WILTSHIRE TIMBER STUDY

Wiltshire Council
Where everybody matters

The Provision of an Evidence Base to Promote the Timber and Forestry Sector within Swindon and Wiltshire

Executive Summary

The purpose of the study was defined as being to provide up to date information in both qualitative and quantitative terms to inform project sponsorship with the Swindon and Wiltshire. Reference was made to the concept, trialled in the Marches, of a Woodland Enterprise Zone, as initiated by the Independent Panel on Forestry. The study was tasked with developing the work undertaken by Wiltshire Council's Oil to Biomass Study and other organisations such as the Forestry Commission, Confor, South West Woodshed, and South West Woodland Renaissance. The following terms of reference were provided: -

a) To define and assess the potential for economic growth and job creation through forestry enterprise, woodland and timber (identifying the 'offer')

b) Demonstrate the opportunities and barriers to achieving local economic resilience, economic growth and employment and job creation through development of this sector in both Swindon and Wiltshire

The forestry and primary processing sectors in the study area are estimated to provide approximately 200 FTEs. GVA is assessed as being £36m and total economic output at £47m. Utilising data from a Confor report, which outlines the growth potential of England's forest industries from a range of initiatives, indicates that Swindon and Wiltshire has the potential to create an additional 88 jobs from similar activity.

The annual value of carbon sequestration by woodlands in the study area is calculated at £5.3m. Other Ecosystem Services provided by woodlands include flood alleviation, landscape, biodiversity and air pollution.

The National Forest Inventory indicates that there are 34,311ha of woodland in Swindon and Wiltshire, representing 10.2% of the land area. Detailed NFI data is not available but older NIWT data describes a predominantly broadleaved cover of 55.5%, mixed woodland at 17.1%, conifer at 13.6% and open space representing 11.8%. 10% of woodland is managed by the Forestry Commission with the remainder owned or managed by organisations and individuals such as private landowners, charitable institutions and local authorities.

The study has identified that a relatively high proportion, 57%, of woodlands are currently under some form of management agreement in the study area. This coincides with a wealth of expertise in forest management and silviculture in Wiltshire with a number of well established forest management professionals based and working in Wiltshire. There is also a well established processing base with many nationally recognised processors sited in or close to the study area processing both hardwoods and softwoods. Despite the high proportion of woodlands in management, there is still room for growth with a further 50,000m3 of timber that could be harvested each year resulting in additional jobs being created in the forest management and timber harvesting supply chain, as well as within the processing sector. The rapid growth of the woodfuel and in particular firewood market is providing a strong pull for hardwoods and there is a willingness

amongst some of the processors to invest in upgrading machinery and adding new lines to increase efficiencies and competitiveness.

The study area does have a low proportion of coniferous cover and a high proportion of ancient woodland. Other weaknesses include a high proportion of woodlands in small blocks with poor access and infrastructure. There also appears to be a disengagement from sectoral support mechanisms. As with other regions, the study area has the ever present threat of tree diseases and there is a growing concern amongst processors of a significantly reducing raw material base over the longer term with ‘Peak Wood’ being reached in Southern England in the next decade. Processors are also under threat from increased competition from the biomass market.

The study sets out a rationale for 5 priority Investment Themes, those of **the processing base**, **establishing stronger vertically integrated supply chains**, **the contracting base**, **timber haulage and collaboration**. In order to pursue the Investment Themes the study sets out a series of Actions, the level of investment required based on bringing and adding value to additional roundwood to market and what impact these Actions would have on the sector. Where possible, sources of funding are discussed alongside other sources of support. The priority Actions discussed are:

- **Timber Harvesting and Extraction Equipment**. Support and facilitation should be provided to forestry contractors to purchase a range of timber harvesting and extraction equipment which is appropriate to the local conditions. Most large scale forest harvesters and forwarders are not suited to the small scale woodlands which Wiltshire has many of, or to the PAWS woodlands which require a more sensitive approach.
- **Skills and Knowledge base**. Support and facilitation should be provided to SMEs in the supply chain to improve skills and knowledge particularly of the management of undermanaged and sensitive woodland sites. A series of demonstration events or workshops should be set up to provide ‘soft’ skills for those operating in the supply chain. This could include machinery demonstrations in sensitive sites or workshops on silvicultural best practice. A series of up to 4 events should be run across the study area inviting participants from the wider SW region. Other ‘harder’ skills could be supported through the provision of technical training courses and seminars such as machinery operation especially where new equipment has been introduced.
- **Improving Processing Competitiveness**. Capital support for processors to invest in upgrading existing equipment to improve efficiencies and add new product lines.
- **Provision of business support to SMEs and Woodland Owners**. Business support for woodland owners and SMEs operating in the supply chain which should include specialist support for collaborative working. This could include seed corn funding for a Ward Forester or similar initiative to engage with and provide an initial hand holding service to owners of undermanaged woodlands.

The estimated cost of the above actions would be in the region of £850,000 or £85 per additional m3 of timber brought to market creating an added value figure of £2,100,000 (Section 5.1). A combination of Rural Development Programme for England funding and its successor programme from 2015 and EU structural funds could be sourced to help fund this expansion which would have consequent increases in employment and upskilling in the supply chain and processing sectors

Additional supporting Actions include a detailed interrogation of NFI data once available, further detailed mapping to provide information on the nature and extent of the undermanaged woodland resource and working with neighbouring authorities and other economic bodies.