

THE UNIQUE NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES ARISING FROM THE NATIONAL FOREST

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The opportunities for the development of the National Forest itself provide a means of securing long term sustainable economic regeneration, environmental improvement and the enhancement of amenity and social well-being of the area in and around the National Forest. There are a number of needs and opportunities common across the National Forest area:
- 1.2 The National Forest provides a unique focus, common identity and purpose around which partners have identified a desire to work together to regenerate their areas.
- 1.3 The National Forest requires a coherent strategy on Learning and Skills, Enterprise and Innovation, ICT, Climate for Investment and Sustainable Communities to help develop the National Forest and surrounding area.

2. COMMON OPPORTUNITIES

- 2.1 There are a number of common opportunities across the National Forest, including:
 - continuing to address the remaining problems of the former Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfields area,
 - developing and strengthening cross-regional linkages. The Government is already encouraging the Regional Development Agencies to develop cross regional linkages. Discussions between North West Leicestershire District Council, South Derbyshire District Council, East Staffordshire Borough Council, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, East Midlands Development Agency and Advantage West Midlands (AWM) have highlighted areas of strategic importance, common interest and possible co-operation.
 - Building on the established cross-border relationships and impressive track record which already exist between Leicestershire, South Derbyshire, and East Staffordshire.
 - Maximising the benefits of the major transport routes in the sub-region,
 - maximise the opportunities for the development of the National Forest as a means of securing long term sustainable economic regeneration, environmental improvement and the enhancement of amenity and social well-being of the sub-region.

3. AREAS OF COMMON INTEREST

- 3.1 There are a number of areas of common interest (past, present and future) across the National Forest that make the area unique and warrant specific action. These common interests include:
 - The Coalfield –a need to continue the good work undertaken by the Coalfields Regeneration Partnership – and finish the job;
 - The National Forest –a need to continue and develop the collaborative work already being undertaken by partners across the sub-region;
 - Large rural populations and medium sized towns which fall through the net of many funding opportunities;
 - Mineral extraction;
 - Derelict land;
 - Excellent overall road infrastructure network: good north-south and east-west links: A511, A50, A38, A444, M42, M1. (also already established liaison on specific

infrastructure issues causing concern, for example around East Midlands Airport/Junction 24 on M1);

- National Forest Rail Line;
- Existing joint co-operation on inward investment and tourism;
- Large tracts of industrial land available for development;
- Strong East-West cross-regional links (on tourism, inward investment, National Forest, strategic planning, infrastructure, etc.).

3.2 In addition to the common interests that binds the area together, there are clear advantages that make partnership working across the National Forest desirable and achievable. These include:

Distinct Identity

3.3 The National Forest area has:

- a) A Local identity with the former Coalfield Area and the developing National Forest.
- b) A National identity for Tourism and communications.

Economy

3.4 The National Forest area:

- a) Requires a coherent strategy on Learning and Skills, Enterprise and Innovation, ICT, Climate for Investment and Sustainable Communities to help develop the National Forest and surrounding area.

Communications

3.5 The National Forest area:

- a) Is increasingly a hub for road, rail and air transport and growth in related industry.
- b) Provides the focus for taking forward the objective of re-opening the National Forest Line as well as the focus for other sub-regional strategic planning and transportation issues.
- c) Has a number of growth corridors and links to the West Midlands (M42/A38/A50).

Social Capital

3.6 The National Forest area:

- a) Has a traditionally high Social Capital due to Coalfield history, which then experienced crisis with the closures but is now rebuilding with even more potential.
- b) Provides greater opportunities for increasing Social Capital further through a co-ordinated voluntary sector-led approach to capacity building of local groups across the area.
- c) Has already developed a strong identity with the National Forest – translating into a growing local pride in what is being achieved with the development of the National Forest.

Linkages

3.7 The National Forest area provides:

- a) A close, strong, and integrated relationship with Local Strategic Partnerships. Its strength is the common local identity across appropriate LSP areas that makes this possible.
- b) An opportunity to cross (and break down) formal boundaries – whether at the local, county or regional level. A successful cross-boundary working relationship has developed over many years between Leicestershire and Derbyshire. This proposal will serve to strengthen the relationships already developed and forge new links across into the West Midlands.

- c) Links between LSC's and SBS's crossing the area, also links between *emda* and AWM and links with other potential SSP's.

Past Performance

- 3.8 The National Forest area:
- a) Is characterised by a long tradition of partnership working that includes the successful cross-border Coalfields Regeneration Partnership and East Staffordshire partners, which have strong track records in delivering on its promises and who now wishes to combine to build new relationships, to look to the future and build on the successes achieved so far.
 - b) Has a tremendous track record in both securing external regeneration funding and delivering on the ground, for example:
 - i) Since 1995, over £32.5 million in RECHAR II, SRB, RDC and lottery funding has been successfully attracted to the National Forest area, leveraging in over £95 million in other public and private sector funding and leading to the creation of over 500 new jobs.
 - c) Has demonstrated an impressive rate of change since the closure of the coal mines and the development of the National Forest, including:
 - i) Developing from an area with virtually no tourism 5 years ago into a leading regional and national tourism destination attracting over 500,000 new visitors a year through new schemes such as Conkers, the Heart of the National Forest Visitor Centre, the Bass Museum, Snibston Discovery Park, etc.
 - ii) Becoming a major focus for inward investment (Toyota, A50, East Midlands Airport, M1).
 - iii) Having a growing population – rising from 187,000 in 1991 to over 205,000 in 2001.

4. COMMON GOALS

- 4.1 The common goals across the National Forest include:
- a) addressing pockets of multiple deprivation and rural isolation;
 - b) improving the image and environmental quality of the area,
 - c) encouraging growth, diversification and increased business competitiveness within the local economy, particularly Forest related economic diversification;
 - d) attracting inward investment,
 - e) promoting the development of tourism
 - f) maximising the benefits of the National Forest;
 - g) promoting sustainable development and rural diversification;
 - h) developing the area's skills base through promoting access to employment and training opportunities, retaining high skill employees and increasing the availability of higher level skills in the local economy;
 - i) encouraging the take up of ICT amongst small and medium sized enterprises;
 - j) increasing the vitality of the towns of the Partnership and their rural hinterlands;
 - k) stimulating community regeneration through improving the social infrastructure, promoting safer communities and building the capacity of community groups to tackle local regeneration issues;
 - l) promoting and improving cultural activities;
 - m) seeking to improve the area's transport infrastructure (e.g. National Forest [Ivanhoe] Line).

5. KEY STRATEGIC ISSUES

1. Sustainable Transport

- The re-opening to passenger transport of the National Forest Line

- The development of Strategic Cycleways and Footpaths across the National Forest.
- The development of co-ordinated, cross-border rural transport initiatives.

2. Tourism

- The growing importance of tourism to the local economy. There is now a proven potential of the NF to provide facilities for local residents and visitors (relieving pressure on other tourism destinations).
- Co-ordinated tourism marketing to exploit the emerging tourism potential of the area as a recognised destination in its own right.
- The need for new and improved accommodation (Youth hostel and family hotels) to maintain growth in tourism.
- Improvements needed to the market towns within the National forest - Coalville, Ashby, Burton and Swadlincote town centres.
- Continued development of the Heart of the National Forest and Rosliston Forestry Centre as centres of Forest related tourism.

3. Learning and Skills

- To address the skills and training needs for the new National Forest economy.
- To promote workforce development – to raise the demand for learning - to make learning more attractive and meaningful to people.
- To address the barriers to training as well as learning.
- To bridge the gap between skill demands and supply – thus also tackling recruitment problems experienced in some parts of the LSEP area.
- To focus on area of multiple deprivation where issues of skills and training are critical.
- To promote higher level skills development.

4. Coalfield

- The need to finish off the job which has been successfully embarked on for the last 10 years.
- Ensuring the high quality restoration and development of former mining sites.

5. Cross Boundary Working

- Cross-border working is required to provide a geographical focus of interest on the National Forest to exploit its opportunities and to meet proven needs.
- Commitment needed by both LSEP and the Derbyshire SSP to facilitate cross boundary working (involving NWL, SD, H&B and ES) with a real prospect of considering funding support to deliver projects associated with the above.

6. ICT

- To utilise ICT's to allow communities, individuals and businesses to use information and knowledge to maximum benefit.
- Specifically addressing the lack of awareness amongst businesses of the benefits and appropriateness of ICT's to their business (and not just the range of technology out there).
- Addressing rural disadvantage in access to ICT and infrastructure in general (not just Broadband).
- Promoting e-government and (co-ordinating) the delivery of electronic services across the LSEP area.
- Encouraging communities to go on-line.

7. Climate for Investment

- To promote the National Forest as one of the area's key tourism destinations.
- Encourage new tourist accommodation in the National Forest.
- Provide new opportunities for employment and tourism (to complete physical regeneration of the area).
- To explore the potential for developing small enterprise centres that will exploit the environmental benefits and opportunities of the new National Forest.
- Co-ordinated marketing to encourage appropriate new inward investment into the area.
- To use the National Forest brand and the improving forest environment as a stimulus to inward investment.
- To support the physical development of Coalville, Swadlincote, Burton and the market towns.
- To concentrate on attracting key target sectors and particularly higher wage industries to strengthen the local economy, rather than seek to try and attract all and any new enterprises.
- To focus on "Aftercare" of those businesses already attracted to the area over the last decade - to retain and sustain investment already made.
- To support a reclamation and environmental improvement programme to enhance the image, environment and economy of the area and the provision of social, cultural and leisure facilities.
- To improve public transport infrastructure.
- To encourage brown field land development.

8. Rural Issues, Enterprise and Innovation

- Build on the successes in the National Forest to provide a model for woodland-based farm and rural diversification.
- Using the National Forest as an exemplar of rural farm diversification.
- Developing the new National Forest economy.
- Specific development of the environmental technology sector within the context of the National Forest.
- Explore the potential for developing the mechanical and electrical engineering industries, particularly mining/quarrying technology equipment and automotive components industries as a key cluster.
- Explore the potential for developing the paper, packaging and printing industries as a key cluster.
- Promoting the creation of quality employment.
- Supporting enterprise innovation in relation to the National Forest – tourism, energy and wood products.
- To seek to support diversification of the local economy by facilitating the removal of barriers to economic growth.
- To encourage and assist small business development through the promotion of community based economic development.

9. Sustainable Communities

- Complete the regeneration of the area through securing full community involvement and addressing social inclusion in remaining pockets of deprivation.
- To develop the potential for forest related community enterprise, including heat and power generation.
- To adopt a holistic approach to regeneration which recognises the value of active community involvement.
- To facilitate the further strengthening of community capacity.
- To enhance access and awareness of available services, information and advice.

- To promote better use of existing community facilities by local groups.
- To sustain and enhance the role of market towns in the economy and social fabric of the area as centres providing employment, shopping, entertainment, services and facilities.
- To safeguard and enhance facilities and services in Rural Centres and villages.
- To develop an Economic Inclusion Programme: including developing enterprising communities and social enterprises with links to the Coalfields Enterprise Fund (where appropriate), the National Forest and agricultural diversification.