

SOUTH WEST FOREST – MONTHLY BRIEFING

January 2008

1. Events

- **18 December 2007 - SWF Partnership Valedictory Meeting**

SWF board and partnership members gathered to hear from Chairman Ian Mercer about the structural changes proposed for South West Forest over the coming year. To this effect the meeting was the last formal gathering of the partnership as it has been known over the last ten years.

South West Forest becomes a company limited by guarantee in 2008, with charitable status to follow. As such it will operate under a members and directors basis with the latter effectively becoming trustees in due course.

Members of the original partnership will still have an important role to play in supporting and acting as ambassadors for South West Forest. Whilst a formal partnership cannot be currently serviced by the organisation as it 'morphs' into its new form it is envisaged that an equivalent group, membership or partnership will emerge once the dust settles from the reorganisation.

- **Jim Skelton - Farewell and Good Luck**

The above meeting also provided an opportunity for the gathered assembly to say thank you, farewell and good luck to Jim Skelton Director for South West Forest for nearly 5½ years.

Having been Forestry Advisor and private sector board member prior to that, Jim's involvement with South West Forest dates back more than ten years to its inception. Originally a sceptic for the South West Forest vision, Jim was won round to the idea by founding chair Rachel Thomas and he has been a stalwart supporter and member of staff ever since.

We wish him well in his new venture as he moves up to Ledbury to take up the post of Wales and West Midlands manager for Fountains' forestry services.

- **South West Forest - Interim Management**

Project Manager, Jim White, will be acting in a caretaking role as senior staff member. He enjoys the support of Heather Hillman and Andrew Lightfoot, officers in the hosting authority Devon County Council, the current SWF board and the small, committed hard working team that is the South West Forest staff.

2. Progress

- **Advisory Visits**

A total of four visits were undertaken in December, two for woodland creation, and two for woodland management.

The most notable report was for;

Halwill Primary School

A small project for the new school that could include establishment of a new woodland as an educational facility. Mick and Richard Irvine (Tree for All Coordinator) are keen to support the school in the design element of the various habitats.

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- **Site Monitoring**

Seven visits were undertaken during December mostly to schemes planted 3 and 4 years ago and one or two 'Year 7' visits.

Mick's time is currently in ever greater demand as he has to balance advisory visits with the need for monitoring (budgetary limitations currently restrict our use of forestry consultants) and writing a bid to Devon Renaissance for Deer Management in the South West Forest. Hopefully all 'Year 3' visits will be completed before the start of the new growing season.

- **Deer Management**

We have had the green light to make a full application, after submitting an Expression of Interest, to Devon Renaissance (DR) for £49K of Sustainable Economies in Rural Communities (SERC) funding for a deer management project. We have also made a bid for £10K of Cornwall Biodiversity Improvement Grant money, which we hope will take care of the part of the SWF project which falls within the Cornwall parishes. Activities will include the establishment of deer management groups in targeted need areas of the South West Forest, a larder which stalkers can access to hang the venison, with associated facilities to process it. We are developing the possibility of a local business to grow out of the 12 month long project. A full bid was submitted to Devon Renaissance on the 23rd of this month.

- **SWF and Forestry Commission**

Roger Ford has taken over from Richard Paton as FC Woodland Officer for Mid-Devon and North Devon. Roger is also likely to take over Torridge in the near future. Richard will retain West Devon but as his new commitments go deeper into Cornwall he is likely to be drawn further away from the SWF office. Regrettably, it appears that Roger Ford will be unable to spend much of his time here either.

- **Woodfair South West**

Plymouth Saturday 22 March 2008 Woodfair South West will be going to Plymouth City Centre (outside Dingles). We are joining up with Working the Woods to bring the Woodfair into the heart of the city. In addition to hosting a public event where people of all ages can learn about the real value of our woodlands (social, environmental and economic) it will also allow us to introduce the Woodfair concept to a new 'urban' audience and attract them to our flagship event at Roadford. Mark Prior from the Woodfuels Initiative (Forestry Commission and Woodland Renaissance) has committed £2,500 to the event to promote woodfuels. WSW has been invited to apply for £5,000 from the Dartmoor National Park Authority's Sustainable Development Fund.

Roadford 12th & 13th July 2008 Planning for the Roadford event is well underway, with an emphasis on greater partnership working, cutting expenditure and providing new and interactive displays to complement traditional Woodfair favourites, such as the ever-popular falconry, horse logging and fire juggling displays.

Just under 30 exhibitors took advantage of the pre-Christmas early booking discount, and we have received enquiries from new exhibitors garnered by holding events in new locations over the past year.

The Roadford Project Action Group met recently and agreed to maintain visitor prices as per 2007 but felt that the family advance ticket should be increased from £10 to £12.

WSW has written to Sean Kearney at Torridge District Council to request funding assistance of £5,000 for the Roadford event.

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- **Ruby Country Initiative**

Ruby Country Coordinator Appointment - Tom Dixon has been appointed and will be in post from 21st January 2008. Tom is joining us from Brackley, Northants but has personal connections in the area.

Previously, as manager of a small independent book shop, he helped to establish a literary festival in Northants, was actively involved with Brackley MCTi and a local shopping/buying initiative. He has studied Norweigan glaciers and cycled through the Middle East getting accidentally caught up in the first Gulf War! He has experience of livestock farming as a farm hand in formative years.

- **Ruby Workshop**

12 December 2007 - Local Development Framework (LDF)

Maria Bailey, Community Planning Manager from Torrington and Chris Dunford a Planning Policy Officer from West Devon fielded questions and debate from a lively group of Ruby Country stakeholders at Cookworthy on 12th December 2007.

The aim of the workshop was to help communicate ideas and thoughts about the emerging LDF for the two LA areas, help to build understanding amongst participants about the process and feed their experience and concerns into it. Issues discussed include:

- Support for community shops
- Materials used in building and home improvement – use local products?
- Harvesting power from farms – solar panels, bio-digesters
- Plans for the cattle markets at Holsworthy & Hatherleigh
- Supporting opportunities for rural diversification
- Flexible approach to planning
- Dark night skies in Ruby Country, would planning take account of light pollution?

3. Meetings / Networking

- **17 December 2007 - Ruby Business Network**

A group of people from all across Ruby Country came together to form the core of the Ruby Business Network. They will be working together throughout the coming year and beyond the life of the current Ruby funding:

- represent the local view
- be proactive in developing events
- encourage businesses to get involved
- helping to establish the Ruby Brand both locally and further afield
- help keep people in touch with ideas, events, training and opportunities
- work on developing the ten year vision which will enable Ruby Country to be self sustaining in the long term.

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- ***South West Water***

Jim S. and Mick had a meeting with Vicky Garner, an independent consultant contracted to South West Water, looking at a feasibility study to investigate the way forestry can be included in 'whole catchment' water management.

New EU regulations have forced the water companies to take a more holistic approach to catchment management. Following results of an experimental study to quantify the savings made by planting trees, they may be prepared to put forward money to create woodlands in strategically beneficial areas.

The GIS work that we have already done in targeting areas of need for planting was explained and it seemed sensible to her that we should be part of the survey process, a proposition that Vicky will put forward to her employers.

- ***20 December 2007 - Dartmoor Railway "Car Free Tourism" proposal***

Ruby Project Manager Jim White met with Ewen Rae of Devon Heartlands Community Development Trust and Stuart Farmer Managing Director for the Dartmoor Railway to hear about their "Car Free Tourism" bid application to Devon Renaissance.

The proposals include development of a link between the Tarka branch line (on the National Rail network) and the Dartmoor Railway line through refurbishment of the railway station at Yeoford and to provide a regular seasonal service from Yeoford to Meldon.

The old Meldon railway junction will in time, with DCC's ongoing work, provide a cycle / bridleway link off the Granite Way to Halwill Junction and will thus provide a vital green tourism transport link into the heart of Ruby Country. Jim was therefore delighted to write a letter of support for their proposed bid.

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