

SOUTH WEST FOREST – MONTHLY BRIEFING

November 2005

1. Events

- **National FEI Networking Day – 3 November** - Jim White attended the 10th Annual Networking day for the FEI which provided a valuable opportunity to find out about good practice and developments elsewhere. Most notable was the presentation outlining FEI's new publicity machine which will help to get the activities of local cluster groups into commercial timber sector related publications (eg TTJ, F&BT etc) as well as into national and local press. Further to this was the presentation by FEI president, Terence Mallinson, outlining recent moves to get more practical involvement of those in the timber trade in the work of FEI and its cluster groups.
- A keynote address was delivered by Liz O'Brien of Forest Research who, along with Richard Murray of the New Economics Foundation, presented findings from their report and evaluation of Forest School delivery in England. This report "Such Enthusiasm – A Joy to See" is available on the Forest Research website at www.forestresearch.gov.uk
- **7 November 2005 - Presentation to Forestry Commission's SW Regional Advisory Committee.** This meeting was attended by Chairman, Ian Mercer, and Jim White who, in Jim Skelton's absence, made a presentation on the work of the South West Forest. This was to provide context for a subsequent presentation by consultants, PACEC, on their findings from their evaluation of the South West Forest. These findings were to be discussed by the Regional Advisory Committee the following day. It is encouraging that so many positive impacts are emerging from the study and RAC members must have been left with an impression of a successful project.
- **Official Celtic Roundhouse Opening - Saturday 29 October** - The opening day started at 2pm and was attended by about 30 people. Everyone involved in building the Roundhouse was invited including volunteers, funders, contract workers, suppliers and councillors. The numbers attending were ideal – any more and it would have been too cramped in the roundhouse. The afternoon went as follows – music by Paul Wilson – Wren Trust director and accordion player; a talk on funding, and how we built the house by Jim White, including thanks to the volunteers; a friction fire lighting demonstration to light the central fire by Tom Wigston; a story by Kate Dixon and more music by Paul Wilson and Charlie Dixon on trombone. Then we sang "The Roundhouse Song" written by Kate Dixon and finally there was cider mulled over the fire and more music, stories and songs. The event ended formally at about 4.30pm.

2. Progress

- **Maureen Ellis** will be retiring in early December after eight years with the South West Forest as Administrator and, from time to time, lynch pin of the organization. She will be hard to replace, but a recent advert for the position has yielded over 50 applicants so we are confident of finding an able replacement at interviews to be held on 22 November.

SOUTH WEST FOREST – MONTHLY BRIEFING

- On 25 October, the **Western Morning News** carried an article on the South West Forest following an interview with Jim Skelton by Martin Hesp. This was one of a series being carried by the newspaper on the woodland industry. The article was very positive and supportive of the project's activities. Furthermore, Martin has promised to carry further coverage of us when the evaluation report being prepared by PACEC is complete in early December. Unfortunately the article had to be cut from a double page spread by the exciting derailment of a Eurostar train in southern Italy when a violent storm washed a bridge away. Jim was forced to concede this was more newsworthy than some of his fine quotes that ended on the cutting room floor.
- The Steering Group formed to take responsibility for the future delivery of the **South West Woodfair** is putting the final touches to its Business Plan. The Business Plan will now advise the completion of a funding bid to SW Woodland Renaissance with the hope of getting funding approved early in December. This will allow sufficient time to deliver a Woodfair at Roadford Lake next July. The plan also allows for a range of satellite events that will help to reach a range of new audiences with specially targeted events. Jim Skelton went to Westonbirt with David West and had a very useful meeting with arboretum head, John Weir, to discuss how to co-promote **Woodfair South West** with Westonbirt's own Festival of Wood.
- **Advisory Visits** - A total of 9 visits were undertaken in October, seven relating to woodland creation. A number of these were repeat visits to resolve EWGS issues. There were also two regarding woodland management. Of particular note were:-
 - A lady who owns a small native woodland near Hartland and employs a local man for a few hours each week through an organisation called P.L.U.S.S at Barnstaple. PLUSS are responsible for finding work for adults with disabilities in the benefits system. The purpose of the visit was to advise on the management of the site but with particular reference to manual operations that could be carried out reasonably safely.
 - Another owner is seeking advice from South West Forest and Business Link in connection with the creation of a wetland attraction near Kilkhampton. This included the development of an action plan by a Business Link appointed consultant. Unfortunately, due to the time limitations of Objective One funding, it may be that only part of this project can be supported, as the creation of a visitor centre will ultimately require planning permission etc. This is unlikely to be achieved before the required submission date of Feb/March 06. Other funding options may include Cartwheel (marketing advice) and Cornwall AONB sustainability fund (Wetland).
- **Monitoring Visits** - Monitoring of last year's sites (16) is due for completion by the end of the year and those sites planted in 1998 (36) by the end of March 2006. Dave Wood and Peter Webb have been appointed to carry out 32 of the visits.

SOUTH WEST FOREST – MONTHLY BRIEFING

- **North Devon AONB – County Wildlife Sites** - SWF have agreed to undertake approximately 20 advisory visits to woodland County Wildlife Sites within the North Devon AONB. The main purpose of the visits is to provide practical management advice on site and indicate the possible grant support arrangements available to owners. This is followed by a brief report designed to conform to a pro forma. The work is to be completed by the end of March 06.
- **North Devon Biodiversity Action Plan** – The revised action plan was re-launched at Morthoe Village Hall on 10 October 2005. The new plan has reviewed all of the original targets and aspirations to more achievable outcomes.
- **AONB Long-term Monitoring Programme** - We have been fortunate in obtaining funding to select four sites for setting up a long term monitoring programme. The initial survey will provide a baseline survey of species, commenting on woodland design and management opportunities for enhancing biodiversity, and finally the value of woodland creation to biodiversity in the context of the site type/setting. The four sites selected include;
 - Welcombe Community Woodland, Welcombe – Woodland Trust
 - Greycliffe Farm, Abbotsham - Dr Hunt
 - Middle Cock Farm, Berrynarbour – Mr & Mrs Harvey
 - Warcombe Farm Caravanning and Camping Site, Morthoe – Mr & Mrs Grafton
- The work on these sites is to be completed by 30 March 2006 and consultants, Clamland Consultants and Coleman Environmental Services, have been appointed to carry out the work.
- **Ancient Tree Forum – 13/10/05** - Two sites were visited during the event, Shobrooke and Creedy Park near Credition. Both have numerous examples of Ancient and Veteran Trees including an Oak with a diameter of over 2.5 metres. This tree was estimated to be some 750 or more years old. This tree is perhaps one of 500 or less across Europe, and a very rare resource indeed. Ironically thousands of pounds are spent on agricultural subsidies driven to protect thousands of hectares of unimproved pasture or heathland across Devon but the subsidies remain largely impotent in protecting a handful of valuable trees from simple cultivation and livestock issues.
- As part of SWF's funded activities in the **North Devon AONB**; Jim White has organised three dates for the SWF Products Network to exhibit and sell its work at the Big Sheep Farmer's Market in the run up to Christmas. The group will have a stand on three consecutive Saturdays starting with the 3rd December. It is anticipated that a wide selection of products and services available from the group's membership will be on show for all to see, buy and enjoy helping to develop the network further.
- **Agricultural Restructuring – Lloyds TSB – 20 Oct 05** - This one of a series of events advising farmers on diversification opportunities the next event is to be held in Exeter on the 17 November. A little over 150 invitations were sent out to SWF beneficiaries for the Cornwall event.

SOUTH WEST FOREST – MONTHLY BRIEFING

- **Training** - two training courses were held during October with a total of 18 beneficiaries attending.
 - Practical Hedgelaying
 - Coppice Management
- **24 October – South West Forest Collaboration Group Steering Committee** meeting. A key meeting took place which presided over the imminent circulation of the group's newsletter and minutes from the last meeting giving notice of the group's name change to the **South West Forest Products Network** and a new fee paying membership arrangement for the group. Furthermore, the committee was delighted to learn that Dr Oliver Rackham OBE, acclaimed author of "History of the British Countryside"; "Trees & Woodland in the British Landscape" and widely acknowledged authority on British Ancient Woodland, had kindly agreed to talk to the group along with a wider audience in the SW during National Tree Week.

3. Meetings / Networking

- On 19 October Jim Skelton attended a meeting of the **Okehampton Deer Park Steering Group**. He was able to offer feedback from the very useful meeting he and John Love had with Michael Clayson of Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) at the end of August. A planning grant of up to £50,000 is available to carry out information gathering to back up a detailed funding bid. In a detailed review of our concept note, it appears that around half of our proposals are supportable by HLF and the Big Lottery Fund should be able to support a number of the other activity based ideas. Steve Blood of Devon Heartlands has been given the task of finding funding for a project manager to develop a bid.
- On 26 October Jim Skelton and Kathy Lewington met with **Andy Rumming of Defra's RDS** to discuss progress with our new VTS Programme. We advised him that as our Objective 1 bid which would have supported Cornish beneficiaries had been rejected we would only be able to accept beneficiaries from Devon and Somerset as subsidized beneficiaries for our courses. This would change one or two of the fundamentals around our planning. We nevertheless expect to meet all the targets signed up to in our VTS bid.
- **Land Use Policy Group EAFRD Forestry Workshop** – On 9 November, Jim White attended this event in Cardiff. He reports that Europe is beginning to wake up to the importance of its woodlands and forestry. The LUPG has instigated a series of workshops and seminars facilitated by the IEEP (Institute of European Environmental Policy) to consult stakeholders in the UK forestry sector about the priorities for their industry. As part of the process, participants at the Cardiff workshop were asked to consider their individual priorities and set these out against the four proposed axes of the EAFRD (European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development). These submissions collectively will go towards advising the next steps in the process which will take in Edinburgh on 13 December and London on 1 February 2006.