LEADER-funded intervention in Cumbria’s Forestry Sector

The project encompassed three main strands of support to the forestry and woodland sector:

- Woodland Advisory Service
- Capital Grants
- Skills for the Forest Programme

This summary uses information from ‘An Evaluation of the LEADER Funded Interventions In the Forestry Sector in Cumbria’ by Adam Wellings, Mark Reynolds and Martin Glynn, which shows the important role that the programme played in integrating three specific types of intervention – advice, skills and capital grants – and shows the additional benefits that can be achieved from this joined-up approach. The full report is available for download from the Cumbria Woodlands document store: http://www.cumbriawoodlands.co.uk/training-and-resources/document-store.aspx
Cumbria Woodlands

For 21 years Cumbria Woodlands has been advising woodland owners on how to improve and increase sustainable woodland management, as well as increasing the amount of new woodland in targeted locations.

It is often presumed that woods are wild places that can look after themselves. But this is rarely the case in the UK, and in fact many benefit greatly from active management, which can bring additional social, environmental and economic benefits. This report focuses on the third of these strands.

Timber is a commodity with a monetary value. This can range from high value timber for veneers, to low value chip and pulp to feed the fibre and fuel markets. There is a massive range in between, not least the firewood market, which has been expanding rapidly in recent years as fossil fuels have increased in cost and incentives have been brought in to encourage conversion to renewable fuel.

What is the LEADER approach?

LEADER is the, well-established, community-led method of delivering rural development at a local level. From the French acronym, ‘Liaison Entre Action Development l’Economie Rurale’, LEADER roughly translates as ‘Liaison Amongst Actors in Rural Economic Development’. There are seven LEADER ‘specificities’: The approach is based on a limited geographic area, is a private/public sector partnership, uses extensive networks, involves tackling problems in new, innovative ways, encourages a co-operative way of working on a strategic plan that is integrated and delivered by empowering the community from the ‘bottom up’.

The key specificities, or issues, for this particular project are the bottom up, partnership way of working and the use of established networks. An integrated range of activity was funded rather than a ‘one size fits all’ approach.

In Cumbria much of the RDPE was delivered using the bottom up LEADER approach via two Local Action Groups – Cumbria Fells and Dales and the Solway, Border and Eden. The forestry sector made excellent use of the wide range of support to bring woodlands into management, providing advice and information along with a substantial training programme, and linking capital grants to enable contractors to grow their businesses.

A new Rural Development Programme is due to start in early 2015 and is likely to support similar types of work.
Woodland Advisory Service (WAS)

The Woodland Advisory Service (WAS) was a three-year programme of visits to woodland owners by qualified advisers. Available to any owner of woodland of half a hectare or more in Cumbria, it was designed to increase the area of woodland under active management throughout the county and raise awareness of the potential of woodlands.

An initial one-day visit and report (called a Silver Birch Day) was typically followed by up to a further three days (Oak Days) to provide tailored implementation advice to the woodland owner.

In total, 439 woodland owners received either a Silver Birch Day and/or one or more Oak Days. The service had a significant impact on several of the adviser businesses. Some reported that in excess of 50% of their turnover during the duration of the programme was a result of WAS, while others reported that post-WAS, their business had rebalanced at 25% above previous level. This also positively reflects the number of new clients that advisers retained post-WAS.

WAS interventions have also been shown to increase the likelihood of woodland owners looking for other forms of support, such as entering into an English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS) and/or applying for a felling licence. Cumbria Woodlands identified at least 185 woodland owners to which this applies.

Key facts

- 439 woodland owners received support through WAS
- Over 50% of adviser businesses said their turnover had increased post-WAS
- WAS visits encouraged 185 woodland owners to apply for additional grant funding to help develop their business
Case Study 1 – Witherslack Woodlands

Until an adviser from Cumbria Woodlands paid a visit, Nick Stanley had viewed the management of the forest on the Witherslack Estate, near Grange-over-Sands, as just another cost. The visit, however, changed things.

“It convinced us that we could make much more of our woodlands, get more of them back into sustainable management and exploit the expanding market for woodfuels,” recalls Nick. “Without that initial assessment we would have been much slower to recognise the opportunity.”

Cumbria Woodlands helped Nick to secure a LEADER grant of £8,000 to buy a state-of-the-art firewood processor, which uses hardwoods such as oak, ash and hazel coppiced on the estate.

“Help in getting grants to buy machines has been massively helpful, but just as important has been the emotional and intellectual support from Cumbria Woodlands. They understand the business and provided a constant source of advice and support. When I was uncertain about something they could help and, importantly, also reassured me when we were on the right track and doing things well.”

To help develop his woodfuel business, Nick has also taken advantage of safety training and marketing support from Cumbria Woodlands.

He believes that the growing value of wood fuel – the price of the estate’s firewood has tripled in five years – and the rapid increase in the number of people installing wood burning stoves, has vindicated Cumbria Woodland’s confidence in the venture, both as a business and also as a way of supporting sustainable woodland management.

Following further RDPE funding, Nick was able to buy new kit including a new medium size tractor, medium log trailer, alpine tractor and alpine forwarder trailer, as well as a drying shed for new boiler at Witherslack Hall. Witherslack now produces over 1,000 tonnes of firewood a year, and supplies over 400 customers, work which has helped to create three new forestry jobs on the estate.
Capital Grant Scheme

Capital Grants have been used to support a wide range of projects, including buying timber extraction and processing machinery, wood fuel and firewood business creation and expansion, furniture manufacturers, and tourism and education.

Most applicants were new businesses that would have been unable to make the investments without capital grants. In total, £1,794,376 was invested in forestry and timber related capital projects, including applicants’ match funding. Thirty-three new full-time jobs were also created, while a further ten were safeguarded.

While many grant beneficiaries commented on the complexity of the process and difficulty in fully understanding the requirements of the scheme, most also said they had received significant, high quality support from business advisers and/or LEADER development officers.

A high proportion of investments were related to the firewood and wood fuel sectors, both of which have undergone strong growth in recent years, and applicants reported significant year-on-year increases in timber usage following the investment.

Key facts

- £1,794,376 invested in forestry and timber related capital projects
- 33 new full-time jobs created
- 10 full-time jobs safeguarded
Case study 2 – Fuelling Local Needs

After struggling to find high quality, locally grown woodchip to heat her domestic boiler, Kerry Cooper decided the best idea would be to produce her own.

With the help of Cumbria Woodlands, Kerry set up Lakes Biomass, a business with ambitious plans to help develop a supply chain of local wood producers to support a range of woodchip, kindling, log and pellets.

Supported by courses and grant applications managed by Cumbria Woodlands, the business has benefited from around £250,000 in capital grants from the LEADER programme. The programme also provided business development support to help towards essential equipment and machinery including a chipping machine and a wood drying system which itself is fuelled by a woodchip boiler.

“The quality of wood fuel depends greatly on the moisture content,” explains Kerry, “air dried is more variable than machine dried fuel. Our aim is to have drying facilities that ensure a better quality and more reliably dry product that burns more efficiently,”

But, says Kerry, almost as important as the financial support and advice has been the mentoring offered both informally and at courses run by the Cumbria Wood Fuel School.

A ‘Fuel for Wood’ package is now up and running. Lakes Biomass carries out felling and thinning as part of its woodland management services, and the timber is then delivered back as high quality dried wood fuel at a reduced price.

Today, Lakes Biomass employs a team of eight – four men and four women – and has recently bought a new lorry and blowing unit to deliver wood fuel more quickly, quietly and efficiently.
Skills for the Forest

Skills for the Forest Programme, designed and delivered by Cumbria Woodlands, was part of a wider Rural Skills Cumbria (RSC) initiative. The programme had three main elements:

**FORESTRY DEMONSTRATIONS** – this element concentrated on attending agricultural shows and fairs to raise awareness of woodland management, harvesting techniques and the use of small-scale equipment in undermanaged small-scale woodlands.

**VOCATIONAL TRAINING** – this theme offered an opportunity for businesses to improve existing skills or develop new enterprises within their businesses. Courses ranged from basic practical requirements (pesticides, chainsaws etc.) through to woodland management and woodfuel production. An online survey was distributed to the 385 individuals who took part and there were 45 responses (12%). The key findings were as follows:

- Five of the respondees were unemployed at the time of their training and two subsequently secured employment, while three set up a business as a direct result of the training.
- Of those employed in farming/forestry, four stated that the training had enabled them to set up a business.
- Seven woodland owners said their knowledge of woodland management had increased, and two said that they now managed their woodlands whereas they hadn’t before.
- For those that engaged as leisure/personal interest, eight said they have used the training to manage their woodland more effectively.
- In terms of the impact of the training on continued personal development, 48% have subsequently undertaken other training or personal development in the farming/forestry sectors.

**WOOD FUEL KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER** – provided support to woodland owners and forestry and timber processing businesses to learn about the technology within the wood fuel sector, and ultimately enhance the supply chain and open up new opportunities for products and services.

The feedback from the beneficiaries of the Woodfuel School has been positive, particularly the response to the mentoring programme. Evaluation showed that:

- 76% scored the course scored very highly in terms of ‘usefulness’
- 21% said the course was ‘inspirational’ and 79% simply ‘informative’
- 34% said the course had ‘greatly’ increased their knowledge and understanding

**Key facts**

- 1,505 vocational training days delivered
- 332 people benefited from forestry demonstration days
- 126 people benefited from the Woodfuel School and mentoring scheme
Case study 3 – Gary Primrose

An in-depth advisory visit by Cumbria Woodlands helped landowner Gary Primrose to explore new possibilities for the forests he part owns and manages at Sawrey Ground Plantation, near Tarn Hows.

“Many of the conifer stands are mature and ready for thinning and conversion to Continuous Cover principles of forest management,” explains Gary, “and there are also opportunities for converting some parts of the wood back to native broadleaves.

“I’ve got a life-long interest in conservation and this was a chance to nurture a more varied structure in age and species and revitalise habitats, which is a big motivation.”

Gary also manages the neighbouring woods around Yewfield Guest House and was keen to see if thinnings from the plantation and local woods could feed the new 150kwh biomass boiler installed at the guest house, along with its open fireplace and eight wood stoves.

Cumbria Woodlands produced an overview of the woods and, after some number crunching, discovered that the woodlands were more than capable of meeting Gary’s needs. As well as helping him to identify the existing value of his woodlands, they have also helped develop a sustainable management plan using a grant from the Forestry Commission.

One hundred tonnes of timber are now felled annually, much of it removed using logging horses rather than machinery. Home grown firewood is also used to heat the guest house, with the rest sold locally, increasing Gary’s income.

“It’s a very elegant plan based on a virtuous circle,” says Gary, “We improve the wood’s ecology by putting it back to work and use the timber as a lean burning fuel cutting energy costs, which in turn allows us to continue our work managing the wood. We are also making a small but important contribution towards a more sustainable society by using a local renewable source, saving 80 tonnes of carbon per year here at Yewfield.”
Conclusions

Feedback has been universally supportive of the programme and of Cumbria Woodlands as a delivery organisation. It has also been recognised that Cumbria Woodlands has delivered a key service that core government agencies, particularly the Forestry Commission, simply did not have the capacity to support.

The ability for the Commission to pass enquiries onto Cumbria Woodlands has also led to a greater level of woodland management in Cumbria than would otherwise have been the case.

Lessons Learnt and Recommendations

Evaluation of the programme produced a universally positive response, with the investments seen as having led to increased woodland management, additional economic activity and wider benefits to Cumbria’s environment and communities. Much of this was due to the integration of the three key elements of the programme – Woodland Advisory Service, Capital Grants, and Skills for the Forest Programme. In addition, the quality of support and guidance offered by staff of all the agencies involved has enabled beneficiaries to focus on their businesses and overcome barriers to progress.
Summary of Programme Impacts

The key purpose of the programme was to ‘help grow the supply chain, and bring woodlands into management’. In that context, it has had a significant impact, bringing 430 woodland owners into a support programme, with an estimated two-thirds of these considered net additional – i.e. they wouldn’t have become involved in the concept of woodland management without the programme.

There were over 1,400 beneficiaries from training and skills development delivered nearly 1,750 training days, with feedback indicating high levels of satisfaction, as well as evidence of job creation and new business forming.

Estimates also suggest that the net additionality of the service is 67%. This compares extremely favourably with other mainstream economic development interventions, which show that the average net additionality for a ‘programme’ intervention is 52.5%. For enterprise support programmes specifically, this falls again to 43%.

There is evidence that the training programme has created seven new businesses and two jobs (from the survey sample of 45), which represents an efficient use of public funds.

Other benefits

**Woodland Advisers** – there has been some significant development of woodland advisor businesses as a result of the programme, particularly marked in terms of developing ongoing client relationships and introducing clients to the benefits of advice and valuing it enough to pay full fees. To an extent this can be seen as a significant output to the programme, generating ‘sustainable’ economic activity.

**The Forestry Commission** – in addition to the significant increase in take up of EWGS, Woodland Officers have reported tangible benefit in being able to refer woodland owners to Cumbria Woodlands for more detailed advice and support.

**Estate Management** – the programme has brought the woodland controlled by a number of large estates into management. Previously, a number that benefited from the programme were only managed on a ‘reactive’ basis, with no planned programmes, therefore limiting opportunities to secure economic benefit from the woodland asset.
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