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# Offcuts

the newsletter of the Oxfordshire Woodland Group

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Group autumn visit to community woodland at the Lockinge Estate

***Events listing 2010: inside back page***

## What is to become of the Forestry Commission?<sup>2</sup>

In October a government leak broke the news that the Coalition was considering the sale of the national forestry estate to help balance the books. Caroline Spelman, the minister concerned faced the predictable and widespread concern of the loss of benefits to the public.

Once the dust settled, it became clear that disposals will be limited, to say the least. Neither Wales nor Scotland is relevant, since forestry policy has been devolved since 2003. Of the English estate around 10% will be sold to achieve a target income of £100m by 2015. It should be borne in mind that the Forestry Commission (FC) controls just 22% of woodland in England, limiting the impact of the worst-case scenario.

This will be no comfort to those who fear the loss of amenity and possibly livelihood in the sale. Access, it is said, will be protected under the Countryside & Rights of Way (CROW) Act. However, the law, where it applies, only guarantees access on foot and there are many riders and cyclists currently benefiting from the FC's stance on wide public access who may lose out.

The government's scrutiny of the FC will discover many further problems as it considers options for sale. Selling the jewel-in-the-crown assets such as the Forest of Dean and the New Forest would be highly risky politically. On the other hand, selling the productive estates would leave the government with an unbalanced estate reliant entirely on public funds for its upkeep.

The options for sale are all decidedly unpalatable. Maybe this goes to show just how much we have all been taking the FC for granted. Far from being a risk, I believe this process

will have increased the stock of the FC in the eyes of the government and of the public as the realisation sinks in –once again- that it does a pretty good job.

Is the government right to question a role for public forestry? Of course nothing is sacrosanct and occasional review of arrangements is reasonable. As in the past however, a review is unlikely to reveal exciting new prospects for managing this national asset. The FC and public forestry delivers a range of benefits that are notoriously difficult to cost, how can we expect wholly commercial concerns to manage such benefits -only some of which generate income- without themselves mimicking the processes of a public body? The government cannot expect private organisations to carry out the unprofitable parts of forest estate management without a subsidy. But introducing a subsidy compromises the ideology of private enterprise and brings us back to square one. The government risks re-inventing the Forestry Commission all over again.



FC's Cowleaze Wood, Stokenchurch

It's natural to rush to the defence of a well-loved, if imperfect institution. But we should also remember that FC has no monopoly on good forest management. Ultimately, we should ask

ourselves whether we think any alternative management arrangements would achieve better results with the same resources. Sadly, there is a real risk that the privatisation process will bring upheaval, waste and fractured progress with little, if anything to show for it.

## MyForest progress

Interest and growth in the [myForest service](#) continues to be encouraging. At the end of November a total of 6000 hectares had been mapped by 225 woodland owners across the UK.

This is the free online woodland management and marketing tool. There's better, more intuitive mapping, using up-to-date aerial photography and improved navigation around the woodland compartments.

If you are looking to carry out work on your woodlands, take a look at the opportunity that this service offers, [www.myforest.org.uk](http://www.myforest.org.uk). The Oxfordshire Woodland Project is working with the creators, the Sylva Foundation woodland charity to introduce the facility across Oxfordshire. In the south of the county we currently offer free private sessions to illustrate more fully the practical value of the application and how to find your way around it. We are negotiating to deliver a similar service to the northern districts of Oxfordshire and expect to be able to deliver free sessions in 2011.



The myforest application buttons



If you live in northern Oxfordshire and would like to know more, register your interest now by contacting the Project office. Under the present funding circumstances we are uncertain of the extent to which we will be able to offer this service

free of charge but for the time being the Woodland Project will do just that for enquiries arriving in the first quarter of 2011.

### New woodland management title

Here's a free text download: [www.woodlands.co.uk/owning-a-wood/books.php#managing-your-woodland-for-wildlife](http://www.woodlands.co.uk/owning-a-wood/books.php#managing-your-woodland-for-wildlife)

## The freeze affects travel & planting

The tree planting season has got off to a very slow start. In recent times, national tree planting week started the season at the back end of November. In the last decade the nurseries had very little time indeed after leaf fall to supply plants in the face of persistently mild conditions. This year was different! Most parts of the UK have received significant amounts of snow which has lingered on over grass when other surfaces have cleared.



Weather stops planting at Woodstock

The planting season was interrupted repeatedly after successive falls of snow. In West Oxfordshire, the new community woodland at Woodstock suffered a series of cancellations of public events, but has since got back on track through the efforts of dedicated locals turning out in the parky conditions.

Grumbling about the weather is a national pastime in the UK. Russian winters are something else, as this picture, sent in by a member, illustrates!



Russia: 2010-another experience of winter!

### ***Biologically active***

It is interesting to note that the piles of organic mulch delivered onto the Woodstock planting site (just visible in the background) have remained snow-free, showing that it is biologically active and capable of releasing warmth into the surrounding ground. But when spread around the trees, this effect will be negligible compared with its other benefits of weed control and soil improvement.

After many years as chairman of the Oxfordshire Woodland Group, Nick Potter announced his intention to stand down at the Woodland Group's Annual general Meeting in September. Nick became associated with the Woodland Group after an advisory visit by Ken Broad, the Project advisor at the time. Nick followed Ken Broad's advice, using the resources available to make improvements to his woodland.

He was impressed by the service and in due course was appointed a trustee and then chairman, a position held for 14 years.

Nick oversaw the transition of the Oxfordshire Woodland Group from an unconstituted body to a registered charity, a move that is largely responsible for the longevity of the free advisory service provided by the Oxfordshire Woodland Project.

Nick has been a great advocate of the OWP's activities and had a particular interest in Centenary Wood, Charlbury's community woodland.

Nick hands the baton onto Thomas Loyd of the Lockinge Estate and will continue as a trustee.



Nick Potter receives a ceremonial gavel made from local yew

## Reasons to be cheerful are three (—no—four!)

Whatever the quality of your broadleaved woodland, you will produce firewood whenever you harvest timber. Firewood is a product that has at last recovered its value. The early onset of winter has increased demand for firewood.

Firewood operates in the global energy market ...its value will follow the price of gas and oil. Therefore the announcements of the majority of domestic energy suppliers to increase prices will further improve firewood profitability.

The national grid and energy supply infrastructure is in urgent need of renewal. The government will be requiring energy companies to bear the burden of much of this investment thus indirectly throwing the burden onto consumers. From this influence alone, energy -and therefore timber- prices are set to rise by around 20% over the next two years.

Finally, much of the local firewood industry has invested in machinery and infrastructure that will improve production efficiency. Better profits will lead to a more stable industry, more competition among traders and ultimately scope for better prices at the woodland gate. Firewood prices paid to woodland owners in the 2010-11 season are reported to have reached £40/tonne for roadside cordwood.

Contact the Project office if you would like to discuss firewood production as an owner or Community Group.



A new Transaw 350 now operating in the Vale,  
supplied by [www.fuelwood.co.uk](http://www.fuelwood.co.uk)

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Oxfordshire Woodland Group Events Booking form</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>--winter/spring 2010-11--</b></p> <p>Print this booking form and enter your preferences and/or places to be booked. Return to OWP, Signal Court Eynsham OX29 4TL Queries? -contact us (see back page)</p>	<p><b>Your name:</b></p> <p>_____</p> <p><b>email/ phone number:</b></p> <p>_____</p>
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<b>Event</b>	<b>Date &amp; times</b>	<b>Enter below numbers of places to be booked</b>
Community Woodland Tree Planting: Woodstock 900 Community Wood	Contact the Project office for January/February dates & times. Special planting sessions can be arranged.	
Workshop: Centenary Wood Formative Pruning	Fri 4th Feb 11.00am-1pm	
Workshop: Besselsleigh Wood Formative Pruning	11 am Sat 5th February	
Marking-for-thinning Warriner School farm Bloxham	From 10.30am 10th february	
Formative pruning, South Hinksey	11 am Sat 19th Feb	
Workshop: Diggers Wood, Shipton-U-Wychwood: formative Pruning	10.00am Sat 26th Feb	
Hollyshaw Wood, Exlade St near Woodcote	1.00pm Friday 29th April	
Hazel draw coppicing workshop Kidlington only	Date to be announced, register your interest by contacting the Project office	
Besselsleigh Wood Bluebell Walk	10.30am Saturday 7th May	
Besselsleigh Wood WOODFEST	From midday Sat 2nd July	
Woodland Group autumn field visit & AGM	4.45pm for 5pm Thursday 8th September	
myForest training		<b>Register your interest here</b>

To book OWG events email the Project office or use booking form opposite.

Contact the Oxfordshire Woodland Project on: 01865 815427 or [owp@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:owp@oxfordshire.gov.uk)  
 Attendance is only by advance booking (use the attached form), unless otherwise stated.  
 'Woodland meeting' road signs are posted around the venues for all Group events. To minimise costs, your booking will be confirmed only on request. Field events will usually involve off-path walking over potentially physically demanding terrain. To find out more, contact the Project office.

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### Tree Planting *Woodstock 900* community woodland

Planting is scheduled for January weekends. Contact the Project office to participate.

### Winter programme of small woodland management workshops

We bring the tools, you bring the warm clothing, boots, gloves & sandwiches! These workshops can accommodate rookies and more experienced persons together.

- Formative Pruning, Centenary Wood, Charlbury, Friday 4th Feb, 11.00am-1pm, Meet at the woodland entrance SP365197
- Formative Pruning, Besselsleigh Wood, Saturday 5th February, 11.00am-1pm, Meet at Appleton Church gate SP444016
- Marking-for-thinning, Warriner School Farm, Bloxham, SP436367, 10.30am-2.30pm Thursday 10th February; places are very limited.
- Formative pruning at South Hinksey, Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> February 11am-3pm, meet at the woodland entrance SP510034 behind the bus stop on the Hinksey Hill road. Access off the A34 via South Hinksey interchange, south west of Oxford City "...just above Betty Lane". Bring secateurs & loppers if you have them. Warm clothes, a bite to eat & flask advised!
- Formative pruning of Digger's Wood, an eight-year-old Community Woodland at Shipton –u-Wychwood, Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> February from 10.00am. Located at the western boundary of the village, SP271173, meet at the woodland entrance.
- Hazel draw-coppicing workshop, Parkhill Recreation Ground off Benmead Road, Kidlington, SP 490143 date tba, contact the Project office.

**Spring visit to Hollyshaw Wood, Exlade Street** Hollyshaw woodland was previously owned by Kenneth Rankin and features his experiment with post war bare ground plantings using a mix of Larch / Lime / Beech and underplanting in a semi ancient beech woodland using Fir & Cedar ...but 23 native species survive & thrive in the wood. Rankin's experiment now requires some new direction. To what uses might the present stock of timber be put? This –and the bluebells- will form the basis of the visit. Meet at Exlade St SP SU660818 (exact parking location to be despatched on booking) 1.00pm Friday 29th April 2011 Parking is limited, booking is essential.

**Besselsleigh Wood Bluebell Walk** 10.30am Saturday 7th May. Meet at the eastern entrance to the wood (the Besselsleigh Hamlet end) SP450018 Oxford Landranger sheet no.164. Further location details may be had from the Project office.

**The Besselsleigh Woodfest** A family day out from midday Saturday 2nd July. Access & parking at SP450017 via Besselsleigh hamlet.

### Woodland Group AGM & Autumn Field Visit: Wytham Woods

Thursday 8th September 2011 Refreshments from 4.45pm for 5.00pm start. The field visit will feature highlights of research undertaken in the wood over the decades in non technical language and deer management. The venue is beyond Wytham village west of Oxford city, at SP469086.

**MyForest training:** Two-hour introductions to the myForest online woodland management facility: Phone the Project office to register your interest in this training.

## International Year of Forests: 2011

The United Nations has declared 2011 as the International Year of Forests.

It has invited governments, organisations and individuals to do all they can to raise public awareness of the key role of forests and sustainable forest management in building a greener, more equitable and sustainable future.



### Hedging stakes & binders, bean poles

Small quantities of coppice material including hedging stakes & binders and short bean poles is now ready for harvesting from woodlands south and west of Oxford. Browse the marketing section of **[www.myforest.org.uk](http://www.myforest.org.uk)** (see also p4) or contact the Project office for further details.

...events listing inside back page

#### The Oxfordshire Woodland Group

*Registered charity no.1055228*

Membership is open to all with an interest in Oxfordshire's woodland. The Group works towards a sustainable future for our small woodlands for the many benefits they provide. The annual subscription is £10, payable from April and confers full rights of membership. Cheques should be made payable to the Oxfordshire Woodland Group and sent to this address:

Oxfordshire Woodland Project

New address!

Countryside Service

Signal Court

Old Station Way

Eynsham

Oxfordshire OX29 4TL

Tel: **01865 815427**

—email: [owp@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:owp@oxfordshire.gov.uk)—

[www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/woodlandproject](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/woodlandproject)

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