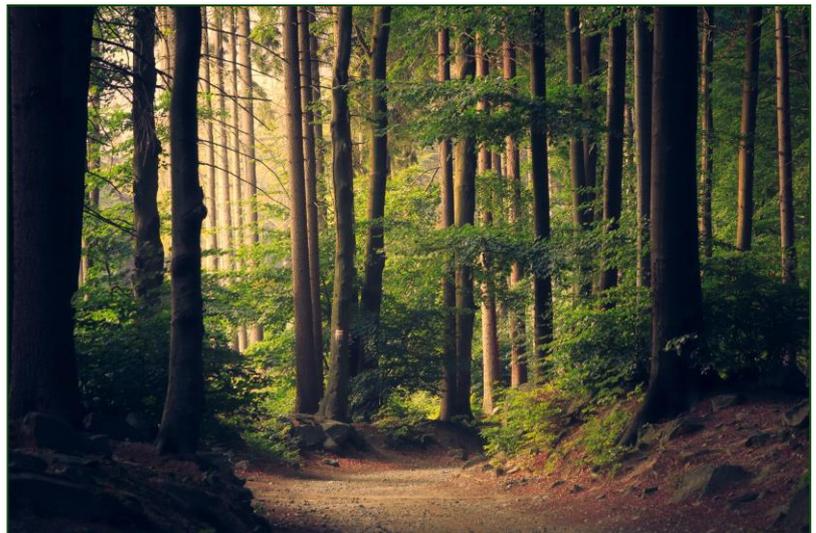


Bracknell Forest

Woodland Assessment

Background

Bracknell Forest is one of six unitary authority areas within Berkshire in southern England. It covers an area of approximately 11,000 ha including the towns of Bracknell and Sandhurst as well as surrounding villages. Bracknell Forest Council parks and countryside team (BFC) is responsible for the management of substantial areas of suburban woodland (around 180ha). These woodlands provide a range of public and environmental benefits, but have not been managed on a productive basis for some time.



Brief

BFC wished to determine whether there was a case for managing the P&C woodland area more pro-actively to support their environmental and social objectives by using revenue obtained from timber sales. They approached WRolls consulting to conduct a feasibility study of managing the woodland for economic benefit in addition to the existing goals of preserving the environmental value of the woodlands and their value to local residents.

Method

The sites were studied using a combination of direct site visits, desk-based assessment, and GIS analysis. This data was then used to produce a model to estimate the indicative yield for the area, and an analysis of the likely costs and constraints to management. The results of the study were then used to produce an outline woodland development plan proposing opportunities for further action.

Results & conclusions

BFC P&C retains a substantial area of woodland which appears to be undermanaged and underutilised. While constraints do exist to managing this woodland more actively (particularly site accessibility and positive public engagement) these do not appear to be insurmountable if handled sensitively.

Woodland yield utilisation

Based on the assumptions in the model, 100% utilisation of the annual woodland increment (the new wood added to a woodland per year) would result in an annual revenue of around £50,000. While it is not desirable or possible to use the 100% of this material (not least due to site constraints) it seems likely that a substantial income could be realised by further development of BFC woodland holdings with a view to timber sales in addition to other management objectives.

Existing standing timber utilisation

An additional calculation was carried out to give an indicative value of standing timber in woodland that has been undermanaged for some time (after felling and extraction). This calculation showed that if woodfuel processing could be carried out for less than around £120 per green tonne then these operations would break even.

Management constraints

The most significant barriers to management of these sites were identified as:

Access

Some sites were particularly hard to access for machinery and this could pose a particular constraint to managing them effectively.

Public engagement

Virtually all of the sites studied were heavily used by the public, many of the sites are also adjacent to residential properties. It is hard to overstate the importance of public engagement with any project, as all forestry operations would be carried out in the public eye. However this does also represent an opportunity to explain fully the reasoning behind management decisions and the environmental benefits of positive woodland management.

Recommendations



A number of key recommendations were made to BFC to support the sensitive utilisation of this publicly owned resource and further development of the project:

Research

In light of the encouraging figures coming from the woodland utilisation study, BFC were recommended to conduct further research into the development of their woodland resource. This would include identifying partners, contractors, markets and sites particularly suited to development, and points of sale.

Management planning

BFC were recommended to overhaul existing management plans for the sites, and to begin a

dialogue with local residents and groups regarding woodland use. The development of local supply chains to convert poor quality timber into useful products such as biomass fuel (logs) was of particular interest.

Development of a woodland strategy

It was recommended that BFC summarise results of both the research and management planning exercises and incorporate them into a new woodland strategy document to both publicise the results and provide a framework to inform future management decisions.

About WRolls Consulting

Will Rolls provides support and advice on forestry, land management, biomass production and use. Will is a Prince2 qualified Chartered Forester with a strong focus on the ecological economics of forestry and biomass projects. He has been active in the biomass industry for around ten years, during which time he has built a sound knowledge of the sector and an extensive network of contacts. Will has spent a number of years working as part of a small team at the Biomass Energy Centre, a leading source of impartial information on biomass technology and supply chains. He is the author of the Amazon top 100 bestseller *The Log Book: Getting the best from your woodburning stove*; and co-author of *Getting started in your wood*. You can find out more and contact Will via www.wrolls.co.uk.