woods, and creating new woods with access thereby providing benefits for people, close to where they live and minimising the need for car travel will be an essential element of the Forest vision. In addition, the opportunity to inform, involve and educate all sections of the community about forestry, woodlands and their environment, increasing enjoyment and understanding will need to be taken to ensure that new and better managed woods really do deliver public benefits.

**7.14** Every opportunity should be taken to encourage owners of both new and existing woodland to offer new public access, to link this to the public rights of way system and to create a network of linked woods and paths. There is also scope for co-operation between adjacent owners to link access to mutual benefit.

**The main issues of recreation, sport and education are dealt with in Chapters 11, 12 and 14.**

### Environment and Conservation

**7.15** Creating the Forest of Avon will have a positive effect on wildlife and biodiversity. The creation and management of non-woodland habitats is dealt with in Chapter 9; this section is focused on woodlands.

**7.16** Many of our existing woods provide some of the most diverse habitat in the Forest area. This is particularly true of ancient semi natural woods. New woodlands will, in time, play their part and careful use of design, species and management will all help improve biodiversity. There should be a presumption

against further loss of any woodland but where there may be an overriding public benefit reasons, the creation of at least equivalent areas will be sought.

**7.17** Ancient woodlands, especially those which are ancient semi-natural, are irreplaceable and the priority will be to protect, maintain and enhance their special value. Where appropriate, this may include the removal of conifers and other exotics. The reversal of fragmentation, linking and expanding existing ASNW, through the creation of new native woodland by regeneration or by the planting of stock from native origin is also an important objective for the Forest partners. Woodland Habitat Action Plans and Biodiversity Action Plans are setting targets for implementation of these and other important aims and objectives. The UK Forestry Standard sets out criteria and standards, and a number of guides and booklets are published by the Forestry Commission which give detailed technical advice.

**7.18** The majority of new woodland planting will be likely to reflect the broadleaved tree and shrub species which grow naturally in the area. These species are ash with oak, as the dominant woodland type, plus wild cherry, field maple and lime; willows and alder may dominate on the flat coastal plain. The Woodland Grant Scheme allows for areas within new woods to be open space to be designed as part of new woodland schemes, which can provide habitat diversity and recreation benefits.

**7.19** There is a range of silvicultural systems and techniques, some of which could be more commonly used to help to revitalise the management of many existing woods. The enhancement of diversity will often be a desirable objective in terms of species, age, structure and open space, achievable through careful selective felling and thinning.

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A series of environmental guidelines, setting standards for good, multipurpose woodland management is available from the Forestry Commission.

**7.20** Creating new woodland needs to be carefully planned as there is a potential for damage to other environmental assets. Establishing new woodland on sites with existing nature conservation, heritage and archaeology value is dealt with in Chapters 9 and 10. Also, landscape character may be affected adversely and new woodland should, as far as possible, reflect the existing character and setting in the landscape of existing woods, for example on steep slopes or on hill tops. Where no exemplars exist, much thought and careful design will be needed. Landscape issues are addressed in Chapter 6.

**7.21** New woodland provides the potential for a significant increase in the populations of potentially damaging mammals, such as deer, rabbits and squirrels. Establishment techniques need to take this into account and management of these species is usually essential and likely to be a requirement in respect of the Woodland Grant Scheme. It is important to explain the necessity for such control to an urban population, unfamiliar with the problems these animals can cause.

**7.22** The establishment and long term management of trees and woodland also plays a part in carbon sequestration, taking and 'locking up' atmospheric carbon. On a wider scale this will provide environmental benefits and may help combat the rate of climate change but will not be a substitute for reducing carbon emissions.

### Proposals

**7.23** A range of activities will be required in order to achieve the woodland and forestry aims. The England Forestry Strategy provides guidance on priority programmes and actions for woodlands and forestry in England, many of which are relevant to the Forest of Avon:

- New, large (20ha and above) community woodlands will be encouraged to the north, south and east of Bristol, where current provision of woods with free, open access on foot is severely limited. Smaller woodlands, close to where people live will also be a priority.

- The Forest partners will develop and implement urban forestry strategies for towns and the city, aimed at increasing tree cover, better management of urban trees and realising economic benefits.
- Where woodland is to be established on difficult sites, best practice from other parts of the country and Forestry Commission research will guide proposals. Proven technology will be applied where appropriate.
- The Forest partners will actively encourage, with the help of grant aid and advice, voluntary participation by landowners and tenants in establishing new woodland areas. Where appropriate, land acquisition on the open market will be used. The impact of new woodland on neighbouring land will need to be considered. Owners will also be encouraged to create new public access.
- The management and restoration of existing woods in the Forest area for economic and environmental benefits will be a high priority for the Forest partners. The establishment of local marketing initiatives, certification to international standards and grant aid will be important in achieving this.
- The Forest partners will be guided by the UK Forestry Standard when advising on and deciding establishment and management prescriptions for woodland.
- The protection, management, regeneration and extension of ancient semi-natural woodlands will be a high priority for Forest partners.
- Landowners with sites particularly suited to producing high-quality hardwoods will be encouraged to plant trees at appropriate spacings. New Woodland Grant Scheme conditions now insist on closer spacing for woods over 3 ha and where timber production is an objective.
- The Forest partners will encourage the planting and marketing of energy crops where appropriate. Development of markets and technology will form part of this work, using existing UK and European examples and research.
- The Forest partners will identify a number of demonstration woods (either new or existing) in conjunction with owners, where design, establishment and management techniques are exemplary and can be used to inform, educate and train existing and potential woodland owners and users.