

# Woodland Initiatives Handbook

Edited by

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## *Introduction*

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I am delighted to have been able to contribute funding for the production of the Woodland Initiatives Handbook on behalf of the Forestry Commission.

The post of the Woodland Initiatives Co-ordinator to aid communication between the Initiatives, sharing news, information, documents and best practice has been instrumental in the production of this Handbook.

By sharing experiences and lessons learnt through this handbook existing initiatives are able to pass on their expertise to others.

I have watched Woodland Initiatives mature over recent years and believe that they have a positive contribution to make in helping to deliver Regional Forestry Frameworks across the Country.

**Paul Hill-Tout** *Director England*

November 2004

## Woodland Initiatives Network

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The first Woodland Initiatives Networking Conference was held on 3rd December 1997, initiated by the Forestry Authority and organised in conjunction with the National Small Woods Association and Mersey Forest. It was a pilot, aimed at encouraging greater co-operation and sharing of best practice within woodland initiatives. The event highlighted the diverse range of organisations, each with their own agendas and priorities.

The Forestry Commission and the Small Woods Association, both undergoing name changes in the interim, have since organised four further conferences, making it a much needed forum for sharing ideas, best practice, learning from each other and raising the profile of initiatives within the wider countryside, development and forestry agendas. Particularly important now as the Regional Forestry Frameworks are designed and implemented.

In 2002 the conference heard that a new post was to be created, jointly funded by the Forestry Commission and Countryside Agency and hosted by the Small Woods Association. The purpose of the post was to broaden existing networks. Representatives from the initiatives were also to join the Steering Group for this post.

Appointed in November 2002 as the Woodland Initiatives Co-ordinator and coming from a communications background rather than forestry, I saw my role as an information conduit, for and about the initiatives. The first newsletter – the UPDATE – was e-mailed in January 2003, the content and distribution list have continued to grow ever since.

The 2004 Networking Conference delegates were introduced to some new 'Tools and Toys'. The first of which is the Woodland Initiatives Learning Network, an on-line communication tool for members only. Initiatives can add comments to the news items and load documents and

reports for everyone to see. On-line discussion forums are also available whenever a group needs to get together to discuss a burning issue or decide on a joint approach to something affecting their region or the initiatives as a whole. The UPDATE is still produced because it goes to a wider audience, but it doesn't have the same opportunities of adding comments or starting discussion threads.

Another new 'toy' is the Woodland Initiatives Register, which has been produced twice in paper form, in 1995 and 1998. It is now on-line and searchable. Initiatives' and the public can search the entries to find out who has experience in which areas, what publications they produce, the structure of their organisation and how they are resourced.

The third 'tool/toy' is this Handbook. The setting up of any group or organisation is a complicated process and keeping it going with all the rules and regulations that entails can be difficult. This Handbook is designed to help guide you in the right direction and enable you to ask the right questions. It will be updated from time to time because things change, particularly where legal structures and employment issues are concerned. It is always important to check, get legal or financial advice from experts and research the recommended websites/contacts for any other information. There is also the Woodland Initiatives Network, which has a number of members who have been down this road before and experienced the pitfalls.

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Woodland Initiatives Learning Network:

**[www.woodland.net.countryside.gov.uk](http://www.woodland.net.countryside.gov.uk)**

Woodland Initiatives Register:

**[www.smallwoods.org.uk/initiatives](http://www.smallwoods.org.uk/initiatives)**