

Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee



17 November 2014

Management of the Woodlands Estate Owned by DCC Review

Joint report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive and Ian Thompson, Corporate Director of Regeneration and Economic Development

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide the Members of Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee with background information prior to the overview presentation on Management of the Woodlands Estate owned by Durham County Council. The presentation will be given by Ged Lawson from Regeneration and Economic Development and Richard Pow from the Forestry Commission.

Background

2. The Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 3 July 2014, agreed that its next in depth overview and scrutiny review would be Management of the Woodlands Estate.
3. On the 14 July 2014, members of the Committee visited three areas of woodlands in County Durham which ranged from mature woodlands of up to 300 years old to recently planted woodland a couple of years old.

Detail

4. At the last meeting of the Committee on 10 November 2014, members received a scoping report which contained the terms of reference for undertaking the review. The report also provided a summary of local and national policy context and a brief synopsis of reviews carried out by other local authorities, however it stressed in the report that research indicates that there has been no other scrutiny review by a local authority that looks at the management of woodlands.
5. Whether woodlands should be managed or left to nature depends upon the individual wood and its purpose. Where woodland is used for economic purpose or where it is used for conservation or recreation then management

is required. In Britain no single woodland has remained uninfluenced by human activities.

6. County Durham has a large body of woods and forests but in comparison with the national average of woodland cover (9%) woodland cover in County Durham is particularly low at 6%. The majority of woodlands in County Durham are plantations established for timber, shelter, amenity or game. A third of the County's woodlands are in public ownership via the Forestry Commission, with Durham County Council owning and managing approximately 1000 hectares of woodland.

National Policy

7. An independent panel was established to advise the government on the future direction of forestry and woodland policy in England and the future role of the Forestry Commission. In response to the panel's report the government agreed that a new woodland culture should be developed and that the woodland and forestry sector should become more resilient. In 2013 a refreshed government forestry policy was produced which although was based around a clear hierarchy of priorities also reflected government principles of economic growth, localism, deregulation, targeted intervention and value for money.
8. The refreshed policy addresses the need to sustain, manage and improve our forests and woodlands to enable their contribution to economic growth by reducing red tape and working with landowners. It suggests promotion of greater involvement of communities in the management of woodlands; encouraging planting trees, working with communities to seek funding for initiatives aimed at developing future access and to continue to look for ways to improve access to woodlands especially in urban areas.
9. A new Rural Development Programme commences next year. From then on all woodland grants for planting new and managing existing woodland that have traditionally come from the Forestry Commission will come through an integrated management scheme provisionally called NELMS. Natural England will lead on the administration of NELMS whilst the Forestry Commission will provide the forestry expertise.
10. Local initiatives include Roots to Prosperity – A strategy and Action Plan for the Growth and Development of the Forestry Sector in Northern England. It provides an evidence base for the value of the sector at present, identifies where the opportunities for growth exist, what the barriers to success are and a rationale for how growth can be facilitated and implemented.

Local Policy

Strategies and policies for woodlands and trees in County Durham

11. The County Durham Landscape Strategy, adopted by the council in 2008, contains a strategy for woodlands and forestry. This seeks to improve the condition and management of the county's woodland resource including ancient woodlands, plantations and commercial forestry. The strategy also seeks to promote markets for timber, woodfuel and other woodland produce and to increase woodland cover. It identifies priority areas for the creation of new woodlands to reverse habitat fragmentation, strengthen landscape character, enhance biodiversity and provide opportunities for access to the countryside around our towns and villages.
12. The woodland strategy is reflected in the Green Infrastructure Strategy for County Durham which has been prepared in association with the County Durham Plan which contains policies for the protection of woodlands and trees. The Council has also produced (2013) a corporate Tree Management Policy which sets out how the council will manage trees in its care.

Next Steps

13. In line with the attached terms of reference and project plan at appendix 2, arrangements have been made for Durham County Council Officers Ged Lawson, Principle Landscape Officer and Richard Pow from the Forestry Commission to deliver a presentation focusing on:

Recommendations

14. Members of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to receive the presentation and to comment accordingly.

Background Papers

- Scoping report for Scrutiny review of the management of the woodland estate owned by DCC – ESC OSC 10/11/14

Contact: Ged Lawson, Principle Landscape Officer ged.lawson@durham.gov.uk
Telephone 03000
Sue Mullinger, Landscape Delivery Officer sue.mullinger@durham.gov.uk
Telephone: 03000
Ann Whitton, Overview and Scrutiny Officer, ann.whitton@durham.gov.uk
Telephone 03000 268143

APPENDIX 1 - Implications

Finance: There are no implications associated with this report.

Staffing: There are no implications associated with this report.

Risk: There are no implications associated with this report.

Equality and Diversity/Public Sector Equality Duty: There are no implications associated with this report.

Accommodation: There are no implications associated with this report.

Crime and Disorder: There are no implications associated with this report.

Human Rights: There are no implications associated with this report.

Consultation: There are no implications associated with this report.

Procurement: There are no implications associated with this report.

Disability Issues: There are no implications associated with this report.

Legal Implications: There are no implications associated with this report.