



West Lothian Council

COUNCIL EXECUTIVE

A FORESTRY FRAMEWORK FOR EDINBURGH & THE LOTHIAN

REPORT BY PLANNING SERVICES MANAGER

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to inform the council executive of a forestry framework for Edinburgh and the Lothians that has been prepared by the Edinburgh & the Lothians Forest Network Habitat Partnership (ELFHNP).

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the executive:

- notes the contents of the forestry framework for Edinburgh and the Lothians and how, in particular, it relates to West Lothian;
- support the Edinburgh & the Lothian Forest Habitat Network, as recommended by the environment policy development & scrutiny panel; and
- sponsor an outreach workshop for developers and communities to convey the framework for the ELFHNP and the opportunities within West Lothian.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I Council Values	Working in partnership, focusing on our customers' needs and making best use of our resources.
II Policy and Legal (including SEA, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	Policy: West Lothian Local Plan policies ENV 10 - 13 that support the Central Scotland Forest initiative and the West Lothian Biodiversity Action Plan in relation to woodlands.
III Resources - Financial Staffing and Property	Financial – minor in association with a half-day conference on ELFHNP and contained within D&RS 2009/10 revenue budget.
IV Consultations	NETS & Land Services and Countryside Manager. Environment Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel considered and unanimously endorsed the report and strategy at its meeting on 23 April 2009.

D. TERMS OF REPORT

1.0 Background

1.1 A forestry framework for Edinburgh and the Lothians has been developed by the Edinburgh and the Lothian Forest Habitat Network Partnership (ELFHNP). The partnership is a joint initiative between a wide range of government agencies, councils and green trusts; i.e. Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS), Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), City of Edinburgh Council, Midlothian, East Lothian and West Lothian Councils, the Edinburgh & the Lothian Greenspace Trust, Woodland Trust and the Central Scotland Forest Trust.

1.2 The partnership was established in early 2008 with funding from FCS and SNH. A project officer is based with the Edinburgh & the Lothian Greenspace Trust. It aims to provide a co-ordinated approach to the development of forestry, specifically to the Lothians, by promoting the concept of integrated habitat networks and their associated social and ecological benefits.

2.0 The Policy Context

2.1 The Lothians Forestry Framework has been created in the context of a wide ranging number of European, UK, Scottish and local forestry, biodiversity and planning policies. These include:

- Natura 2000 / European Ecological Network;
- UK and Scottish Biodiversity Strategies;
- UK and Scottish Climate change policies;
- Scottish Forestry Strategy 2008;
- Forest Habitat Network for Scotland and Lothians Forest Habitat Network study produced by the Forestry Commission's Forest Research in 2005
- Edinburgh and the Lothian Structure Plan 2015 and its proposed replacement SESPLAN (i.e.; the Strategic Development Plan for Edinburgh and South East Scotland);
- existing local plans and the emerging replacement LDPs (Local Development Plans); and
- the emerging concept of a Central Scotland Green Network that is contained within the government's National Planning Framework 2 document.

2.2 The Lothians Forestry Framework will be overarching but also complement councils other localised "green strategies" such as open space strategies and core path plans. It will add value by filling the policy gaps between, and linking existing, strategies.

3.0 Lothians Forest Characteristics

3.1 The Forestry Commission's Forest Research Agency undertook a extensive background research along with policy and literature reviews in 2005. It identified areas of high quality woodland in the Lothians.

3.2 Overall, Scotland has one of the lowest levels of remaining native woodland cover in Europe; i.e. around only 2% of the original forest cover remains. In the Lothians, forest cover accounts for approximately 13% of the land area. Since 1945 the focus of forestry has been on planting fast-growing, exotic species plantations. Coniferous woodland accounts for 41% of all woodland, with broadleaved woodland forming 35%.

3.3 More recently the focus has moved from managing woods for timber production to multi-purpose forestry, including woodland in and around towns and also for biodiversity and improving access to the countryside for health and well-being benefits.

3.4 Woodland cover in the Lothians is diverse but 17 areas were identified as having high biodiversity value; e.g. a number of ancient woodland fragments along valley gorges. (see appendix 1). In West Lothian these include the rivers Almond and Avon. In addition to this ancient woodland, Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) are also found throughout the region. These woodlands have considerable potential to be restored and enhanced through restructuring, management and where possible, new planting to create habitat linkages

3.5 Mixed woodlands, including policy shelter belts and farm shelter belts, occur across Lothian. Edinburgh and its surrounding towns, such as Livingston, are characterised by significant areas of amenity woodland and specimen trees in greenways and parks.

3.6 However, in recent years there has been an awareness of the effects of habitat fragmentation. The impact of loss of habitats include:

- loss of biodiversity and potential extinctions of flora and fauna;
- greater threat from climate change; and
- urbanisation and development.

3.7 The Forest Framework aims to reverse the process of habitat decline through increasing the amount of new woodland planting across the Lothians and also through providing increased linkages of semi-natural habitats on a landscape scale.

4.0 **Forest Framework vision and principles**

4.1 The strategic objectives of the Partnership are set out in the Regional Forestry Framework. This outlines the direction of forest policy within Edinburgh and the wider Lothian region for the next 40 years towards 2050. It envisages :

“Edinburgh and the Lothians will have attractive biodiverse networks of forest, woodlands and greenspaces and semi-natural habitats. These networks will contribute to the development of a strong local economy and provide diverse benefits for local residents including recreation, health and well-being. Local people will be actively involved in the planning, creation and development of these networks, which will be key assets for the community”

4.2 Key principles of the Forestry Framework include:

- complementing existing UK, Scottish forestry and planning strategies;
- adding value to what is already happening;
- promoting habitat networks as one of a range of mechanisms to improve biodiversity connectivity and sustainable forest management;
- encouraging participation from a wide range of statutory and local partners;
- promoting case study examples of best practice; and
- creating mechanisms to deliver real benefits on the ground.

4.3 A major challenge of the Forestry Framework is to balance the overall projected demand for new housing and development land within the structure plan and the forthcoming SDP. From the 15 core development areas (CDA) spread across Lothian, there are three within West Lothian, covering Armadale / Winchburgh & East Broxburn and Livingston and the Almond Valley.

4.4 These CDAs have the potential to weaken habitat networks by reducing physical and functional connectivity of woodland sites. However, careful management of existing sites can also provide an opportunity for creation of new green infrastructure through the CDA master-planning process and delivery by developers in advance of the CDAs. Appendix 2 gives the broad outline of FHN priority areas across the Lothians.

5.0 **Delivering the Forest Vision of the habitat network**

5.1 The delivery of the forest framework requires the partnership to:

- provide detailed forest habitat network (FHN) maps for priority areas;
- incorporate the FHN into the forthcoming SDP and LDP process;
- integrate with the government's SRDP grant scheme regional priorities; and
- achieve planning gain through the CDA master-planning process.

5.2 There is a role for the following three key groups to develop the network:

- a) Farmers and Land Managers – “stepping stones” between existing woodland patches and new native woodland opportunities will help consolidate the overall network. Linear feature, including hedgerows, are required.
- b) Planners and developers – careful planning can integrate the concept of forest habitat networks into major new developments, ideally in advance of site works to create an attractive environment for new residents and businesses.
- c) Local communities – can identify opportunities for new woodland planting. This can involve Eco Schools and community councils and other local environment groups in planting. Local people can also be actively engaged in managing their local woods.

6.0 **West Lothian considerations**

6.1 Key to progressing the “western end” of the Lothians forest habitat network will be West Lothian Council's continued support and work with the Central Scotland Forest Trust who are charged with delivering the Central Scotland Forest Strategy to create a mosaic of new woodlands and green spaces in the target area over the next 30 years.

6.2 West Lothian has opportunities to continue, through government grants provided by the Forestry Commission, the SRDP process and the European LEADER rural grant scheme to establish and replenish forest habitat networks across the district.

6.3 Additional opportunities will occur through the master planning of the three Core Development Area (CDA) within West Lothian and the delivery, by developers, of new “green infrastructure” as the CDAs progress. To raise awareness, it is proposed that the council host a half day seminar in June 2009 for developers, land managers community organisations and local environmental organisations. This will explore the forest habitat network concept and the potential opportunities across West Lothian.

E. CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Forestry Framework for Edinburgh and the Lothians over the next forty years depends on building strong partnerships between government agencies, councils, woodland charities and local community environment groups.

The aim is the creation of multi-functional green networks which link town and country and provide wide ranging benefits for local people. This will require integration of both top-down and local community led approaches to deliver a vibrant network of forest habitats.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

Edinburgh & Lothians Forest Habitat Network Forestry Framework February 2009;
Edinburgh & Lothians Forest Habitat Network summary document, February 2009;
and www.elfhnp.org.uk

Appendices / Attachments: two: 1) Lothian woodland types and geographical spread; and
2) Edinburgh & Lothian Forest Habitat Network priority areas

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