

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP REPORT - MANAGEMENT OF THE WOODLAND ESTATE OWNED BY DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL
REVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS CONSIDERED BY CABINET ON 16 SEPTEMBER 2015.**

Review Recommendation	Progress Report of Action taken to implement recommendation	Resib'ty	Timescale
<p>1. That Durham County Council as part of the audit of the woodland estate considers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The future strategic management of the woodland estate. • The partnership management approaches adopted by key partners within County Durham such as Durham Wildlife Trust. • The development and implementation of a streamlined corporate strategy/policy framework for the management and protection of woodland owned by Durham County Council. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Review of Durham County Council Woodland Estate produced in 2015. Number of key findings and delivery recommendations including; Consolidating woodland management and operations across the council; Scoping out outsourcing of forestry operations • Durham Woodland Revival HLF application successful. A grant of £59k has been awarded for the development phase, leading to a future £432,700 bid to HLF. Along with match funding from DCC, the Woodland Trust and Forestry Commission it will mean £1m investment in woodlands and the forestry sector in the County. Recruitment for a Development Manager is underway. The next 15 months will be spent working up detailed projects to stimulate management of small woodlands and provide opportunities for communities to help manage the sites. The project will deliver from early 2019 to the end of 2023 and will be managed by 3 new staff members funded through the programme. • A Development Manager, funded by HLF, has been in post since November 2017 to work up the detail required to submit to Stage 2 early November. This will release £432,700 and a further £400,000 from partners for a 4 year delivery programme starting summer 2019. The project aims to conserve and restore the network of woodlands and strengthen resilience 	<p>SM</p>	<p>2017</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>

	<p>against diseases and the effects of climate change. It will reconnect communities and landowners with woodlands, providing support to manage them effectively and provide a valuable, sustainable timber resource for years to come. More details can be found at http://www.woodlandrevivalproject.info/</p>		
<p>2. That Durham County Council maximise the income generation and employment opportunities from timber extraction on existing and potential new sites including consideration of new management models such as those produced by the SIMWOOD project for the marketing and extraction of timber.</p>	<p>Income from thinning contracts is almost £50k to date. Most of the economical woodlands have now been thinned . A new contract with Stobart Forestry is underway to thin a further 14 woodlands. These are woodlands with young trees and access/security issues where previous attempts at selling standing timber have failed. There will be no income from these sites but it does mean that the woodlands will be better managed and more resilient in the future.</p> <p>All thinning contracts will finish March 2019. There have been a few teething problems with Stobart which we have hopefully sorted prior to future opportunities. Timber markets, particularly woodchip are significantly more buoyant than when we started this process. Any new thinning agreements will allow for these changes. We also need to be more realistic about the value of the timber and factor in site security and access, which can significantly alter the level of income.</p> <p>Forestry Commission approved management plans are about to be finalised for the remaining 1000ha of DCC forest estate. This means we can start to look at further active management works in conjunction with the Durham Woodland Revival project over the next few years. Consultants have produced the plans, which cost £12,000 and have been funded through agri-environment grants.</p>	<p>SM</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

<p>3. That Durham County Council's procurement process for the letting of timber extraction contracts ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contracts are advertised to target and maximise interest from the private sector. • That in conjunction with the Corporate Procurement Manager the required documentation and process is simplified to make contracts more attractive to private sector companies. 	<p>Sales of standing timber are now going through a timber auction company.</p>		
<p>4. That Durham County Council maximises the funding opportunities available via the Common Agricultural Policy (Countryside Stewardship Scheme for England) and the European Structural and Investment Fund (Low Carbon Economy Strand) if and when such funding becomes available for the benefit of the Durham County Council woodland estate.</p>	<p>This is an issue for all areas not currently under management as there will be no new funding agreements issued by the Forestry Commission after the autumn statement. In order to get funding to prepare management plans and get felling licences in place, land has to be registered on the Rural Land Registry which is an extremely time consuming exercise.</p> <p>The remaining areas of woodland have been registered on the Rural Land Registry making them eligible for Forestry Commission grants. A contract is currently with procurement for consultants to produce management plans for the remainder of the forest estate. This should be complete by June 2018. It will be entirely funded through Forestry Commission grant.</p> <p>The management plans are almost complete, we are just finalising detail with the Forestry Commission. These cost £12,000 and are 100% grant aided.</p>	<p>SM</p>	<p>2017</p>

