

NORTHERN ENGLAND FORESTRY SECTOR GROWTH PLAN

'A PARTNERSHIP FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH'.

The forestry and forest products sector in northern England is a well established sector of business and has an enviable reputation for continued investment and the delivery of economic, social and environmental benefits. Furthermore, Northern England offers a great opportunity to secure an exciting future for the sector, with its potential as a driver of economic growth and employment at the heart.

A range of organisations from both the public and private sectors have come together to work in partnership to promote the opportunities for growth offered by the domestic forestry and forest products sector in northern England. The partnership comprises the County Councils of Cumbria, Durham, Northumberland and North Yorkshire, together with Forestry Commission England, the Confederation of Forest Industries and the UK Forest Products Association.

The primary objective of this initiative is to raise awareness of the sector and its opportunities for development and growth amongst the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in northern England. It is hoped that publication of the Sector Growth Plan will lead to greater engagement with LEPs in the region and that in turn, they and others will be able to help support the continued development of the sector across Northern England, thereby maximising the economic, social and environmental benefits provided by the forest resource and the sector dependent on it.

The industry has identified opportunities for growth and has also highlighted some barriers, which if adequately addressed can greatly enhance the economic value of the sector in northern England.

Following a pan-industry survey in Autumn 2013 and subsequent discussions, a steering group of the partnership agreed to commission specialist forest industry consultants to work with them in the development of evidence based Forestry Sector Growth Plan for Northern England. Development of the Growth Plan started in earnest in November 2013, working to a tight timetable to produce a headline report in mid-January 2014 for presentation to LEPs. Martin Glynn, Chartered Forester and Rural Development Advisor, working in conjunction with Rural Development Initiatives has been commissioned to support this development. It is envisaged that a more detailed report will then be produced, which is expected to be published in March 2014.

The opportunities already identified include a wide variety of subjects ranging from physical infrastructure, including public and in-forest roads, to specialist business support skills and recruitment and training issues. There is also an opportunity to increase levels of active woodland management across the existing resource.

In addition, there is the question of the forest resource in northern England and the need for increased focus on commercial conifer production, to provide the basic raw material for the wood processing sector.

It is the aspiration of the sector that by 2020, there should be an expanded, thriving forestry and timber sector, with 18,000 hectares of new productive woodland and 3000 additional jobs across the sector.

The forest industry in northern England, which includes state of the art industrial wood processing, employs some 25,000 people, in activities ranging from nurseries, establishment contractors to timber harvesting, haulage and wood processing, together with downstream value added manufacturing. It is recognised that the sector has the potential to further increase its contribution, in economic, social and environmental terms, thereby delivering even greater benefits to the region. With a range of opportunities, co-ordinated action to address a number of key issues to maximise the potential of this sector could deliver these benefits.

It is hoped that the Northern England Forestry Sector Growth Plan could be instrumental in accessing funds to support the continued development of this regionally and economically significant sector of industry and to boost the economy of the region.

Businesses across the sector are encouraged to support this important initiative. Further information can be obtained from Jane Karthaus (ConFor), David Sulman (UKFPA), Crispin Thorn (Forestry Commission), Cameron Scott (Northumberland County Council) or Paul Dodson (Cumbria County Council).

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