



forest review 2005 - 2006

your forest

now and in the future



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Your forest now and in the future

The Great Western Community Forest (GWCF) is taking shape in and around Swindon. It covers an area of 168 square miles stretching from Wootton Bassett to Faringdon and the Downs to the Thames. Over the coming years the Forest will become a unique mix of woodlands, open space, farmland and nature area – creating a landscape to be proud of and to be enjoyed by all.

A dedicated Community Forest Team is based within Swindon Borough Council and has the task of ensuring that the Forest develops on the ground over the next twenty five years. The Team works in partnership with a broad range of local and regional organisations that are supporting the development of the Forest in a variety of ways. The public is consulted over plans and proposals as they emerge in order that projects take account of local needs and aspirations and the local business community is supporting the project through sponsorship

The Main Aims of the Great Western Community Forest Partnership

- Champion the development of a multi-purpose forest around Swindon, incorporating a balanced mix of woods, farmland, open space and communities.
- Encourage community involvement in the creation, maintenance and enjoyment of the Forest, and instill a strong sense of ownership and pride in the local environment.
- Encourage sustainable development in the Forest, including employment and education opportunities that make use of the Forest itself.
- Ensure the long-term viability of Great Western Community Forest

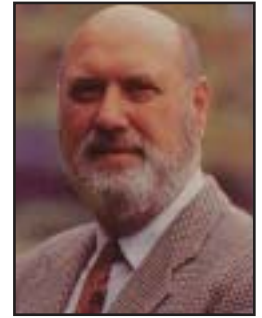
Our Mission

‘To work with the community and integrated woodland environment now and for the future.’



Chairmans Statement

At the beginning of April, the Great Western Community Forest entered a two-year period of transition funding that is being administered through the Forestry Commission and contributes to the core funding for the project, terminating in 2007.



As part of the succession work required to take Great Western Community Forest through this transition period, consideration was given at the time, to the role of Great Western Community Forest up to 2010. A key part of this work involved appraisals of the key potential delivery roles for Great Western Community Forest and this in turn involved members of the Great Western Community Forest team, with input from key partners. Based on the team's knowledge and experience of issues and opportunities, plus the wider policy context and role of other organisations, opportunities were considered in relation to potential funding streams, particularly developer contributions.

Using the position statements laid out in the Succession Planning Framework, a Business Planning meeting was held in April 2005 to:

- bring partners up to speed with the general direction and areas of activity being considered
- identify and acknowledge any gaps in thinking
- identify and acknowledge any fundamental conflicts with partners priorities/policies
- gain partner's support in principle to taking the business plan forward

Partners were invited from a broader cross section than that traditionally considered the Great Western Community Forest partnership and particular effort was made to invite representation from the education, health/lifestyle and business sector.

The approved five-year Business Plan was finally launched at the end of 2005 setting out the actions the Community Forest will focus on over the coming years. It has implications for the team in terms of new skill development and funding and further development of partnership working will also be required to help to achieve these key objectives.

One of the key players in creating this new Business Plan was Dave Evans, Director of Great Western Community Forest who led the Great Western Community Forest team for four years. Although Dave left in April 2005 to take up a new role closer to his home town in Wales, his enthusiasm and leadership secured the commitment of many partners and stakeholders which in turn, helped to take Great Western Community Forest forward with a clear strategy into the 2005/2006 period. Dr Gesa Reiss joined the team in August 2005 as Forest Officer to continue this commitment, seeing the Business Plan through to fruition and ensuring that the Great Western Community Forest project continues to develop and diversify to achieve the long-term vision.

With the support of Swindon Borough Council who has made a promise to continue to commit to the 30 year vision for the Great Western Community Forest, continuing with partners to deliver a woodland framework for Swindon, the team and our partners are determined to fulfil these long term aims and we appreciate your support in enabling us to do this.

Healthy Lifestyles

Active Swindon

In our last Forest Review we reported on a successful bid from Sport England which would provide funding for the next 3 years via the Swindon Physical Development Alliance (PADAL), with the aim of getting people fit and active.

One of Active Swindon's key objectives was to improve access to walking and cycling pathways in Swindon and the surrounding areas and to encourage the use of woodlands for family activity and learning. As a result of this an Active Swindon team has been created to identify and implement a work programme to meet these objectives.

Nan Pratt was appointed in November 2005 as Development Officer for family-based learning and although employed by the Primary Care Trust, Nan has been based within the GWCF team. Nan has developed a threefold role to encourage greater levels of fitness by being active in the countryside and open spaces within the Forest area.

- Woodland for Activity embraces school and family based initiatives, such as Forest Schools and the highly acclaimed Story Sack project. Both of these entice young people and their parents into the woodlands to explore, learn and be active. Included will be programmes of activities through Extended schools and Sure Start, tailored to the needs and opportunities of each centre.
- Green Gyms is a British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) supported activity to promote fitness, well-being and health for everyone through physical work improving the local environment. This offers a new way to get fit and healthy and to socialise, providing an exciting alternative for people who do not like the idea of joining a sports centre or gym.
- Active Travel aims to encourage more people to walk and cycle to work and for leisure.



Developing Green

Infrastructure

Urban Fringe Action Plan

October 2005 saw the publication of the Urban Fringe Action Plan (UFAP) for the southern fringes of Swindon. The UFAP has been developed by the North Wessex Downs AONB in collaboration with a broad partnership including the GWCF team. It was developed in response to issues raised through the development of the AONB management plan in relation to the impact of urban expansion on the nature/character of the AONB.

The UFAP has been built on feedback gained at the 'Fringe Benefits' workshop held in April 2005. The UFAP has been built on feedback gained at the 'Fringe Benefits' workshops held in April 2005 when a number of key issues and realistic actions were identified and discussed via a broad partnership of organisations led by GWCF and the North Wessex Downs AONB teams, the Countryside Agency, Swindon Borough Council and the Government Office of the South West.

The UFAP addresses a complex range of issues facing people living in the urban fringes to the south of Swindon and reaching up into the protected landscape of the North Wessex Downs. It not only looks at some of the negative issues facing people in the area such as flytipping, 'rat runs', trespassing, etc, but also describes the importance of the urban fringe as an area which has huge potential to: act as a 'bridge' between urban and rural, act as a gateway to and from the AONB, provide opportunities for informal recreation and to promote healthy lifestyles, provide for outdoor education, increase biodiversity and much more.

Achieving this potential isn't something that will be done overnight. The UFAP sets out a long-term vision for area and describes how this could be achieved through collaborative efforts between local people, local authorities, agencies and organisations with a role to play, from setting the right policies through to delivering action on the ground.

The Great Western Community Forest team and partners will have a big part to play in taking forward some of these actions. At the end of 2005, GWCF received a Sustainable Development Fund Grant for the development of a Green Infrastructure plan for the area which looked at how a network of interconnected open spaces, woodlands, farmland, etc, could be improved and used to realise the potential benefits described in the UFAP.

During 2005, the North Wessex Downs AONB distributed more than £88,000 (SDF) grants. The Fund is managed by the Countryside Agency on behalf of Defra. The Green Infrastructure Project is also supported by Swindon Borough Council.

Upper River Thames Heritage Project

In the last issue of forest Review we reported on this new project which had just received £49,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project aims to develop a strategy to support the natural history of the Upper River Thames and the communities who live and work in the area. It covers an area from Waterhay, Nr Cricklade in the west to Radcot Bridge in the east. In July 2005, the Upper River Thames Heritage project was officially launched at a stakeholders forum which was an initial chance for partners and community groups to find out more about this research project and to meet some of the key people involved. Since then an enormous amount of activity has taken place.

The first newsletter was issued shortly after the official launch of the project in July, consultants from the Countryside and Community Research Unit (CCRU) of the University of Gloucestershire were employed by the Great Western Community Forest team to carry out a visitor survey and a community survey of the Upper River Thames study area and a history competition involving four Primary Schools adjacent to the Thames took place. Throughout 2005 literally hundreds of people who live, work and visit along the Upper River Thames area helped the Great Western Community Forest team to piece together a picture of life there in the past and the present. These studies explore the value of the Upper River Thames corridor as a natural and a cultural heritage attraction from both a visitor and a community perspective.

On Thursday 30th March 2006 a second Stakeholders Forum took place in Lechlade which enabled partners and community groups to find out more about the consultative processes and results. It also provided the chance for the GWCF team and partners to thank those who had contributed to the project so far.

The Project Planning Grant phase of the Upper River Thames Heritage Project drew to a close in April 2006, but the initial 12 months of funding has produced great results and has helped us to understand and draw together the facts and figures needed for the project to proceed to the next stage through 2006 and beyond.



Community & Education Partnerships

Shaw Forest Park

Covering an area of some 150 acres and divided into three areas, Shaw Forest Park has been taking shape over the past 11 years with over 46,000 trees being planted with the support of the local community and the Great Western Community Forest project. Whilst landscape restoration has continued on site during this time, public access has been limited.

At the beginning of 2006, a circular footpath was constructed within the first phase of the site, avoiding the area of phase two which was still being actively tipped. The continued installation of the environmental systems in this area inevitably created some disturbance but interpretation boards giving details of the route along with signage clearly stating which areas were accessible to the public, prevented the risk of health and safety issues. In addition to this, a new public car park, picnic areas and a central grassy recreation area have been provided for public use and a community tree planting event on March 19th 2006 marked the final stage of Phase 1 of this developing Forest Park.

Cllr Nick Martin, Ward Member for Shaw & Nine Elms said,

“I am delighted to see the progress that is being made at Shaw Forest Park. The new footpaths, signposts and briefing boards will increase the use and appreciation of the park for local residents and visitors from other parts of Swindon. Shaw Forest Park is a fantastic success story and demonstrates how land can be recycled and industrial waste sites restored.”

As development continues, we will gradually see the whole site being opened up for public use, in line with No. 23 of the Borough's 50 Promises. The tipping of subsoil will continue in this area to shape and mould the park and finally by the end of 2008, Shaw Forest Park will have become a fully accessible, thriving woodland, offering a range of facilities and a wildlife oasis to be used and enjoyed by everyone.



Buckhurst Fields

A public open space known as Buckhurst Fields in Park North, Swindon is in an area that was highlighted in 2005 for Government funding through the Neighbourhood Renewal Area grant. This funding, a scheme for the improvement and regeneration of public areas, supported environmental improvements including a new play area, benches, skateboard ramps, shrubs and tree planting.

Partners in this project included the local community, the Great Western Community Forest team (GWCF), Local Agenda 21, British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) and Swindon Borough Council.

Through public consultation and ongoing steering group meetings, it was concluded that planting on the fields themselves would be fairly limited so the idea of increasing tree cover in the area through offering trees for people to plant in their own gardens was raised.

The first phase of the project, the planting of the trees on the fields themselves, was carried out by BTCV on behalf of the GWCF along with local people. The second phase was carried out by local contractors and in all, 70 trees were planted to create two avenues and a fruit and nut copse.

During the summer a Buckhurst Fields Family Day was held allowing the Great Western Community Forest team to promote the 'Free Tree for your Garden' scheme. Holly, Silver Birch and Rowan were offered, species suitable for the small gardens surrounding the open space. As a result, people living throughout Park North and Park South and many adjacent to the Buckhurst Fields open space itself, took advantage to green up their own back gardens at the same time as increasing tree cover in the whole area.

Coppidthorn Meadow

On 11th December 2005, the residents of Shrivenham, Nr Swindon, took part in a community tree planting event to plant 275 trees in Coppidthorn Meadow, a new public open space for the village.

The tree plant was a key phase in a project that had been embraced enthusiastically by all concerned, the Vale of White Horse District Council, GWCF, the Parish Council and the local community.

The name Coppidthorn Meadow had been chosen by the people of Shrivenham at a consultation in April 2005, an event that was attended by 80 local people in the Memorial Hall.

The consultation not only provided the name, but also gave the community the opportunity to discuss the project with the Landscape Team from the Vale of White Horse District Council, the Community Forest team, the Parish Council and local Councillors all taking part.

One key output of the consultation was the need for sensitivity to the surroundings; Coppidthorn Meadow is adjacent to the village cemetery and the community did not want the peace and tranquillity of this corner of the village changed significantly. The site design took these and other concerns into account, providing a final plan that supported the environment and the views of everyone involved.

With the funding for the capital work being provided by the District Council, much of the groundwork was completed in November by the Vale's Landscape Team. It included new gateways, surfaced paths, benches and many larger trees and was closely followed by the community tree planting event in December when the remaining 275 trees were planted.



Coppidthorn Meadow is now part of Shrivenham's accessible countryside; it has links to the footpath network, the village centre via Stainswick Lane, the Wilts and Berks Canal Pocket Park and to some permissive footpaths created under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. The community has continued to look after Coppidthorn Meadow and in 2006 spring bulbs were planted to add some early colour to this popular new green space for the village.

Oxleaze Wood

As well as the 3000 trees planted in Oxleaze Wood, South Marston, Nr Swindon in 2004, the local community now has the opportunity to reach all corners of this popular new woodland by following a high quality surfaced path around the wood which was constructed in October 2005.



The path is 700 metres long and will allow the majority of users to enjoy the wood, on foot, with a pushchair or buggy and it is accessible to the majority of wheelchair users. A member of the Landscape Architect's team at Swindon Borough Council supervised the construction of the path, with the groundwork carried out by Swindon Commercial Services.

South Marston Parish Council and the local community continue to support activities to promote Oxleaze Wood. GWCF is working with the village school to develop an arts project, with the intention of creating a feature that will link the school to Oxleaze Wood. This arts project is an exciting and innovative way to engage local children with their environment and GWCF is looking forward to taking this forward to a successful conclusion in 2006/07.

GWCF has worked very closely with the Parish Council, local landowners, business and the Borough Council to create better links from the village centre to Oxleaze Wood using the footpath network. Implementation of these improvements, made possible through the support of local landowners, will take place soon and will include new kissing gates and signs.

The last item of work for Oxleaze Wood in 2006/07 will see 182 metres of the boundary hedge layered; this will be a continuous process over the next three to four years as all the hedges surrounding Oxleaze come under the same type of management. Many of the hedgerows in the Parish have been layered in recent years; with landowners and businesses all playing their part to rejuvenate these important landscape features.

Penhill and Pinehurst Sure Start

The Swindon Learning Partnership, an initiative between the Great Western Community Forest, Sure Start and Swindon Borough Council was boosted by a grant early in 2006 from the New Opportunities Fund to develop Forest Learning based activity at the Penhill and Pinehurst Sure Start Children's Centres in Swindon.



Sure Start local programmes work with parents and parents-to-be to improve children's life chances through better access to family support, advice on nurturing, health services and early learning and as a result of this funding, the GWCF was able to introduce Forest School leader training, the planning of free Family Forest Fun Days to engage the whole family in woodland based activity, the development of the play area sites for imaginative use for learning and play and the introduction of two Story Sack courses.

These courses, inspired by the Harry Hazelnut Story Sack, encouraged mothers to understand more about their environment and to bond with their children through creating story sacks and story-telling. The linked Forest Family Fun Days are also designed to encourage parents and families to enjoy outdoor activity thus fulfilling one of the aims of the GWCF in increasing the use of Forests. Forest School leader training has been made available for nursery teachers and their assistants at both centres and the Active Swindon Development Officer for family-based learning who sits within the GWCF team has been closely involved in the development of this project.

Through public consultation, the Community Forest has also helped to develop plans for the Sure Start outdoor play area and grounds which will include the provision of pathways, seating areas, woodland and hedgerows. Further funding will be sought at the end of 2006 to ensure that, not only will this development take place, but a future management plan for the site will be in place too.

The Great Western Community Forest boundary



Achievements

2005-2006

New woodland planting	2.8 ha
New areas open to the public	16 ha
Routes restored / improved for public access	5.44 km
Events for schools and local community	343
Non-woodland habitat created or restored	1.96 ha
Value of volunteer & in-kind support	£193,035

Financial statement 2005 – 2006

Funding

Principle Partners' contribution to GWCF core and project cost

	£
Forestry Commission	102,200
Swindon Borough Council	205,450
Vale of White Horse District Council	15,000
North Wiltshire District Council	4,000
Other sources	5,130



Other Funding – GWCF partnership

	£
Private sector	16,057
Grants (land fill tax, European, Lottery, etc.)	122,021
Others (in-kind contributions, donations, etc.)	124,577



Where has the money gone?

Projects	281,880
Personnel	184,270
Administrative, support and training cost	128,285



Events & Highlights 2005-2006

2005

April	Earth Day/Business Planning Day
May	AFL Mature tree planting
June	First 'Forests on your Doorstep' leaflet launched
July	Upper River Thames Heritage Project first stakeholder forum
August	New Director, Gesa Reiss, joins team
September	Seventh Forest Festival/Oxleaze Wood path completion
October	Publication of Urban Fringe Action Plan

November	GWCF hosted FEI Conference & launch of Harry's Hazelnut Story Sack
December	Coppidthorn Meadow Community tree plant, Shrivenham
2006	
January	Woodlands for Learning network meeting/ Launch of Pinehurst & Penhill Sure Start
March	Shaw Forest Park Community tree plant/ Upper River Thames Heritage project stakeholder forum/GI Planning Seminar



For more information contact:

Great Western Community Forest
1st Floor Premier House
Station Road
Swindon SN1 1TZ


Telephone: 01793 466324
Fax: 01793 466306

www.forestweb.org.uk

The Great Western Community Forest Team:

Dr Gesa Reiss
Community Forest Officer
Telephone 01793 466320
email: greiss@swindon.gov.uk

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 In addition to 80% recycled fibre
the remaining 20% virgin pulp is
TCF (totally chlorine free)

The National
community forest
Partnership

 Forestry Commission

 Vale
of White Horse

*North
Wiltshire
District
Council*

 SWINDON
BOROUGH COUNCIL