

Oxfordshire Environment Partnership

1 November 2013

Towards A Biomass Strategy For Oxfordshire

Introduction

1. Keith Richards, Managing Director of Thames Valley Energy, will give a short presentation on the biomass supply chain in Oxfordshire.

Background

2. Over two meetings last year, the Partnership discussed its role in supporting biomass as a local renewable fuel. In fact, this discussion raised more questions than it answered. In response, the County Council asked Thames Valley Energy to prepare a report which would help the Partnership:
 - improve its understanding of the local wood fuel market;
 - to identify whether there are any market failures, and, if so;
 - whether there were any appropriate and affordable interventions which could help promote the increased use of wood fuel in Oxfordshire.
3. Oxfordshire has the wood fuel resource and the biomass potential to establish a successful local supply chain. A strong local market would help deliver the Oxfordshire 2030 carbon targets as well as creating jobs and increasing local energy security.
4. The supply of wood fuel, particularly wood chip, is currently greater than demand. The balance has become worse with the closure of the main consumer of wood fuel – Slough Heat & Power. As a consequence, suppliers are suffering.
5. There are a range of interventions available to local authorities which could help stimulate demand in the county and support local wood fuel suppliers:
 - Use opportunities on their own estate to expand the use of wood fuel in public sector buildings. As several member authorities have realised, the Renewable Heat Incentive now makes investing in biomass boilers financially viable. This will both stimulate demand and create exemplar facilities to encourage replication (e.g. in schools, council offices, leisure centres).
 - Support owners and community groups to make the most of existing woodlands or to bring them back into management through selling wood as a fuel. One example is the Oxfordshire Community Woodfuel Programme, part-funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation and the County Council.
 - Support a group of local suppliers, led by the Oxfordshire Community Woodfuel Programme and Nicholson's Nurseries in a bid to the Oxfordshire

LEP for a project to promote the benefits of biomass to large institutions in Oxfordshire such as private schools, hotels etc.

- Review the effectiveness of the planning system in encouraging the greater use of renewables and woodfuel in new developments and major refurbishments.
6. Dr Richards will also briefly describe the ERDF funded RE:START project designed to help local small businesses overcome the hurdles of public procurement when bidding for renewable energy projects.
 7. The presentation summarises Dr Richard's initial findings. The full report is due for publication by the end of the year.

Recommendations

The Partnership is asked to

- a) To note and comment on the report and presentation
- b) Consider the opportunities available to the Partnership and to member authorities to promote the use of wood fuel in the county.

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