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An Evaluation of the Forest of Dean Integrated Rural Development (FODIRD) Programme¹– 2000 to 2003

Final Report March 2003
(with minor revisions April 2003)

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¹ Throughout we refer to the FODIRD **programme**, reserving the terms '**project**' for the individual initiatives that have comprised the programme, and '**mini-project**' for the specific actions that comprise elements of some of those projects, notably SRB6 and the Local Grants Scheme.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In essence the terms of reference of this evaluation have been

- 1 to summarise the achievements of the FODIRD programme
- 2 to assess them in relation to the relevant Board resolutions; the Agency's interpretation of IRD; the programme's aims, objectives and anticipated outcomes; the degree of 'fit' with related parts of the Agency's programme as set out in its Corporate Plan; the hopes and expectations of key partners; value for money.
- 3 to draw out lessons for the proposed second phase of the programme, for a possible AONB designation, for the Agency's approach to IRD, and for other rural sustainable development strategies.

This evaluation has been carried out to a tight timetable – essentially mid December 2002 to mid February 2003.

The origin and essence of the Programme.

Although it will be familiar to many, the genesis and 'philosophy' of the FODIRD programme should be briefly recalled, not least because it was born in controversial circumstances which have in some measure coloured what subsequently happened and which remain a live issue in the minds of many local actors and agencies.

In essence, a number of environmental concerns in the mid 1990s, notably in relation to a possible extension of quarrying, had led to a promise by a then member of the Shadow Cabinet of some sort of 'special status' for the area if and when the Labour Party came to power. With the new government in office, the Agency duly commissioned an assessment of the options for 'special status' and, cognizant that their consultants had concluded that no possible current designation precisely fitted the special circumstances of the Forest of Dean (although AONB came closest), resolved at both its November 1999 and September 2000 Board meetings not to proceed along the designation route, at least for the time being, preferring instead to launch a tailor-made IRD programme better suited, it felt, to the needs of the area. The matter would be returned to in 2003 when that programme had had time to show its worth.

The sum of £1 million was allocated for this three-year IRD Programme which was to be carried out in close association with the various local stakeholders and with the local community. In essence the Board appears to have had four broad aims in mind

- to take forward the 'special status debate' by ensuring a better basis for a considered decision three years later
- to address simultaneously the landscape management and the regeneration issues which were, and remain, equally pressing in this area
- to try out an IRD approach to such issues in a distinctive local area, such that lessons might be learned for possible application elsewhere in the country
- to reassure local people that it was 'doing something' and not simply shelving a difficult problem.

Some relevant quotations include;

“...the Board were unanimous on the objective of a programme of work to meet the needs of the Forest of Dean. On balance they believed that this could best be achieved through the integrated rural development approach...(but)... the Agency should monitor and evaluate (it) and be ready to return to the designation issue in three years time”. (Minutes of Board meeting of 14 Sept 2002)

“The Board resolved that the needs of the Area would be better served by supporting sustainable regeneration integrated with measures to protect and enhance the landscape...than by starting the process of AONB designation” (Forest of Dean IRD Programme – revised project document October 2002)

“ The IRD programme explores ways of protecting, managing and regenerating landscapes and places that everyone knows are special but that do not have protective designation” (ibid)

The last of these quotations is interesting as it alludes to another justification for the three year hiatus...that it would allow an assessment of whether existing mechanisms, unadorned by any Special Status designation but supported by a carefully designed IRD programme, might be able to achieve the desired balance of ‘conservation’ and ‘regeneration’.

Thus was the FODIRD programme born and, rather less than 3 years later, we will attempt to assess its success against those and related goals.

Criticisms & Challenges

This report will demonstrate that, in a short time, the Programme has achieved a considerable amount - most notably in fostering greater community involvement in the regeneration and conservation processes, and thereby a real contribution to the ‘capacity building’ and community development that a continuing process of sustainable regeneration needs. Significant but perhaps more limited success has also been achieved in relation to the definition and recognition of the area’s ‘special-ness’, to certain aspects of environmental conservation, to economic development and to the necessary collaboration between the different actors and agencies involved in regeneration. And a better factual base has been created upon which decisions regarding the formal designation of some sort of ‘special status’ for the Forest of Dean might be based.

That said, it is right to recognise at the outset that some trenchant criticisms of the Programme were made by some of our respondents, and these we will recall in the punchy ‘short-hand’ style with which they tended to be expressed;

- we were given ‘half a loaf’ – the regeneration package and not the landscape-related special status which it should have complemented
- the package was a ‘sop’, a ‘fob-off’, a way of buying time
- the Agency ‘parachuted in’, with little or no consultation on the suitability of its package of measures and little recognition that we had been practising IRD in the area for 10 years or more
- the Agency has been ‘semi-detached’ from local partnerships – it has tended to do its own thing
- certain ‘mainstream’ Agency programmes have tended to be packaged under the IRD umbrella; we would have been eligible for them anyway and those programmes have not been noticeably enhanced or modified to local conditions

- as for the various research studies that have been commissioned, they make interesting reading, but what action on the ground have they led to?

It is not the case that most of our interviewees expressed most of those criticisms. Nor is it the case that they outweighed the positive reactions we received and the widely expressed local recognition that the IRD programme had brought the area some valuable and significant benefits. But those criticisms have been voiced and not just by isolated individuals; our evaluation must address them and the Agency should bear them in mind in fashioning any ‘phase 2’ of its IRD programme.

In mitigation, we should recognise three facts;

- that the FODIRD was launched in a rather frosty local political context – in large part reflecting the disappointment expressed above, but perhaps due also in some measure to a certain cultural defensiveness (one respondent referred to ‘a victim mentality’) itself reflecting perhaps the area’s painful economic history. Whatever the reason, the Agency’s officers had some (initial) difficulty establishing themselves and the Programme.
- that though some preparatory work preceded it, barely two and a half years have elapsed since the Board resolution that formally launched the Programme and, what’s more, for several months in 2001 the Forest was virtually a no-go area because of the Foot and Mouth outbreak. If sustainable rural development takes time, time has been in short supply
- that the FODIRD programme has never been wholly about the needs of the Forest of Dean. As a national body the Agency has also rightly worked to a national agenda, reflecting most notably the need to develop good practice in the parallel resolution of conservation and regeneration issues in areas with a special character. The occasional comment, “why didn’t they just give us the million pounds – we knew what to do with it?” tends to overlook that point.

Those criticisms and points of mitigation aside, it is clear that as the two-and-a-half years have progressed, a much better spirit of common purpose and partnership working has developed, as has a general sense that the exercise has been clearly worthwhile. That general message will come out clearly in the following pages.

2 OUR METHODOLOGY – SETTING PROJECTS AGAINST OBJECTIVES

This evaluation has used a very simple approach – but it is one that has gained growing recognition as being appropriate for wide-ranging area-wide programmes which seek to foster integrated, sustainable rural development rather than ‘simply’, say, the ‘creation of jobs’ or the ‘birth of new businesses’ or the ‘protection of certain habitats or species’. It is an approach that lays emphasis on the qualitative rather than quantitative definition of outcomes, and on the substantial involvement of the various stakeholders in clarifying those outcomes and how they came about. It is built around four questions;

- (i) what was intended?
- (ii) what actually happened?
- (iii) why is (ii) different from (i)?
- (iv) what is the significance of that difference?

Given a preference for that approach, and the very tight timetable for the research, in practice what we have done is

- to clarify carefully the underlying objectives of the Programme
- to assess each project or initiative against them
- to draw lessons that might be useful in the future.

Thus a sort of ‘matrix’ is implied – setting ‘projects’ against ‘objectives’ – though no attempt has been made to put numbers in the cells of that matrix. Rather we have used professional judgement, based on

- a careful reading of the file material on each project
- one-to-one interviews, generally face to face, with a large sample of the main protagonists (appendix 3 lists the 29 interviewees)
- two workshops of local stakeholders held in Cinderford – the first, held on January 15th, to suggest and discuss the key issues, introduce the methodology and set up some interviews; the second, on February 12th, to broach and get reactions to our provisional conclusions. Both were lively and valuable meetings – attended by 25 and 17 people respectively (see appendix 3)

In addition, a presentation of the proposed scope and method of the evaluation was made to the Agency’s ‘FODIRD External Advisory Group’ on 8 January 2003, and of a draft final report to its meeting on 27 February 2003.

Finally mention should be made of Appendix 1 of the report which presents work undertaken by Paul Selman, the University’s Professor of Environmental Planning, specifically to review the potential contribution to the ‘Special Status debate’ of the various technical ‘baseline studies’ commissioned by the Agency, as a major part of the FODIRD programme.

3 THIRTEEN OBJECTIVES

Careful perusal of the Programme's initial action plan and of its 'revised project document' followed by discussion with the two Agency officers involved, identified a total of 13 objectives being pursued by the Agency in its framing and delivery of the Programme. Four of these, what we term below 'routine objectives', tend to be common – albeit with different wording of course - to virtually all area-based rural development programmes in the UK.

The other nine are in some measure specific to the FODIRD programme though most also have echoes elsewhere. The nine tend to encapsulate specific approaches to development that the Agency has been keen to explore as part of its 'piloting' or 'good practice' mission (including the famous 'three I's' - integration, involvement and individuality- first championed in the very early and much more localised Peak Park IRD experiments) plus one which relates unambiguously to the 'special status' debate.

The thirteen are listed below, and considered subsequently, in no implied order of precedence. Their wording is that of the evaluation team, based on that in the various documents, and in each case a 'strap-line' is suggested to aid their subsequent consideration in this report.

'Routine' Objectives

- 1 **Conservation**; to conserve and enhance the environment, landscape and cultural heritage of the Forest of Dean.
- 2 **Economic Development**; to promote the sustainable economic development of the Forest of Dean
- 3 **Community Development**; to promote the development of the Forest of Dean's community/ies
- 4 **Social inclusion**; to promote the inclusion of currently 'excluded' social groups in the Forest of Dean

'Specific' Objectives

- 5 **Integration**; to promote genuinely integrated development in the Forest of Dean
- 6 **Community involvement**; to promote greater community involvement in, and ownership of, the development and conservation of the Forest of Dean
- 7 **Identity and distinctiveness**; to recognise, support and appropriately exploit the Forest of Dean's particular identity, distinctiveness and sense of place.
- 8 **Innovation**; to explore, pilot and demonstrate new ways of promoting local sustainable development
- 9 **Adding Value**; to add value to the activities of other agencies and/or of other 'arms' of the Countryside Agency.
- 10 **Longevity**; to set in train projects and initiatives likely to 'bear fruit' for many years to come
- 11 **Transferability**; to provide lessons and examples of good practice which can help the promotion of integrated rural development elsewhere

12 **Crystallisation**; to crystallise a clear vision of integrated rural development, for the Agency and others to apply elsewhere

13 **Special status**; to help the Agency to decide whether the Forest of Dean should be accorded AONB or some other special status.

4 THE LIST OF PROJECTS

The individual projects, the promotion and delivery of which have comprised much the largest component of the FODIRD programme², are listed below. In each case an indication of their cost to the Agency over the three year period (April 2000 to March 2003) is indicated. These are ‘anticipated out-turn figures’ at February 2003 and are therefore approximate.

The projects seem naturally to fall into three categories – plus a fourth (staff costs, PR and communications) which relates to the Agency’s delivery of the projects and to any ‘influencing’ work (see footnote 2). Thus

PROJECTS	ANTICIPATED APPROXIMATE OUT-TURN COST TO THE AGENCY (in £'000) April 2000 – March 2003
1 The ‘Baseline Studies’	240
1.1 Landscape Character Assessment	56
1.2 Dean by Definition	55
1.3 Historic Landscape assessment	20
1.4 Archaeology Survey	45
1.5 Biodiversity Survey	60
(& preparation for Local Plan Enquiry etc)	4
2 Local Regeneration work	475
1.6 Local Grants Scheme	170
1.7 Environment and Rural Skills	57
1.8 Dean Oak	28
1.9 SRB 6	69
1.10 Support for Farmers Markets	25
1.11 ‘Future for Tourism’ Study	25
1.12 Others	101
3 ‘Mainstream’ Agency Programmes	200
1.13 Rural Transport Programme	64
1.14 Vital Villages (including Parish Plans and Community Service Grants)	c33 (of which PPs c19)
Local Heritage Initiative	10
1.15 Millennium Greens	38
1.16 Market Towns initiative	55
4 PR and communications	197
Grand Total	1,112

² Agencies promoting local development / conservation have essentially two ways of pursuing their objectives – by promoting discrete projects, and by seeking to influence other actors and agencies. These approaches are not mutually exclusive; the ‘projects’ may in part be designed to influence; and any ‘influencing’ may be designed to encourage the launch or more favourable delivery of projects. But it is a useful distinction and one well appreciated by the Agency at national and regional level where it seeks to do both. In the case of FODIRD, the programme largely had a project focus, but much of the work of the two Agency staff will have had an ‘influencing’ character.

The above table indicates how the approximately £1.1 million has been deployed. In round terms

- about 22 % on the five baseline studies
- about 43 % on the regeneration work
- about 18 % as the local expenditure of certain mainstream programmes
- about 18% on running the programme and associated tasks

Before proceeding to look in turn at these projects and then at the achievement of the objectives, it may be useful to ask where the projects came from. How did they come to be included in the programme?

In essence the answer seems to be

- **Baseline studies;** these originated in the Agency itself with an eye to the ‘special status debate’
- **Regeneration work;** these projects were of varied provenance. Essentially Agency involvement in the Local Grant Scheme, the Tourism Study, the farmers market support, the environment and rural skills programme and the SRB6 programme was suggested by one or more local agencies or actors and the part or full funding of these projects was accepted by the Agency as comprising an appropriate way of delivering its FODIRD aims. The Dean Oak project arose from an early recognition by both Agency and Forest Enterprise officers of the limited use of local wood by Forest wood workers / crafts people.

Thus as far as the baseline studies are concerned their ‘top down’ provenance may be noted, while in the regeneration work, a more ‘bottom up’ (or at least ‘local-agency-up’) element may be discerned with the Agency adding value to the various proposals in each case. Within the single biggest ‘regeneration project’, namely the Local Grant Scheme, the very clear ‘truly bottom-up’ provenance of the individual mini-projects may be noted. As for the ‘**Mainstream Programmes**’, all are national Agency programmes designed to encourage and support bottom-up initiatives emanating from local partnerships or community groups.

5 THE INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS

As explained above, the core of our evaluation will comprise a consideration of the degree of attainment of the Programme's 13 underlying objectives, by the various projects viewed *in toto*. That is the subject of the following section. But first it is necessary to present the various projects themselves, one by one. Here we will avoid an excess of detail – since, of course, the projects will already be familiar to the Agency – focussing rather on their purpose, their apparent success and any other essential features.

1 The Landscape Character Assessment.

This piece of research was commissioned by the Agency to provide a 'district-wide record of existing landscape character'. The idea was to generate a 'landscape typology' using the tools of GIS (Geographical Information Systems). This was to be of use in two principal ways – to produce further rigorous evidence to help the impending (2003) reconsideration of the Special Status issue; and to feed into the existing land-use planning process, perhaps by means of its formal adoption as 'Supplementary Planning Guidance'.

The work was undertaken by Landscape Design Associates in association with officers from the district and county councils, and was completed in November 2002. It drew on earlier work, notably the Historic Landscape Assessment (see below). In addition the consultants liaised with the team undertaking the 'Dean by Definition' study (also, see below). But close links remain to be made between these two rather disparate pieces of landscape related work – one a systematic consideration of the detailed geography of character, the other a qualitative survey of popular perceptions and concerns.

The project outputs also included a first draft of a strategy document which would give more guidance on the forces generating landscape change and on some associated planning, resource management and regeneration implications for the local authorities and the main resource management agencies.

The LCA report comprises an authoritative and detailed description and assessment of the district's landscape character and received very favourable comments in our enquiries. But as yet it has not fed significantly into policy. (It was completed only four months ago). Clearly it will be a useful tool in the impending reconsideration of 'Special Status' and of the delineation of any designated area. (An appendix to the present paper, by Professor Paul Selman, expands on that.) It seems to have come a little too late to feed significantly into the current 'Local Plan' process, but active consideration is being given by the District Council to its adoption as 'Supplementary Planning Guidance'.

2 'Dean by Definition'

This was an innovative project, run to a parallel timetable (it too was completed in November 2002) and undertaken by a consortium of local organisations led by the Forest Business Education Partnership. Its aim was to establish what it is that local people consider to be special about the Forest of Dean. It was launched in a climate of some scepticism – 'what good will it do?' – but its product is now widely admired as a valuable collation of local perceptions and concerns about the local culture and environment and as a brave attempt to crystallise the essence of the area's 'special-ness'.

It employed a variety of tools – questionnaire surveys (over 1,200 people interviewed on a one-to-one basis), photography and video, artistic and writing projects, a presence at some 50 local events and

meetings, a web-site, and the (celebrated!) persuasion of pub-goers to record their views on beer-mats. The project tried hard, and with some success, to reach out to those social groups which are usually underrepresented in such research.

The output is a report that is rather richer in detail than in the considered extraction of underlying messages (but see Paul Selman's paper in annex which itself extracts a good deal in that respect). Much is made of local people's valuation of 'people' and 'place' – and of the area's distinctive past, heritage, rights, tranquillity, access, freedom etc.

Again, as with the Landscape Character Assessment, the report provides valuable contextual material to inform the Special Status debate, without of itself providing unambiguous guidance. But it would be a pity if it were only examined in that connection. There seems much of value here to inform the preparation of the district's Community Strategy and other district wide planning documents, including in due course the 'Local Development Framework'. Also, where locality-specific information exists, this can feed into parish and market town plans. Moreover resource management agencies, notably Forest Enterprise, may find material of help to them. In short, we see considerable scope for a further winnowing of the Dean by Definition report and database, and its focused dissemination. Some further work is in hand in that respect.

3 The Historic Landscape Assessment

This county-wide project's aim was to 'characterise the present landscape in terms of the visible evidence of human processes which have formed through time, to inform a range of planning, conservation and management initiatives and strategies'. In essence the task was to map the mosaic of historic landscapes in the county.

Begun in 1999 (i.e. before the FODIRD programme was conceived) it was undertaken by the County Council's Archaeological Service and brought to completion in 2001 with the help of some FODIRD funding specifically for the Forest of Dean element. A condition of that funding was that the work should feed into the subsequent Landscape Character Assessment, which it duly did; the authors of the latter study confirmed that the Historic Landscape Assessment database had been a key input to their own work. Thus, largely via its incorporation into that work, the Historic Landscape Assessment also provides material to inform the Special Status debate and to guide a range of land-use and landscape decision-making.

4 The Archaeological Survey of the Forest of Dean

The aim of this study has been to collate archaeological and industrial heritage information for the area and thereby to inform strategic and local management policies of the local authorities and the resource management agencies. Undertaken by the Archaeological Service of the County Council, the work was begun in January 2002 and is still ongoing. Completion is anticipated for summer 2003 with possible further work, particularly in association with community groups, in 2004/5. Some of its work has already fed into the Landscape Character Assessment.

The project has developed a strong 'community outreach' component seeking both to encourage and embrace the work of independent field researchers and local organisations

notably the Dean Archaeology Group, and to raise the interest and awareness of local people without specialist knowledge. One respondent referred to ‘growing community involvement which is almost self generating’. Another regretted that ‘this is essentially a limited desk-based piece of work without the money for field surveys’.

5 The Biodiversity Survey

The aim of this work has been to assimilate and collate habitat and species data pertaining to the Forest of Dean and thereby to provide an accurate information base for various agencies and organisations with planning or resource management responsibilities in the district. It should prove useful both to the local authority planners concerned with land-use and to the major users of land themselves, notably Forest Enterprise. Undertaken by the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust in association with the District Council and English Nature, as well as the County Council and Forest Enterprise which has fed in information, this two year project, begun in 2001, is also ongoing.

The output will be a set of GIS maps and written reports, and some particular areas have been targeted for early attention – notably certain brownfield development sites, orchards and commons. Again, information was fed into the Landscape Character Assessment exercise to help them identify and record the key protected or otherwise valuable sites.

It is hoped that there will be an increasing element of community involvement in the work, though as yet volunteer interest appears to have been modest.

6 The Local Grant Scheme

This initiative is wholly funded by the Agency which stepped in when another potential sponsor pulled out. It is administered by the District Council with project selection and oversight provided by a group of partners namely the Agency itself, the Rural Community Council, Forest Voluntary Action Forum and the Forest Regeneration Partnership; officers from each have met monthly to adjudicate on funding applications.

The scheme’s aim has been ‘to promote the quality of life in the Forest of Dean, through improving facilities and services, increasing access for all and encouraging participation in community life’. It has pursued this aim by providing grants of up to £5,000 and up to 75% of total cost, to local voluntary organisations and parish councils, for community and environmental projects. Launched in November 2001, the organisers have had no problem in disbursing (or at least committing) grants totalling some £170,000.

The project is universally regarded as having been a great success, channelling small sums to local voluntary and community groups who have added value through their efforts and thereby delivered both socially useful outputs and a measure of ‘community development’. As one respondent observed ‘it has really shown that local people can work together at the community level’. A key feature has been the simplicity of the guidelines and the administrative procedures – and an acceptance that the 25% of matched ‘funding’ could take the form of help in kind.

By November 2002 (i.e. after just one year) 59 groups had been awarded grants ranging from a few hundred pounds to £5,000 with a total of £149,000 committed at that time. (There had

been 73 applications). Of the 59, 28 were charities and/or community groups, 12 were village hall committees, nine parish councils and six playgroups. Twenty two parishes were included spanning 26 specific local communities. The diverse list of mini-projects supported included several playgroups, some transport related schemes, refurbished community buildings, local environmental improvements, play-areas and equipment and various community facilities such as shops and a cafe.

Recognising that some 16% of the budget of the whole FoDIRD programme has been accounted for by the Local Grant Scheme, we looked in some detail at five of the mini projects

- Forest Big Art Web (a website to showcase and market Forest of Dean artists)
- Forest of Dean community radio (a project to promote the regeneration of the Forest through the medium of radio)
- Support for the Newent Beekeepers (to help keep alive and promote what might otherwise be a dying tradition /expertise)
- The Quackers project (an after-school care scheme)
- Cinderford Art Space project (support for a community art space centre)

In each case, for very modest funding, useful contributions were made to the development process. Some other mini-projects have been essentially ‘gap fillers’ with little or no ‘development impulse’ associated with them – but overall it would be surprising if a significant amount of ‘community capacity building’ has not resulted, as well as more tangible improvements to the quality of life of many disadvantaged individuals.

7 The Environment and Rural Skills Project

This project was conceived and subsequently managed by the Dean Heritage Museum and has run with Agency funding for three years beginning April 2000, this funding coming to an end in March 2003. It stemmed from a realisation similar to that which triggered the Dean Oak project (see below) namely that despite being heavily wooded the Forest of Dean has supported few wood-working practitioners in recent years. The Museum wanted to help local people better appreciate the forest and its traditions and to keep alive the practice of such traditional wood working skills as coppicing, pole lathe turning and charcoal burning.

The aims of the project were defined at the outset to include the undertaking of research into sustainable woodland management practices and woodland skills in the Forest; the increasing of awareness locally of those practices and skills; and an assessment of the viability of increasing the practice of those skills. After year one, those objectives were modified to place more emphasis on providing practical training in such skills particularly for local secondary school children but also for the community more widely.

The Agency’s financial support has made possible the employment of one full and one part-time member of staff for most of the period in question, the creation and equipping of workshop facilities and the marketing and running of various courses and events.

One early output of the project was a directory of local wood workers and crafts-people and this information was shared with those initiating what was to become the ‘Dean Oak’ project (see below) though the lack of other significant interaction between these two projects, which have shared related ideals as well as Agency funding, seems an opportunity missed.

The difficulties encountered by the project have included a certain reluctance by the contractors purchasing timber from Forest Enterprise to sell on suitable wood in small quantities, and the reticence of some schools to participate in the skills training activities, partly because of curriculum pressures (which were subsequently researched in some detail by the Museum) and partly for such practical reasons as the cost of transport.

Some useful outcomes have been achieved. Probably most significant has been the delivery of practical training, and a broadening of experience, to many less academic and often otherwise disadvantaged young people. ‘They learned a lot about wood working, the forest environment and their own capabilities’. In addition has been an increased awareness of how such training might mesh with curriculum requirements. A third outcome has involved some environmental improvements in woodlands owned or leased by the Museum Trust, thanks to the practice there of better woodland management practices. As yet, however, the Museum has not collated quantitative evidence on such outputs, though a report is promised in late March detailing the number of workshop sessions, students attending, volunteers trained, organisations involved etc.

In the absence of that evidence it is hard to come to a definitive evaluation of the project, though with Agency funding having been deployed for three years, there is no suggestion that this be rolled forward. Encouragingly, however, the Museum plans to press on for at least one more year using its own resources.

8 Dean Oak

This project arose from the realisation in 2001, by both the Agency and Forest Enterprise, that in the Forest of Dean it was very difficult to buy wooden artefacts made from local wood. It was also recognised that wood arising from thinning the smaller and/or deformed trees from younger stands of oak (40-90 years old) was normally pulped to be made into cardboard. In other words there seemed untapped potential for adding value locally to a local asset. Thus it was agreed ‘to explore and promote the craft and trade-work potential of small dimension planks made from local oak thinnings’.

Some exploratory work in 2001 involved contacting some 40 local wood artists, wood workers and craftspeople and inviting them to take away a sample of oak thinnings and to create items with market potential. This proved very successful and a mobile exhibition in the Forest revealed considerable local interest.

So in March 2002, the ‘Dean Oak’ project was launched to take forward the initiative. The Dean Oak Co-operative comprises local woodworkers who are keen to buy and work with local hardwoods. The cooperative now has 60 members and is the majority shareholder of the Dean Oak Company which was set up to purchase small quantities of wood from Forest Enterprise’s contractors for onward sale to members of the cooperative at a competitive price.

The Agency’s role in this has been to fund Forest Enterprise to carry out the initial survey of potentially interested wood workers; to establish what sort of demand for wood products existed locally; to cut, mill and distribute wood in the pilot phase; and to sell wood to Dean Oak on a sale or return basis in the initial period following the successful pilot. That funding

has now come to an end – and a Dean Oak interviewee was at pains to explain that Dean Oak itself has ‘not got a penny from the Agency’.

The cooperative has amongst its aims the support of a local wood working industry based on the sustainable use of local timber and also the pursuit of what it terms a ‘total tree’ policy whereby all parts of a tree would be used in a sustainable way to produce goods and services.

It is very early days for the Dean Oak cooperative, and the venture is some way from profitability, but it seems an exciting development based as it is upon such cardinal principles as local ownership (after a ‘top-down’ start); the adding of value locally to a local resource, the support of local capacity building and entrepreneurship, and the potential for developing employment and tourism in a sustainable way. Indeed it seems to be a quintessential example of ‘sustainable development’ promising social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits and is a venture worth carefully nurturing.

9 SRB 6

This SRB programme (using the terms proposed at the start of this report, it is strictly a ‘project’ as far as the FODIRD programme is concerned) is effectively a Forest Regeneration Partnership initiative to which the Agency, through the FODIRD programme, makes a valuable contribution with SWRDA of course being a major funder also. The programme is wholly based on responding to the needs of young people. The Agency provides match funding for selected individual mini-projects up to a £5,000 ceiling. In addition the Agency provides some officer time to the SRB management group and makes a financial contribution to the administration. Over the two years 2001 - 2003 the Agency has contributed some £69,000 to this initiative.

The mini-projects which have attracted Agency co-finance are as follows, with their names giving a flavour of their purpose; the Cinderford Neighbourhood Dance Initiative, the Forest of Dean Young People’s Forum, Coleford Churches Together, Young People’s Support, Parkend Youth Project, Rural Club Support, Cinderford Skate Park, ‘Lydney State Circus’, Gloucestershire Dance, Action for Youth Coordination, ‘SHARE,’ Mercury- Cinderford Artspace’.

We looked at two mini-projects in a little more detail. Cinderford Skate Park stemmed from a need identified in an earlier consultation exercise in the town. It involved the Agency in helping with the cost of proper surfacing and landscaping and of various bits of equipment for the skate park. This was one element of an integrated plan for improving facilities on a Cinderford housing estate; other elements included a new play area and a basketball court. The CANDI neighbourhood dance project involved expenditure on equipment and training provision to enhance the dance and music opportunities for young people meeting at a drop-in centre. In the case of both of these Cinderford projects young people have been actively involved in their design and management.

10 Support for Farmers Markets

This initiative has involved support for the establishment of a monthly farmers’ market in each of the district’s four main towns by means of a straightforward grant to the ‘farmers

market partnership' to help defray costs relating for example to new stall equipment, freezing facilities and a laptop to facilitate management. The farmers market partnership and its salaried officer have themselves put a lot of effort into promoting and marketing the venture, for example via local bed and breakfasts and campsites. Contributions in cash or kind have come also from SWERDA, the town and district councils, the chambers of trade and commerce etc.

The aim has been to help small local producers reach a local market, especially in the aftermath of the foot and mouth crisis, to help local consumers gain access to local produce, and indirectly to help other local businesses by increasing the 'footfall' and general attractiveness of the four towns. More generally this is an attempt to reduce financial 'leakage' from the local economy.

But without continued financial support, the long term viability of these markets is not assured and it has been suggested that it may be necessary to discontinue the weaker markets and concentrate on those proving more successful.

What is not clear is how significant this support has been to local farmers and producers. Some appear to have been encouraged to diversify – e.g. into the production of apple juice and the sale of 'vegetable boxes' - but there are said to be significant obstacles (of cost and business skills) constraining the expansion of existing businesses to include the supply of local shops. And no data is readily available on the markets' success in attracting visitors and tourists from beyond the area or on the stimulus provided to the economies of the market towns.

11 The Future for Tourism study

At the request of the District Council and of the Forest Regeneration Partnership, the Agency jointly (with SWERDA) funded in 2002 a study of the district's potential for an expansion of sustainable tourism. The report, which has been generally well received as a rigorous and far-sighted piece of work, was completed in September 2002.

The consultants' basic aim was to identify sustainable tourism opportunities and to develop an action plan around them. Most significantly their study identified the apparent strengths of the forest from a tourism viewpoint and urged a coherent marketing approach. Sixteen possible projects were outlined, relating to accommodation, leisure activities which add value to the forest environment, marketing and management.

Their findings and recommendations have subsequently been examined by a working group of the relevant agencies, notably the District Council, the Countryside Agency, the Regional Development Agency and Forest Enterprise with a view to developing a 'tourism strategy'. At the time of writing a draft strategy has emerged but it does not of itself reveal sufficient commitment and adequate funding to ensure that real concerted action will be taken to implement a concerted and imaginative tourism development strategy. Clearly further work remains to be done.

12 Other regeneration projects’.

This category includes a number of projects generally benefiting from Agency funding of less than £10,000 – for example support for Dean Forest Voice.

We may briefly mention one other example, support for ‘**Forest Showcase**’. This is a (roughly) annual event to promote local food, crafts and other produce; indeed it is intended to promote the Forest of Dean’s image more generally. Typically it comprises a market / display of over 50 stalls and draws visitors from a wide radius beyond the Forest itself. It is not of itself a FODIRD initiative but the Agency helped with some funding of the ‘post FMD’ event which took place in late 2001. Forest Showcase appears to score highly on the promotion of local produce, the encouraging of local initiative, the marketing of the area and the enhancement of the local residents’ pride of place. The showcase’s future appears uncertain without further sponsorship, though there are hopes that it may become self funding if an admission charge is levied in future.

13 Projects stemming from ‘Mainstream’ Agency programmes

(i) The ‘**Rural Transport Partnership**’ initiative is designed to bring together, in specific geographical areas, a range of public, private and voluntary sector agencies (typically parish and town councils, voluntary and community groups and some businesses) with a stake in rural passenger transport, to develop projects to improve peoples’ access to jobs, services and social activity. That serving the Forest of Dean is in fact a county-wide partnership with a salaried ‘partnership officer’ to make things happen. A ‘delegated fund’ is available to the partnership to support specific ventures.

The largest single project thus supported has been the ‘**Forest Flyer**’ – a new bus service, operated by Dukes Travel. This comprises both a commuter service, morning and evening, linking a large number of Forest villages and towns to the major employment centres of Cheltenham and Gloucester, and also a daytime service in the summer months linking the main tourist attractions of the Forest by means of a circular route. Some £50,000 was pledged by the Agency in the period to March 2003, to cover significant contributions to both the initial capital cost and to an anticipated revenue deficit (with commercial viability anticipated by 2005). The service began only in summer 2002 so it has not been possible to undertake any serious evaluation as yet though anecdotal evidence suggest that a very satisfactory start has been made

Another project launched by the Transport Partnership is the ‘**Bream Carers Transport Project**’, involving volunteer drivers who provide transport for socially isolated people with carer responsibilities – including young carers. It is run by the Bream Voluntary Car Service with the Agency meeting half of its annual cost.

(ii) As for **parish plans**, five are underway in the District - at Dymock, Tibberton, Longhope, Woolaston and Gorsley & Kilcot. That for Dymock is close to completion, the others are at various stages of progress. Each has involved the parish council and local activists researching and planning a holistic plan of action for the parish, supported by a small grant from the Agency of up to £5,000.

(iii) Community groups in five parishes have also received '**Community Services Grants**'. This is a grant scheme to help small rural communities maintain and improve the services they need. Four of these projects (in Yorkley, Coleway and Redbrook) involve the refurbishment or upgrading of shops and or post offices. The fifth, involves the deployment of a mobile marquee.

(iv) As for the '**Local Heritage Initiative**', this is a project administered by the Agency but actually funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. It is designed to enable local communities to demonstrate in some practical way their commitment to local heritage. The Agency has promoted the initiative in the Forest of Dean but so far to only modest effect. The only 'live' LHI project in the Forest of which we are aware is that in Hartpury parish; it has involved the recording, restoring and protecting of milestones, including an 'adopt a milestone' scheme. Hopes have been expressed that one or more of the 'Local Grants Scheme' mini-projects might generate another LHI scheme, but this seems not to have happened to date.

(v) **Millennium Greens**. Again we are aware of only one such project in the Forest of Dean; that in the parish of Redbrook where local volunteers created a public green space from derelict land.

(vi) The '**Market and Coastal Towns Initiative**'. By mid 2002 all four of the District's small towns had formed market town partnerships and were undertaking 'health checks' and action planning with the help of a health check co-ordinator appointed with Agency funding. That person, on a two year contract, is based in the District Council offices in Coleford, serves all four towns and helps the towns to access substantial funding from SWRDA and other sources.

6 ATTAINMENT OF THE OBJECTIVES

Having briefly considered each project in turn, we now consider their contribution, indeed the whole programme's contribution, to the underlying set of objectives. We must again point out that this exercise has involved the application of judgment rather than some quasi-quantitative scoring of projects against targets or criteria. But to try to encapsulate the product of that judgment in a way that might better provoke discussion, we have attempted a simple scoring device. Thus

- * suggests a 'modest' achievement of the objective
- ** suggests a 'significant' achievement of the objective
- *** suggests a 'substantial' achievement of the objective

Those adjectives – modest , significant and substantial - are of course relative, in using them we have to acknowledge that this has been a £1.1 million, three year programme across an area containing over 70,000 people. And 'three stars' should not be taken as implying a 'maximum score'. We repeat that these symbols are simply intended to provoke debate and reflection.

And again we repeat that the objectives are not considered in any particular order.

1 **Conservation; to conserve and enhance the environment, landscape and cultural heritage of the Forest of Dean. ****

This objective has been central to the Agency's FODIRD programme. It underlay the decision to commission or support the five 'baseline studies' and has determined the type of 'regeneration work' undertaken.

The five baseline studies have provided (or, in the case of the ongoing Biodiversity and Archaeology studies, are likely to provide) a sound base of fact and interpretation upon which better conservation policy and practice can be based, with or without Special Status. The Dean Oak, Environment and Rural Skills, and Future for Tourism initiatives have all embodied an approach to economic development which has unambiguously respected the local environment. And many of the Local Grants Scheme mini-projects, not to mention the Local Heritage Initiative and Millennium Greens projects, have involved community action to improve the very local environment. Of the other various projects and mini-projects we can see none that seems in any serious way detrimental to the environment or to local heritage.

But the conservation objective seems to be 'significantly' rather than 'substantially' attained for the reason that the baseline studies offer potential rather than substantive environmental benefits. This is largely a matter of timing; two have been very recently completed, two remain unfinished. With hindsight they might have been commissioned a few months earlier, though the political climate is said not to have been right then, and certainly the foot and mouth outbreak held things up. Be that as it may, there has as yet been no formal response to, or acceptance of, their content and recommendations either by the Agency or by more local agencies and any hope that they might significantly feed in to the Local Plan enquiry proved illusory. Thus, great promise, yes; substantial impact on environmental conservation, no. Or at least not yet.

2 Economic Development; to promote the sustainable economic development of the Forest of Dean **

This objective, too, has been at the heart of the FODIRD Programme, but really in a ‘playing it long’ sense. There has been no rush to ‘create new businesses or jobs’ and for this sort of programme that seems to have been appropriate. Rather the emphasis, where the economy has been concerned, has been on nurturing the conditions for sustainable development based squarely on adding value to local resources, be they human or land-based.

The area’s ‘human resource’ has been enriched, if only modestly, by the SRB6 and the Environment and Rural Skills training programme though the latter did not set out to impart skills most relevant to the modern timber industry. The Dean Oak initiative, and the entrepreneurial spirit that it has fostered amongst local wood workers is also notable in that respect. The market town initiative has enhanced the ‘social capital’ in the four towns.

As for adding value to land-based resources, the Dean Oak project and the Tourism Study each promise economic development that builds on the area’s distinctive woodland resource. And support for the farmers’ markets and the ‘showcase’ initiatives have each made small contributions to economic development.

But again we see this as ‘significant but not substantial’ as these various endeavours are still at an early stage and because, to give *some* attention to the harsh economic indicators, it would be hard to identify even half a dozen jobs that have been ‘created or retained’ (admittedly difficult concepts in this connection) from the whole Programme, setting aside various ‘facilitator’ posts.

3 Community Development; to promote the development of the Forest of Dean’s community/ies ***

(Here we draw a distinction between community ‘development’- which implies some positive qualitative change in human relationships – and community ‘involvement’ which is the subject of Objective 6, below)

It certainly seems that all of the various projects have explicitly or implicitly developed the areas’ social capital (except for five of the studies, namely the two relating to landscape and those relating to biodiversity, tourism and archaeology, though in the case of the last mentioned this exclusion is more arguable giving its growing practice of drawing on community resources). This adds up to a ‘substantial’ achievement.

Particularly notable in this respect are

- the Local Grant Scheme (whereby 59 local groups have been supported)
- the Dean Oak and farmers market initiatives (each of which have given a spur to ‘interest’ rather than ‘locality’ communities – viz communities of woodworkers and of small farmers / growers respectively)
- all of what we have termed the Agency’s mainstream programmes which have channelled support to a dozen or more ‘locality communities’.

- and, more arguably, the Dean by Definition exercise which involved local people to a degree and in a manner that some ‘community development’ is likely to have resulted

Given limited research resources it is true that we have had to assume (rather than empirically establish) the community development that has flowed from these various initiatives. But it certainly seems that a total of some 70-80 community focused projects or mini-projects will have had a significant effect. The challenge of course is to build upon it, since community spirit and endeavour can easily evaporate.

4 Social inclusion; to promote the inclusion of currently ‘excluded’ social groups in the Forest of Dean *

Attacking social exclusion has not been a prime focus of the FODIRD programme. Only one of the projects that it has supported – the SRB6 programme addressing the problems of disadvantaged young people – has explicitly addressed it, though the Environment and Rural Skills project (offering training to, generally, low academic achievers) and some of the Local Grants Scheme mini-projects will have made useful contributions.

In addition the Dean by Definition project did make a real attempt, by means of its innovative and ‘open’ methodology, to seek out the opinions of less articulate people.

But it seems true to say that the FODIRD programme has focused more on ‘groups and communities’ of local people than on ‘tranches’ of local people. We consider that the overall impact on social exclusion has been positive but modest.

5 Integration; to promote genuinely integrated development in the Forest of Dean **

‘Integrated Rural Development’ is a slippery concept but a valuable if elusive goal. We see it as having three elements – the integration, in a particular programme or milieu, of the various ‘*dimensions*’ of development (social, economic, environmental, cultural), of the various *actors and agencies* of development, and of the individual *projects and initiatives* which make up development. In each case the argument for integration rests on the release of synergy – the idea that the whole can be greater than the sum of the disparate parts.

The FODIRD programme has been rather more successful in integrating the ‘dimensions’ and the ‘actors and agencies’ of development, than in integrating ‘projects’ (though that is by no means unusual in local development programmes, and excessive project integration can be at the price of spontaneity and entrepreneurship)

Thus as far as the four ‘*dimensions*’ are concerned, the Programme as a whole appears broadly balanced - as a recapitulation of the various projects would reveal. And the Agency officers’ claim in interview that ‘we always looked to see if a proposed project would address at least two of the ‘social, economic and environmental dimensions’ seems to have been very largely vindicated. Indeed one or two projects, notably Dean Oak and the Market Towns Initiative, promise a real contribution on all three.

As for the ‘*actors and agencies*’ dimension here, there is an irony here. The Agency has been criticised in some quarters for being a reluctant team player, at least in the first year, and for

being in some respects ‘semidetached’ from the Forest Regeneration Partnership. But much of its work has successfully promoted joint working. We may cite its own collaboration with Forest Enterprise (regarding Dean Oak) and with a range of actors in both the SRB6 and Local Grants Scheme initiatives. And many of the projects supported - the farmers’ markets, the tourism study and virtually all of the ‘mainstream’ programmes - have either required or promoted the active collaboration of a range of partners in more than a ‘cheque book’ sense.

But the individual projects have largely stood alone. There have been some exceptions; those undertaking the five ‘baseline studies’ have shared information and ideas; and the woodworkers involved in Dean Oak got some web-site exposure from the ‘Forest Big Web’ initiative supported under the local Grants Scheme. But the exceptions seem rare and we have already noted the separateness of the Dean Oak and Rural & Environmental Skills projects despite the close affinity of their objectives.

Overall we consider project integration to have been modest while dimension and actor/agency integration has been more significant. Hence the possibly a bit generous ‘two star’ rating!

6 Community involvement; to promote greater community involvement in, and ownership of, the development and conservation of the Forest of Dean ***

Here we are concerned with any involvement in the programme and/or its constituent projects and mini-projects of ‘ordinary’ individuals and of local organisations and groups; and also, more demandingly, any evidence of community ownership in the sense of local groups taking real responsibility.

Community involvement has been substantial. It has been at the heart of all of the ‘mainstream’ programmes most notably in the Market Towns and Parish Plans projects. There has also been substantial community involvement in all of the various ‘regeneration’ initiatives and in the Dean by Definition Study. In short there has been a real bottom-up flavour to most of the individual projects.

But community ownership? That has proved more elusive though it is still early days. Impressive steps in that direction are provided by the Dean Oak initiative, where the ‘cooperative’ may well prove able to sustain this initiative, by the farmers markets, and by the Parish Plans and Market Towns initiatives where local groups are essentially in the driving seat. But in each case if the state in its various guises were now to walk away, survival and continuity are not assured.

7 Identity and distinctiveness; to recognise, support and appropriately exploit the Forest of Dean’s particular identity, distinctiveness and sense of place **

Here we must take the three verbs in turn.

First, ‘recognise’. Dean by Definition has made a major contribution in this respect though, as suggested earlier, there is more work to be done crystallising that ‘identity, distinctiveness and sense of place’ from the mass of evidence assembled. In addition the landscape

assessment exercises (and possible in due course the archaeology and biodiversity exercises) promise further insights into the Forest of Dean's distinctiveness (i.e. when compared with other rural areas)

But what of support for such identity / distinctiveness and sense of place? Has the Programme done anything to enhance or protect it? Maybe the Dean by Definition study also achieved this? Maybe support for the 'Forest Showcase' also did so in some small measure and some of the Local Grant Scheme mini-projects that championed local cultural activities. And the Local Heritage Initiative is relevant but it has been very little taken up.

As for 'exploit' (in the benign sense of that word), only the 'Tourism Study' firmly based as it was on the adding of value to distinctive forest features, offers a significant step in that direction – and real practical action has yet to be launched. This seems a major opportunity – developing tourism which is both sustainable and genuinely based on the particular environmental and cultural features of the Forest of Dean.

Thus we suggest a significant contribution to the recognition of identity / distinctiveness and sense of place, but rather less progress in its support and sustainable exploitation. So the two star rating may be a little generous.

8 Innovation; to explore, pilot and demonstrate new ways of promoting local sustainable development *

Looking at the FODIRD programme as a whole, there is little that has been fundamentally innovative about it viewed from a national standpoint. Across the whole of rural Britain (not to mention Ireland and continental Europe) there are scores of area-wide, project focussed, partnership driven, community involving, multi-dimensional programmes designed to promote integrated and sustainable development. And even focusing just on the Forest of Dean there is certainly validity in the suggestion that attempting integrated development there is not new³. So it would be hard to claim that the FODIRD programme has taken forward the practice of IRD in some novel way. The one caveat to that may be the considerable emphasis placed on the 'baseline studies'; that emphasis is very unusual and stems of course from the special circumstances of the programme's conception.

But there have been innovations in the more commonly accepted sense that 'innovation is doing something new in a particular milieu'. The Dean by Definition study's innovativeness of focus and method has already been mentioned.. The Dean Oak initiative which some thought was fanciful if not extremely risky, also deserves mention. But the Local Grant Scheme, the support of SRB6 projects, the host of other initiatives to support local communities – all of these while very welcome are not particularly novel. But then, as one interviewee observed, 'the Programme did the right thing by supporting the commonplace – that's what was needed'.

Maybe we might mention one innovation that did not really work; and one that did not really happen. The first was the attempt to bring alive traditional woodworking skills in local

³ But any claim that 'we were doing integrated rural development long before the Agency introduced its IRD programme in 2000' may be a little disingenuous. It may be truer to say that there have been many bold attempts to foster IRD in rural England but that all of them have stood to be improved.

youngsters; the data are not yet available but that seems not really to have worked to any significant extent. The second is a reference to the explicit aim of testing out whether, duly supported, existing planning and management mechanisms might deliver most of the benefits hoped for from 'special status'. That never really happened and we will return to that omission later.

Overall, not an abundance of innovation; so one star!

9 Adding Value; to add value to the activities of other agencies and/or of other 'arms' of the Countryside Agency. *

The idea of 'adding value' to other resources has become a central tenet of integrated rural development in recent years; in the present context it has three connotations.

First 'adding value' to the inputs of other actors and agencies - and here we may note that all of the FODIRD Programmes projects with the exception of Environment and Rural Skills and the Landscape Character and Dean by Definition surveys, involved the Agency in only part funding the initiative in question. In that sense the Agency 'added value to' or at least 'extracted some value from' other players. In some cases there was a real 'adding of value' to the unpaid efforts of volunteers and we have already cited several examples of that.

Second 'adding value' to other Agency activities or programmes, and here we have already noted that in practice there was little or no 'adding value' to the mainstream Agency programmes which were nonetheless welcome in the Forest. But we may also note that an (unsuccessful) attempt was apparently made by the FODIRD officers to secure from their Vital Villages colleagues in the Agency some extra funding to facilitate the extension of that programme into Forest of Dean parishes unlikely otherwise to get involved.

Third, adding value in a sense already mentioned – getting existing mechanisms in the Forest to deliver more of the benefits hoped for. Here we may recall an objective set out in the Programme's 'revised project document' – "to use existing planning frameworks and mechanisms in new ways to ensure that landscape, environmental and cultural heritage concerns are dealt with appropriately....and to ensure that account is taken of new processes such as community planning, cultural strategies..." In fact we have discovered little successful influencing of this kind and have already noted that the various landscape, environment and tourism studies have not, at least as yet, had any significant impact on the policies of the local authorities or other agencies. Hence 'one star' but that may be a little harsh given the first interpretation of 'adding value' set out above.

10 Longevity; to set in train projects and initiatives likely to 'bear fruit' for many years to come **

Have the projects fostered got a 'self sustaining momentum' in that either

- they will themselves continue for some years without further external support? or
- they have developed a resource which will itself remain productive for some years without further external support?

In the first case, the answer is not very encouraging; the two ‘small grant schemes’, namely the Local Grants Scheme and the SRB6 programme will each just run their course and then end unless a new funder comes forward. (But it would be useful to look at each of the dozen SRB6 mini-projects supported by the Agency and to ask the same question of each in turn.) Likewise the mainstream Agency programmes and, in all probability the Environment and Skills project albeit after one or two further years support by Dean Heritage Museum itself. The case of Dean Oak is less clear but we will recommend some further support to try to render it self sustaining.

But given the second interpretation, there are plenty of examples of resources being developed by the Programme such that ongoing benefits may be expected to ensue if appropriate decisions are made by the various agencies. That is true, for reasons already explained, of the various landscape and environmental studies and it is certainly true of the tourism study. Some periodic updating will be needed but together these studies lay a basis for sustainable long term development. Similarly, while the 59 individual mini-projects supported by the Agency under the Local Grant Scheme may themselves come to an end, the ‘community development’ thus implied may well live on – we just don’t know.

11 Transferability; to provide lessons and examples of good practice which can help the promotion of integrated rural development elsewhere *

In practice this objective comes close to number 8 – the one that deals with ‘innovation’. Our assessment is that outside the six studies (i.e. the baseline studies plus the tourism study) there is not a lot that the Agency can extract from the FODIRD Programme and promote in other contexts elsewhere. That is not to say that the Local Grant Scheme for example is not ‘transferable’ – it certainly is - simply that there is already good experience elsewhere of such initiatives.

It may be however that the Dean Oak and Environment & Rural Skills projects (and the woodland related elements of the Tourism study) would bear closer and collective study in an attempt to distil lessons for initiatives elsewhere that are intended to ‘add value to woodland’.

12 Crystallisation; to crystallise a clear vision of integrated rural development, for the Agency and others to apply elsewhere *

In recent years the Agency has done quite a lot of work on the definition and refinement of the ‘integrated rural development’ model and it has hoped that the FODIRD programme, as well as delivering benefits locally, would help improve or extend it such that it might be confidently rolled out elsewhere. In fact it is hard to define any element of a ‘vision’ for rural development, arising from the FODIRD programme that was not already appreciated – the need for partnership working and community involvement; the need to address social, economic and environmental issues in the round; the need to focus on projects without neglecting the ‘influencing of others task’; the desirability of adding value to local resources and of ‘championing the locally distinctive’. The FODIRD programme has tended to confirm these truths rather than to refine them or discover new ones.

Qualifying that assessment there may still be lessons to be extracted regarding the potential of the environment to be a driver of, rather than a constraint upon, local development.

And there may yet also be lessons to be learned about the ability of ‘existing mechanisms’, as distinct from some form of ‘special status’, to balance the conservation of environment and the support of regeneration in areas acknowledged to be in some sense ‘special’. But as already indicated our view is that that ability has not yet been tested in the Forest of Dean.

13 Special status; to help the Agency to decide whether the Forest of Dean should be accorded AONB or some other special status*

Finally we come to an objective which flowed directly from the Agency’s wrestling with the ‘designation dilemma’ in late 1999 / 2000 and its subsequent launch of the FODIRD Programme (And, in the minds of several representatives of environmental pressure groups in the area still smarting from the failure to go down the special status route in 2000, to the only objective that really matters.)

Has the whole FODIRD programme served to clarify whether some or all of the Forest of Dean should be accorded some form of ‘special status’ and if so, what form?

To answer that we must recall that that clarification was to come in two ways. First by building a sounder base of information upon which to base a decision. Second by testing whether existing mechanisms might deliver most of what would be hoped for, thereby obviating the need for Special Status (an obviation that has its attractions given that the twin imperatives of conservation and regeneration might prove to be uncomfortable bedfellows in an AONB).

As for the first argument, the five baseline studies (plus the tourism study which can also make a useful input) comprise a very substantial contribution, though one which is, as already explained, still somewhat unrefined (but see Selman’s appendix to this report) or else, in the case of the biodiversity and archaeology studies, incomplete.

As for the second argument, we have suggested several times that this ‘testing’ has not in fact happened, partly because the ‘baseline studies’ have only very recently emerged or remain unfinished. So we do not know whether the planning system plus, perhaps, appropriate undertakings by certain resource management agencies would give the sort of environmental protection-cum-regeneration that is generally hoped for.

And it should be added that as for the rest of the FODIRD programme (that which we have termed in this report ‘regeneration work’ and ‘mainline programmes’) it is hard to see any way in which their operation / success / failure could have clarified the special status issue one way or the other. They have been irrelevant in that respect though of course extremely valuable in the context of other objectives.

So overall it is hard to argue that the FODIRD programme has as yet made more than a ‘modest’ contribution to the Special Status debate and the Agency must decide whether it wants to devote some months to really trying to increase that contribution, or else to move to a decision notwithstanding.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Some conclusions

- 1 The Programme was launched in a difficult climate, with some disappointment felt locally that the Special Status issue had not been resolved and some concern that the Agency was being insufficiently sensitive to the existing attempts to foster integrated rural development. That, and the foot and mouth crisis of 2001, meant that programme got off to a slow start and that the period available for constructive work has been quite limited. The programme has tended to evolve rather than to be a matter of implementing projects all agreed at the outset.
- 2 That said, early difficulties have now been largely resolved and much good collaborative work has been done. The local development process takes time and it would be wrong to terminate the programme at this stage.
- 3 Some £1.1 million has been spent in the District over the three years, by the Agency, either directly through this Programme or less directly through other national programmes closely aligned to the programme's purpose. We consider this money to have been well spent. The programme has made a significant contribution to the processes of social and economic regeneration in the area and provides a platform for significant progress in landscape and environmental conservation as well.
- 4 Particular mention may be made of the programme's support for a local grant scheme that has channelled small sums to 59 local community groups, to its spawning of a business to add value to local wood by craftspeople and other woodworkers, and its part-funding of a dozen projects focusing on the needs of young disadvantaged people. But the most original contribution made by the programme has been its support for five 'baseline studies' encapsulating the area's distinctiveness and environmental assets; this work has recently been completed or is nearing completion.
- 5 The programme has made a substantial contribution to the development of the area's human and social capital in ways detailed in our report.
- 6 With some notable exceptions, much of the work has not been noticeably innovative; it has tended to confirm rather than advance the model of local development that stresses partnership working, community involvement and the sustainable adding of value to local resources.
- 7 The programme has retained an essentially 'project focus'. All of its projects have in some measure involved partnership working between different agencies, but the amount of 'influencing of other agencies' in the sense of persuading them to modify their own programmes, has been limited. It remains to be seen, for example, how far the baseline studies will influence local planning and management policies and processes.
- 8 The programme has made a contribution to the 'special status' debate without in any sense resolving it.

Recommendations

- 1 The programme should be continued, possibly for three more years, but with some significant changes of emphasis.
- 2 A priority is to bring to a satisfactory conclusion, and to render as useful as possible, the suite of 'baseline studies'. Those five studies (plus the landscape strategy study and the tourism study) collectively comprise a rich resource for future planning and management. A distillation of them might usefully be published in a single volume both as a resource for Forest agencies and activists but also as an example of a wide ranging 'baseline study' for possible emulation elsewhere. As far as the studies already completed are concerned, the Agency should
 - explore with the local authorities and other key agencies how the landscape assessment and strategy studies might best inform and enhance existing mechanisms and processes
 - ensure that the Dean by Definition research, duly refined, feeds into the Community Strategy, local parish plan exercises etc
 - seek to ensure that a sound sustainable tourism strategy emerges based, in part, on the tourism study.
- 3 The Agency should continue its support for at least the following projects
 - a 'local grant scheme' but with a requirement that any mini-projects funded should be justified in a 'parish plan' or similar document based on careful local consultation and reflection (see also paragraph 5, third bullet point, below)
 - the Dean Oak initiative (and see paragraph 5, second bullet point, below)
 - the quartet of farmers markets at least until their continued viability is proven one way or the other
 - the SRB6 programme until its termination
- 4 But the Agency's support for a Phase 2 of the Programme should be built around a clear and distinctive 'philosophy' which should relate as much to 'learning lessons for wider application in rural England' as to 'promoting sustainable development and conservation in the Forest of Dean'. That philosophy and its translation into a practical programme should be developed in the coming weeks and months with its partner agencies.

In that respect we suggest the following elements

- Deriving full value from the baseline studies and exploring how such research might best inform action
- 'Managing the landscape for environmental, economic and social gain' as a core theme
- 'Adding value to the woodland resource' as a further, if related, core theme. (Drawing on the lessons of Phase 1, attention might be paid to the Dean Oak initiative and to its 'whole tree' model; to the enskilling of local people in wood and woodland related skills, to the ability of Forest Enterprise and its contractors to provide small quantities of wood for local use; to ways of using the forest as a sustainable tourism resource; to the better marketing of the Forest (the place) and the forest (the woodland)).
- Continuing to build capacity and achieve cultural change in the individuals, groups and organisations of the area. A significant part of this might involve increasing the number of parishes producing parish plans both by means of deploying a designated

‘facilitator’ and by offering a real prospect of funding for projects emerging from those planning exercises⁴ (see recommendation 4 above)

- Explicitly targeting excluded social groups and those localities where traditionally ‘little or nothing happens’
- Exploring the validity of achieving systematic influence / involvement in local governance, as an approach to Agency involvement in local development processes complementary to its more familiar support of individual projects. In particular, the possibility of appropriate and enthusiastic Agency involvement in the preparation and delivery of the district’s ‘community strategy’ should be explored.

It will be recognised that these suggestions focus as much on the ‘innovative development of good practice for national dissemination’ as on ‘assistance to the Forest of Dean *per se*’. They also suggest a more unified, less bitty, portfolio of projects and initiatives than was apparent in Phase 1 of the IRD Programme.

5 Finally; ‘special status’. We understand that with the termination of the current FODIRD programme this month (March 2003) a paper for the Agency Board is to be prepared, reflecting on the relevance of the FODIRD experience and pointing the way forward as far as the ‘special status’ issue is concerned. Certainly the issue cannot be left pending; while the lack of its resolution has not prevented the delivery of a valuable programme of local development, its *continuing* non-resolution is likely to impose a sort of ‘planning blight’ on future Agency involvement in the area. But the truth is that the FODIRD experience does not point unequivocally in one direction or another (as Paul Selman’s appendix to this report, reviewing *inter alia* the pros and cons of AONB designation, confirms). It follows that while the paper to the Board might usefully review the experience of the IRD programme and recommend its continuance along lines set out above, it should also stress the need for further urgent work on the alternative options available for conserving the special character of the area while simultaneously fostering its social and economic regeneration. The suite of baseline studies, and the wider experience of the FODIRD programme, provide useful pointers regarding ‘special status’, but of themselves they do not provide the answer.

⁴ Experience elsewhere (eg Staffordshire Moorlands and the Wallonia region of Belgium) shows that a majority of parishes can be persuaded to get involved in bottom-up village / parish planning if these two factors are present

Appendix 1. A note by Professor Paul Selman on

‘Clarifying the Case for Special Status for the Forest of Dean: an interpretation of the Landscape Character Assessment, Landscape Strategy (Draft Final Report), Dean by Definition study, Archaeological Survey, and Historic Landscape Assessment (Project Design)’

1 Introduction and Conclusions

This annexe summarises the background documents relating to the Forest of Dean landscape. Whilst aiming to give an unbiased overview of the content of these, an attempt has been made to view them in terms of whether they shed any light on the case for ‘special status’. The interpretation is, therefore, somewhat selective, not least in view of the length of the documents.

In broad terms, the over-riding impression from reading these studies is that the Forest is most certainly special. Designation as AONB would probably meet at least some of the needs of parts of the area. However, much of the special-ness of the Forest can best be protected and enhanced by countryside planning measures which do not yet adequately exist.

In terms of the case for AONB, a number of reasonably supportive observations may be made:

- first, parts of the area do seem to meet AONB criteria quite convincingly. This is principally the case in the dolomitic limestone area of the west, contiguous with the Wye Valley AONB, and corresponding to Landscape Character Types ‘Wooded Valleys’, ‘Limestone Hills’ and ‘Limestone Plateau’. In this area, the scenic qualities are high, villages generally cohesive, and some of the field patterns are of great interest.
- second – and this is purely a personal observation – the area has many similarities with Cannock Chase, which has AONB status.
- third, ‘beauty’ is an elusive concept, that might be interpreted differently in different contexts. Thus, it is arguably the case that ‘outstanding natural beauty’ should not be equated with ‘outstanding natural prettiness’. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and those who identify themselves as being ‘Forest people’ perceive a ‘warts and all’ beauty in the place, which is not always apparent to the ‘external gaze’. Moreover, many of the cherished qualities of the Forest are intangible and ephemeral (seasons, events, dapple shade, fleeting sights of wildlife) – yet, whilst such impermanent qualities may not conventionally be a criterion for landscape designation, Paul Brassley⁵, has drawn attention to the contribution of ‘ephemera’ to landscape values.

However, there are also reasons why AONB status may not be the most appropriate option for the Forest. The key impression conveyed by the documents is that the distinctiveness of the Forest derives from an intimate association between place and people, whereas AONB designation is principally concerned with the scenic qualities of ‘place’. In essence, the Forest’s special qualities are cultural rather than narrowly topographic. Thus, for example:

⁵ P Brassley (1998) On the unrecognised significance of the ephemeral landscape, *Landscape Research*, 23(2), 119-132.

- the special-ness of the Forest is often related to ‘people doing things’ and a sense that the land ‘has been repeatedly worked over’ through the centuries;
- the distinctive appearance of the land is generally associated with cultural features deriving from historic rights, traditional farming practices, historical phases of settlement, land clearance and sub-division, the network of highways and byways, indigenous industry, and so forth. Again, this does not sit comfortably with criteria of ‘fundamental beauty, ecology and natural resources’ applied to AONBs;
- many of the values appreciated both by locals and visitors relate to leisure in a broad sense – whether pursuing specific recreational activities, or more generally valuing the ease of unrestricted access and qualities of isolation and tranquillity – yet recreation *per se* is not a basis for AONB designation;
- many of the area’s most valued features are those created by the farming industry, and yet these are currently very vulnerable to pressures ranging from economic recession to ‘horsiculture’. AONB status could do little to support farmers in maintaining the unusual field, field boundary, and farm building attributes of the Forest, whereas some sort of ‘integrated rural development’ package might conceivably respond to this need;
- the woodland/forest cover is obviously diagnostic to the area’s identity, and this is nowadays a largely human-made landscape. It also possesses great potential as an exemplar for multi-benefit woodland management, related to local economy, society and environment.

Consequently, a personal interpretation of the documents is that AONB status for at least part of the area cannot easily be ruled out, and it would give specific additional safeguard against particular development pressures. However, more appropriate options might lie in one or a combination of: a continuing IRD programme, including carefully targeted support to specific features of the farmed landscape; an extension of the concept of Forest Park, to include an innovative and ‘demonstration’ role in social/rural development forestry; a new ‘cultural area’ designation, perhaps akin to the German/Austrian ‘kulturpark’; and specific designations for cultural assets, perhaps similar to the American idea of ‘Rustic Roads’.

2 The Landscape Character Assessment and Strategy

General Principles

The Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) has taken place within the context of the Countryside Agency’s ‘Countryside Character Initiative’, which comprises a programme of information and advice on the character of the English countryside. The Countryside Character Initiative came about because the Countryside Agency recognised a need for a new approach to landscape assessment which would look at the whole of England’s countryside - rather than just specific designated areas - and provide a consistent national framework within which more detailed local landscape assessments would sit. This Initiative led to the task of mapping the country into 159 separate, distinctive character areas. The features that define the landscape of each area are recorded in individual descriptions which explain what makes one area different from another and shows how that character has arisen and how it is changing.

The first level of generalisation is that of the landscape character type, which reflects characteristic features over a sizeable area. Nested within these, are individual landscape character areas. A single landscape character type will have broadly similar patterns of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use, settlement and field pattern in every area where

it occurs. This does not mean that every area will be identical but rather that there is a common pattern which can be discerned both in the maps and in the field survey records. Landscape character areas are the unique individual geographical areas in which landscape types occur. They share generic characteristics with other areas of the same type but have their own particular identity. In the majority of cases there will be more landscape character areas than landscape character types, as some types will occur in more than one area.

The Forest of Dean Landscape Character Assessment

The Landscape Character Assessment undertaken by Landscape Design Associates used, as a framework, the emerging county landscape typology, which in turn drew on the Countryside Agency's characterisation programme. The assessment combines elements of physical environment, ecological habitats, land use, and cultural attributes, as well as drawing on artistic and literary impressions. The LCA adopts a holistic approach and considers the FoD as a mosaic of different landscape types and character areas, each with particular characteristics and subject to particular forces for change. The main objectives of the Assessment are thus to:

- provide an assessment of the cultural and natural heritage resources which have shaped the landscapes of the FoD;
- identify and describe the district's component landscape character types and LCAs; and
- summarise the key characteristics associated with each landscape character type to provide the principles to guide landscape change.

It also embraces the wider purpose of informing policy and planning, and of promoting awareness.

The Assessment first describes the evolution of the landscape, reflecting the intricate interplay of numerous physical and human factors which have led to the Forest's current appearance.

The *geology* is described as complex and diverse, and derives from seven main geological periods. Particularly distinctive 'geological' features appear to be:

- May Hill/Huntley Hill, representing two distinct forms of Silurian sandstone;
- the Wye Valley, cut into Devonian Old Red Sandstone, with associated quartz conglomerates (c.f. Buck Stone, Suck Stone), and the distinctive ridge line deriving from the St Maughan's formation;
- the principal forested syncline, the plateau to its west and ridges to the east, as well as the notable river scenery between Redbrook and Brockweir, all formed from carboniferous rocks;
- the Crease Limestone band within this Carboniferous formation, which gave rise to iron ore mining in outcrops between Drybrook and Upper Soudley, and between Harkening Roack and Lydney Park;
- carboniferous coal measures within the syncline.

The report notes that the district has a range of nationally, regionally and locally important geological and geomorphological sites, including:

- sites which demonstrate the geological make-up of the Dean;
- sites that contain the fossil remains of numerous plant and animal groups and evidence of early inhabitants; and
- sites that demonstrate the past and continuing evolution of the landscape particularly the formation of river valleys and gorges.

The *landform* closely reflects the geology, and is notable for:

- the transition from the steep sided gorge of the Wye Valley to the undulating limestone plateau in the west, displaying a progression from an intimate landscape of remote riverside meadows and steep wooded gorges often confined by dramatic rock faces, to an exposed and expansive elevated plateau associated with long distance views;
- a distinctive forest core possessing a mosaic of various types of woodland interspersed with small clearings, settlement, riverside meadows and ancient forest farmland, and providing a popular recreational landscape;
- distinctive sandstone ridgelines and hills in the east, often only fully appreciated where forest cover is less dense, grading to undulating or flat riverine farmland.

The *biodiversity* is characterised by:

- extensive woodland habitats of both native and non-native types, of which the ash, lime, beech and yew woods of the Wye Valley, and oak, alder and birch woods of the Dean are nationally important;
- species rich grassland habitats (acid, basic, neutral, floodplain and estuarine);
- rivers and streams and associated wetlands with important populations of birds, water vole, otter, crayfish and migratory fish;
- remnant heathlands and associated mire and wetland bog habitats;
- ancient hedgerow networks;
- extensive mining galleries, supporting internationally important horseshoe bat populations.

The key *human influence* on the district is the distribution of natural resources (coal, iron, water power, building stone and timber), which has had a profound influence on the development and distribution of industry, agriculture, settlement and infrastructure. In addition, there are some important historic/archaeological features, notably the 8th century Offa's Dyke in the west. Despite a relatively limited understanding of the district's archaeology, the Assessment points to:

- Palaeolithic remains in 'King Arthur's Cave' which, though just outside the Forest boundary, suggests that forays were made into the area;
- relics from the Mesolithic era, confirming that anthropogenic landscape change (burning, etc.) started to occur during this period;
- some single monoliths (e.g. the former 'Longstone', near St Briavels) from the Neolithic;
- round barrows near Tidenham Chase, dating from the Bronze Age;
- Iron Age hill forts at Lydney, Lancaut, Symond's Yat, Penyard and Soudley;
- some evidence of mining/smelting activity and road and harbour building from the Romano British period;
- remnants of Saxon churches and monastic sites, especially Lancaut and the Isle of St Tecla, just off the Beachley peninsula, as well as evidence for deer hunting from this period;
- a motte and bailey castle at English Bicknor and stone castle at St Briavels, together with several churches (notably Kempley) from the Norman period;
- progressive land clearance, charcoal production and industrial activity from the 14th century onwards;

- relatively recent, but locally important, features are the planned villages of the Chartist estates at Lowbands and Snigs End (Staunton) between 1846 and 1851.

One of the key historic features, however, is not a hallmark of the landscape but a legal provision. Around the mid-14th century, the unique privileges of the Forest Miners arose, by royal decree, giving them the right to mine anywhere in the forest without hindrance.

The Forest has had a number of cultural associations over the years, and the principal ones noted by the Assessment include:

- Wordsworth and Gilpin – who were particularly attracted to the Wye Valley, as it epitomised their conception of the ‘picturesque’. Indeed, it is noted that ‘as the search for the picturesque became fashionable, a tour of the Wye became an integral part of the development of a person of taste.’
- the celebrated group of Dymock Poets on occasion wrote about Forest landscapes and people;
- local writers such as Winifred Foley and Leonard Clarke capture the sense of being ‘content to be a race apart’, often associated with Forest culture;
- Dennis Potter who, as well as drawing inspiration from the Forest for many of his plays, also provided detailed accounts of the uniqueness of Forest life, dialect and traditions in his books.

There is little artistic or musical legacy, though the woodland setting has latterly provided a venue for important performance events, as well as the Sculpture Trail.

In describing the landscape of the district, the LCA observes that whilst the FoD is acknowledged for its natural beauty and amenity, it deserves to be better recognised for its landscape *diversity*: ‘the combination of woodland, pasture, arable land, hills, ridge lines, scarp slopes, valleys, riverine landscapes all contribute to a dramatically varied landscape’. The LCA records the character of 15 (generic) landscape character types and 42 (unique) landscape character areas.

The landscape character types are described in considerable detail in terms of their natural and cultural features, whilst character areas are defined in terms of specific distinctive features. The accounts of the Dean landscape character types/areas are summarised in tabular form at the end of this annexe.

It should be noted that the Assessment covers the whole of FoD District, and thus extends towards the surrounding agricultural areas around Newent, Dymock and the foothills of the Malverns. The most distinctive landscape types, which do appear to have very special qualities, are principally towards the west of the Forest, adjacent to the Wye Valley and its associated limestone outcrops. Some striking, but less accessible and somewhat exposed, landscapes border the Severn Estuary. Moving eastwards, while there are some pockets of fine and cohesive landscape, much of the area is merely pleasant farmland, and on occasion is somewhat bleak or urbanised. Equally, while there are some well composed villages and interesting buildings, there are also some incoherent settlement patterns and elements of incongruous materials. The visual character of some of the larger settlements, in particular, does not sit easily with the popular notion of ‘outstanding natural beauty’. In the core Forest area, much of the distinctiveness seems to be associated with cultural heritage, particularly the character of the people, the unique land rights, and the settlement patterns associated with historic practices such as ‘assarting’ or ‘squatting’.

3 Landscape Strategy: Final Draft Report

The Draft Report has five main objectives, namely:

1. to identify the forces for change that have influenced the landscape of the FoD District in the past, or are likely to do so in the foreseeable future;
2. to consider the implications of these changes on existing landscape character with particular reference to the key environmental assets identified for the 15 landscape character types;
3. to develop broad landscape and land use management strategies to inform the decision-making process and help manage change in a sustainable and positive manner;
4. to develop ideas for local landscape indicators that could be used to monitor landscape change in the future and;
5. to provide advice to partners and stakeholder groups on the range of potential applications for the landscape character assessment and landscape strategy, and analyse the full range of mechanisms and techniques that might be used in applying the results of the study to help inform policy and decision-making processes at district, county and regional levels.

It should be noted that the Strategy, as with the Assessment, relates to the whole local government district, not just to the core 'Forest'.

The Strategy is essentially an aid to the development and execution of planning and management policies. It does not aim to shed light on the case for 'special status', nor single out parts of the District as being of 'national importance'. Consequently, any indication of these aspects must be purely inferential. Nevertheless, a close reading of the Draft Strategy suggests some particular issues and areas where 'special status' might be warranted, or might give additional leverage to the planning system in protecting important and vulnerable assets. A selection of these issues is given below and, whilst this choice is rather subjective, it is intended to reflect issues pertinent to the 'peculiar' qualities of the Forest, rather than the more generic pressures encountered widely in the English lowlands (such as barn conversion or suburbanisation). It is notable that much of the landscape distinctiveness is associated with cultural features (settlements, fields, roads, etc.) rather than 'natural' ones.

Erosion of distinctive settlement character. Even the casual observer driving through the Forest, will be struck by its unusual settlement pattern. The very distinctive nature of semi-dispersed villages is often associated with historic practices of assarting, squatting and sporadic settlement of common land, and is most unusual in England. This pattern is very vulnerable to modern accretions and infilling, as well as more insidious use of unsympathetic materials.

For example, in the Wooded Valleys (character areas 1a, 1b, 1c) the Draft Strategy notes the risks of 'expansion and suburbanisation of existing valley floor settlements' and 'expansion and infilling of existing scattered settlements on valley sides'.

Pressures from 'horsiculture' and similar uses. Many parts of the countryside are experiencing the effect of long distance commuting by people wishing to buy farms at currently low prices. Incoming residents often have little interest in the productive aspects of the farm, and land management practices can change markedly, particularly in the use of paddocks, etc., for leisure purposes. The Forest appears to be doubly vulnerable to these forces – both because of

its accessibility to urban areas and because the relatively small farm sizes almost ‘invite’ such acquisition.

For example, the Draft Strategy notes that local forces for change include ‘decline in the agricultural sector, aging population of smallholders using traditional management regimes, and the influence of hobby farmers and horticulture’.

Risk of intrusive developments in landscape units with high ‘intervisibility’. The Landscape Character Assessment notes that some areas have high inter-visibility due to the rolling nature of the topography. New developments, particularly highway improvements and residential sites, can thus be prominent over long distances.

For example in the Limestone Hills (character areas 2a-2e), the Draft Strategy notes that ‘the open hillsides are particularly sensitive to the effects of large scale built development and structures due to a combination of their elevation, the absence of significant woodland cover and a high degree of inter-visibility with surrounding landscapes’.

Distinctive field patterns and vernacular farm buildings. As noted above, the origins of farming and land holdings in the Forest are quite unusual, and often comprise a strong pattern of small field sizes with wooded boundaries, aligned in ways that emphasise (often by cutting across) local topography. The result is one of great scenic and historic interest. A number of pressures could lead to the rationalisation and deterioration of this field pattern, compounded by unsympathetic changes to farm buildings. Pressures on farmers to diversify often lead to risks of ‘shackery’, and some of the squatter settlements give the impression of being especially susceptible to this.

For example, the Draft Strategy notes that holdings of 50ha account for some 86% of all holdings in the Forest, relative to 28% in Gloucestershire as a whole. The Draft Strategy devotes several pages to a review of the measures that could be used to buttress the local agricultural economy, and these appear have more in common with IRD (viz. ‘tailored package’ approaches in Land Management Initiative areas) than AONB status.

Scenic routes. Again, even the casual visitor to the Forest will be struck by network of byways, sometimes cutting across the heart of the Forest, and sometimes winding through isolated squatter settlements. Again, the circuitry and appearance of these byways is unusual. Many of these routes are at risk of progressive ‘urbanisation’. It is interesting to note that some countries have a specific landscape designation for scenic routes, partly to protect their ‘unimproved’ character.

For example, the Draft Strategy notes that: ‘Minor road improvements in rural areas tend to have an urbanising influence as they bring additional lighting, signage, roundabouts, kerbs and engineered embankments. The resultant *roadscape* brings a degree of standardisation to the countryside which can erode distinctive features of local character. Landscapes particularly sensitive to these kinds of changes are rural areas on the fringes of the district’s larger towns, particularly in the Wooded Syncline and Settled Forest Margin (landscape type 5), Coleford and Christchurch Hills (landscape character areas 2c) and Tidenham Chase (landscape character area 3a).’ It could be argued, however, that the Forest’s *roadscape* has a heritage value which extends well beyond the pressured urban fringe areas.

Telecommunication masts. The elevated nature of much of the Forest lends itself to the location of telecommunication masts, especially for mobile ‘phone companies. Parts of the Forest are already experiencing ‘clustering’ of these features.

For example, the Draft Strategy notes that ‘High points, such as Edge Hill (landscape character area 10c) and May Hill (landscape character area 11a) are under particular pressure and masts are particularly intrusive in landscape such as these which are remote and rural in character’.

Quarrying, particularly on the western limestone band. The western periphery of the Forest is characterised by the dolomitic limestone, which outcrops extensively, in gentle and easily worked deposits, to the west of Coleford. This has long been used for local industries, and remains under pressure for modern quarrying.

For example, the Draft Strategy hints at the knock-on pressures on these outcrops, as the majority of the deposits lie within the specially protected area of the Wye Valley AONB. Currently, quarrying of this resource impacts principally on landscape character areas 2b and 2e.

The Forests and Woodlands of the District. The over-riding character of the area is, of course, woodland. Some 25% of the District (52,666ha) is wooded, with the central wooded core of the Forest having approximately 11,000ha of contiguous woodland. Elsewhere in the District, such as in the Severn Vale, woodland is sparse and tends to be restricted to small farmland copses and shelterbelts, though even these can contribute significantly to local landscape character. One of the most prized features of the central forest core is its peace and tranquillity, linked to a very limited capacity to accommodate new development.

The Draft Strategy notes the character of both the modern commercial forest, and the ancient rights and customs associated with the central forest core. There is strong recognition of current policy moves towards ‘social’ or ‘public benefit’ forestry. This section is perhaps more in keeping with the idea of a ‘forest park’, perhaps increasingly based on exemplary management to maximise social, rural development and environmental benefits. Equally, however, it is difficult not to be struck by the similarities with Cannock Chase AONB.

4 Royal Forest of Dean by Definition: what makes the Forest of Dean Special?

This study encapsulates the views of stakeholders and community groups across the FoD district, obtained from a variety of imaginative participatory processes. The report ‘presents’, but deliberately does not ‘interpret’, these views. Perhaps the most striking observation is the way in which respondents combined ‘people and place’: 84% of respondents gave statements indicating that both were special, whereas only 10% referred just to ‘place’ and 5% solely to ‘people’. As with the Landscape Character Assessment, the study covered the whole of FoD District, not just the ‘Forest’ core. In this respect, it is notable that less than 20% of survey respondents considered the two to be equivalent, with a steady increase from north to south in the percentage seeing the statutory ‘Forest’ as definitional rather than the local government district. However, the proportion of residents stating that they felt ‘part of the Forest of Dean’ was highest in the centre (86%), followed by the south (67%) and north (29%). As a very broad generalisation, there was a modest but significant degree to which respondents from the

‘centre’ identified the Forest in ‘people’ terms, whereas the north and south saw it more as a ‘place’.

The consultation involved a diverse mix of participants, namely:

- 1256 individuals (survey questionnaires)
- 39 parish councils
- 10 primary schools (‘That’s what we think’ sound sculpture)
- 5 secondary schools (Recipe production)
- 2 primary schools (Song writing)
- 17 Public houses (Beer mat project)
- 2 Visitor attractions (Beer mat project)
- 3 Primary and 1 secondary schools (Textile workshops)
- Listeners of FoD Radio
- 2 residential homes for the elderly
- 1 centre for the visually impaired
- 3 drop-in Art events.

These were undertaken at a wide range of events (e.g. carnivals) and venues (e.g. farmers’ markets). It is noteworthy that the survey questionnaire was generally based on interview rather than self-completion, resulting in a high response rate and probably a more socially representative sample.

As noted above, most people felt that ‘special-ness’ was defined by a combination of ‘people’ and ‘place’: key ideas were ‘past, heritage and rights’, ‘presence’ (e.g. peacefulness, tranquillity, safety), ‘process’ (e.g. walking, cycling, fishing), and ‘access and freedom’. 51% of respondents attached significance to ‘events’, including both traditional carnivals and fetes, and innovations such as festivals of music and transport. Sites and attractions, ways of life, and the changing seasons were all deemed important in making the area ‘special’. Reasons for ‘sense of belonging’ seemed to be much more variable, for example, working in the area, feeling accepted by locals after settling in the area, and being born at the ‘Dilke’. Interestingly, the types of response did not appear to vary materially according to the geographical location of the respondent, except that ‘south’ Forest people made more references to ‘sites and attractions’ and to the effects of seasonality.

Particular ‘place qualities’ included:

- distinctive geographical unit, separating other identifiable units such as Malverns and Wye Valley (and even England and Wales);
- good access and countryside, despite some unattractive towns;
- contrasts between eyesores and beauty spots, industrial and market towns – the ‘robust’ rather than ‘quaint’ character of the Forest was generally viewed positively;
- being able to get away from main roads and constant discovery of unexplored corners;
- long distance views and sunsets;
- trees and their changing colours (‘natural’ rather than ‘regimented’ forest was preferred), as well as the associated wildlife;
- being set ‘between the rivers’ giving it an ‘island’ feel.

With regard to the first of these bullet points, some respondents from outside the statutory Forest seemed equally to identify with the special-ness of their own locality, such as the Wye Valley. Identification with place varied considerably between individuals – one Dymock resident felt ‘inside’ whereas a Blaisdon respondent felt very definitely ‘outside’. One person succinctly noted that the Forest of Dean was down the A40 from Huntley and turn left.

‘People’ qualities included:

- strong kinship and friendship networks;
- sense of independence (including having no truck with fashionable ideas), ‘old-worldliness’ (in a complimentary way), humour, community spirit, caring, mutual respect, ‘real people going about real lives’ (unlike the Cotswolds!), social organisations (rugby, silver band, etc.);
- ‘anti-authority’ attitudes, ‘free spirits’, haphazard buildings (a ‘beer-mat’ response), accepted on own merits.

The tendency towards ‘independence’, though, seemed to be balanced by a feeling of structure and stability. More controversially, there was a suggestion that centuries of inbreeding had led to social/intellectual sorting, which resulted in people being more at ease in their particular cohort! However, contrary to what might perhaps have been predicted, there were favourable comments from relative newcomers about feeling quickly ‘accepted’.

‘Process’ (activity) qualities were mainly related to types of environment which afforded specific opportunities, such as:

- waymarked and relatively uncrowded paths;
- Lydney Docks – peaceful, bird-watching, viewing ships going into Sharpness;
- beauty and solitude for walking and cycling;
- the music scene.

The convenience of easy access, giving a sense of freedom and lack of restriction for both locals and visitors, was reported in response to several questions, and not only those related to recreation.

In relation to ‘heritage’, there was a mix of the ‘natural’ and the ‘social’:

- ancient trees, trackways, tramways;
- brought up in Forest ways;
- traditions, such as carnivals, silver bands;
- generations in the same industry, especially mining, often resulting in distinctive skills;
- churches and their congregations.

One telling comment referred to a sense that ‘the whole land has been burrowed, tipped, mined, quarried and used’.

More abstract ideas related to the Forest’s uniqueness (could not be compared with anywhere else), a magical/mysterious quality (one ‘beer-mat’ response suggested there were fairies everywhere!), and a feeling of being ‘in’ the Forest (as an integral part of a living organism). In terms of ‘aesthetic’ and ‘abstract’ qualities, there were fulsome appreciations of seasonal effects (bluebells, foliage – both the colour and the scents – and lambs), beauty spots (including a sense of mystery, e.g. at Puzzle Wood), pubs, markets, fetes, local foods – as well as the more mundane, such as farming and recreation.

The question about ‘likes and dislikes’ seemed to have a surprisingly critical quality (given the general affection for the area). ‘Grotty’ towns, traffic, drugs, litter, dissatisfied incomers, sporadic housing development, poor public transport, lack of things for young people to do, poor condition of roads, inconsiderate motorists – even the sheep! Admittedly, one respondent did not dislike anything – ‘there’s places I enjoy more than others but there’s nowhere I dislike’. Perhaps predictably, respondents from the more rural and agricultural ‘north’ were

less critical than those from the centre and south. When invited to wave a magic wand and make one improvement, responses seemed in keeping with the above ‘gripes’. It is also notable that, towards the end of the DbyD report, the authors draw strong attention to the presence of poverty in the Forest – not just low income and poor housing, but poor access to services and information, poor communications (including mobile phone and television reception), and poor public transport. There was no attempt to glamorise or prettify the Forest, despite a deep affection for it.

None of the other consultative methods produced such rich responses as the questionnaire, albeit they were important in embracing a wide range of constituencies. The photographs appeared to highlight:

- buildings and monuments seen to relate to history/heritage;
- special places – walks, bluebell woods, heaths;
- significant boundaries and landmarks;
- community buildings (schools, village halls, and churches – one was ‘always open’);
- industrial sites – sources of employment;
- socialising (‘people have time for each other’).

Children’s poems emphasised nature, seasons (sometimes harsh) and ‘hard knocks’. Writers-in-residence echoed a number of the positive and negative features noted elsewhere and, whilst some places were ‘wicked’, there was a hankering after more money, more fashionable shops, and more venues for active leisure pursuits. Some of the writings – both from adults and children – were unsentimental about former ‘hard times’, and this came across as part of the area’s richness. One of the local writers drew attention – perhaps this deserved wider acclaim – to the Forest dialect, accepted by some as ‘the closest form to Anglo-Saxon’. Yet this, too, had mixed affections: a treasure to some, but an impediment to the ‘global village generation’. Some striking new poems were specially written for the DbyD exercise, and these too reflected: the topography, with distinct contrast between ridge, scarp, vale and river; silence (but not lack of sound) and the ephemeral (e.g. fleeting sunlight); nature (at times personified) which was commonplace whilst charged with meaning; a ‘place’ that was in the fibres of ‘people’; social history, daily life and dialect; and a mixture of softness and harshness in both community and environment.

Other important consultative media were the production of three videos, the distribution of beer mats (asking people what was special, and what they would change), a website, arts projects (e.g. murals, pavement drawings, textiles), photography, music-making, sponsored walks, and Forest food in schools. These exercises, however, were probably more effective in awareness-raising, commitment-building, and ascending a learning curve in community-based research, than in producing specific additional information about distinctiveness. However, the ‘beer mats’ produced some interestingly polarised views about the merits of development and tourism, and strongly held concerns about drugs and urban scruffiness. There were regular comments about the need for better ‘eateries’, and a sadness at the culling of so many sheep, though in general there was a strong (even fierce) sense of independence as well as great affection for the openness, accessibility, timelessness, beauty, and sights and sounds of the Forest.

5 Archaeological Survey (Project Design for Stages 1 & 2, and Outline Proposal for Stages 3 & 4), and Historic Landscape Assessment (Project Design)

These documents are very embryonic and are intended to lead to fuller assessments and strategies. Neither is at present very helpful in assisting judgements about the case for ‘special

status'. Much of the work is prospective and centred on sources, methods and potential classifications. Other studies have confirmed the relatively low level of knowledge about the archaeological and historic assets of the Forest. However, there are two key observations.

First, the archaeological survey really comes 'alive' around the 14th century, and particularly from the 17th century. The substantive interest, therefore, is in industrial archaeology, associated both with physical remains and distinctive legal entitlements. Some of this, such as the 'Free Mining' economy, is a living heritage.

Second, extrapolating from the slightly more advanced historic landscape assessment for the Cotswolds, the main interest lies in medieval and post-medieval field patterns. The distinctive field patterns in the Forest are likely to lie towards the later end of this period. There is nothing really from 'pre-history' that impinges on the 'landscape scale' (funerary mounds, etc., are sporadic features rather than geographic clusters). This reinforces the relative significance of field, hedge, road, settlement and river commerce legacies.

Both of these documents provide an indication that any 'special' character of the area is likely to derive from its settlement and industries of the past millennium, and especially of the past 3-400 years.

An annex to Appendix 1; Summary of Landscape Character based on the FoD Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Type	Landscape Character Area
<p><u>Wooded valleys</u> – steep sided, dramatic bare rock faces, densely wooded valley sides with narrow floodplain pastures on the valley floor with linear settlements and ancient bridging points, intricate field and lane patterns, and high vantage points.</p>	<p>Wye Valley – Common Grove to the Slaughter. (Gorge, crags, thick woodland, Symonds Yat).</p> <p>Wye Valley – Redbrook to Brockweir. (Steep slopes, woodlands, field patterns, alluvial floodplain, relict fluvial geomorphology features).</p> <p>Wye Valley – Brockweir to Tutshill. (Narrow floodplain, gorge, dense woodland, wide meanders, field patterns, long distance views).</p>
<p><u>Limestone Hills</u> – interlocking convex hills and dry valleys, pasture, hedgerow patterns, well integrated small villages, large towns, extensive woodland, remnants of mining activity.</p>	<p>English Bicknor. (Soft landscape of rolling pastoral hills, dry valleys, sink holes, field pattern, well wooded but mainly improved pasture).</p> <p>High Meadow Woods and Staunton. (Conifer plantations, mixed woodlands, ‘natural amphitheatre’ of woodland fringing pasture, quarries, crags)</p> <p>Coleford and Christchurch. (Gentle hills, hedgerows, urban fringe, housing and industrial estates, ribbon development, some incongruous building materials).</p> <p>Newland Hills. (Convex hills, pasture, erosion platforms, veteran oak tree, quarry, industrial relics).</p> <p>Ruardean Hills. (Panoramic views from exposed hill tops, well wooded, incised river valley, quarry, traditional building materials).</p>
<p><u>Limestone Plateau</u> – gently undulating plateau with villages at edge, expansive views, arable/pasture field pattern, isolated farms, modern barn complexes, active/redundant quarries, probably rich archaeological record, small enclosures, winding lands, small woodlands, ‘squatter’ cottages, heaths and unimproved grassland.</p>	<p>Tidenham Chase. (Strong and coherent identity, well-defined field pattern with ancient/modern hedgerows, fences and distinctive limestone walls; sense of elevation and exposure with some extensive views; some large conifer plantations and important heathlands).</p> <p>St Briavels Common. (Unique landscape of intimate pastures and dispersed ‘squatter’ settlements linked by narrow winding lanes on gently sloping landform, transitional to sandstone plateau; intimate woodland/ hedgerow landscape with strong and coherent identity).</p>

<p><u>Wooded Scarp and Lower Scarp Slopes</u> – steep, exposed, elevated, with broadleaved woodland and coniferous plantations; sense of elevation and dramatic panoramic views, with gentler landform on lower slopes, distinctive settlement patterns, historic designed parkland at Lydney Park.</p>	<p>Lydney Park. (Extensively planted with conifers, isolated farms and loose clusters of houses, strong influence of designed landscape, archaeological interest.) Netherend Farmed Slopes. (Gentle slopes bordering the steep wooded scarp, steep sided valleys with rough pasture or linear broadleaved woodlands. Pasture/ arable fields with hedgerows. Linear villages and settlement clusters, plus isolated farm houses. Woolaston Scarp. (Dramatic steep slopes visible from the Cotswolds, dark wooded backdrop to river and vale farmland. Deeply incised roads and tracks have tunnel-like effect due to adjacent trees/ hedgerows. Wide panoramic views. Recent piecemeal housing, often prominent with incongruous materials.)</p>
<p><u>Wooded Syncline and Settled Forest Margin</u> – distinctive syncline structure occupied by extensive areas of deciduous and conifer woodland; linear ponds and lakes along streams bordered by verdant lawns and riparian habitats; long history of mining, industry and forestry, and encircled by almost continuous belt of development.</p>	<p>Forest Core. (Strong sense of wilderness and isolation, extensive coniferous and broadleaved plantations, few roads and little development, sense of isolation. Topography obscured and few panoramas, apart from occasional viewpoints. Some clearfelling may detract but mainly sensitive management.) Lydbrook and Ruardean Woodside. (Sprawling settlements fringing the edge of the forest core, housing and industry interspersed with open grazing land, occasional dereliction and woodlands. Patchwork of small irregular hedged enclosures, isolated dwellings and ‘squatter’ settlements, scattered across hillsides and occasionally breaching the skyline). Cinderford and Ruspidge. (Industrial character, modified by recent residential and commercial development. Linear park acts as important ‘buffer’). Soudley Brook. (Linear riverine landscape with deeply incised valley. Clearings open up relatively long distance views. Scattered settlement, apart from Soudley village.) Littledean Ridges and Valleys. (Distinct wooded ridgelines, Soudley ponds, tranquil character).</p>

	<p>Ellwood. (Narrow band of sprawling settlement and small clearings; relative soft landscape provides transition to hills and plateau to the west. Settlements mainly undistinguished and tend to coalesce, with some industrial legacy). Bream and Yorkley Fringe. (Prominent development on slopes, with significant areas of woodland and farmland softening the visual impact).</p>
<p><u>Unwooded Vale</u> – soft rolling landscape with extensive areas of wet meadow and floodplain, well maintained fields with hedgerows, some distinctive farmsteads and field archaeology.</p>	<p>The Severn Vale. (Gently undulating, productive farmland with well maintained hedges; saline riverside pastures; tidal flats; many large modern and more traditional farm buildings; wooded backdrop; mainly isolated settlement but some distinctive riverside villages with impressive churches). The Leadon Vale. (Southern end of extensive fertile rolling agricultural landscape; some remnant water meadows; some distinctive farm buildings, churches and orchards).</p>
<p><u>Drained Riverine Farmland and Grazed Salt Marsh</u> – low-lying, windswept and generally treeless flat landscape of improved pasture, prone to inundation with drainage ditches sometimes lined by pollarded willows; remote and largely inaccessible; several small wharves; some modern industrial encroachment.</p>	<p>Pillhouse Drained Farmland. (Inaccessible drained pastures and salt marsh, rich in archaeology). Ayleburton Newgrounds. (Extensive area of drained farmland with varied field boundaries, and some extensive views. Somewhat abandoned air.) Awre Drained Farmland. (Neat collection of pasture fields extending out to the Severn, divided by dense hawthorn hedges; wide views with very ‘horizontal’ feel, so vertical [e.g. pylons] elements can intrude; historical features of interest). Westbury-on-Severn Drained Farmland. (Small area of pasture and arable land situated between village and river; Westbury church and Severn Mill are prominent features, as are pylons and telegraph lines). Upper and Lower Dumball. (Narrow strip of farmland divided by drainage ditches and hedgerows along river edge).</p>
<p><u>Littoral Sands and Rock Outcrops</u> – broad and sometimes dramatic landscape of open water, sandbanks, mudflats and rock outcrops, with some industrial</p>	<p>Severn Sands. (As for Character Type)</p>

intrusion towards east; cliffs and beaches, plus ecologically rich riverine and estuarine habitats.	
<u>Undulating Farmland</u> – convex hills with broad rounded tops and often steep sides, strong hedgerow pattern, woodland on narrow steep-sided streams, relatively inaccessible.	Bledisloe Hundred. (As for Character Type)
<u>Ridges and Valleys</u> – distinctive rounded ridge profiles with extensive views and frequent conifer plantations, north-south orientation emphasised by hedgerows, mosaic of mixed farmland and woodland, distinctive squatter settlements, redundant quarries, variety of semi-natural habitats.	Allaston Ridge. (Prominent ridge forming south-eastern boundary of syncline; open and panoramic views; strong field pattern with (over) mature hedges but few woodlands; squatter settlements on top of ridge line.) Littledean Ridge. (Farmed and wooded ridge forming an important buffer between Cinderford and rural landscapes to east; field patterns aligned along ridge; Littledean is located in valley; historic buildings and some extensive views). Edge Hill. (Prominent rounded ridge, with extensive, mainly coniferous woodland cover; small clearings with associated small quarries). Breakheart Hill. (Predominantly agricultural with strong pattern of hedged fields, and extensive conifer plantations to the south. Some small settlements plus a pattern of small cottages linked by winding lanes, and some more urban/ industrial intrusions.)
<u>Wooded Hills</u> – varied, often steeply sloping, hilly landform rising above neighbouring vale landscapes, wide views, quick flowing streams in wooded valleys; interconnecting pattern of broadleaved woods, conifer plantations, and assorted hedge fields; dispersed pattern of buildings with occasional clusters of squatter settlements.)	May Hill and Outliers. (Prominent landmark with capping of trees; hedgerows link with woodlands giving area a strong sense of unity and cohesion; important acid grasslands; traditional orchards on lower ground.) The South Malvern Foothills. (Important transitional landscape between Severn Vale and main body of Malvern Hills; numerous woodlands and some parkland; mainly arable on lower ground).
<u>Floodplain Farmland</u> – flat floodplains subject to winter flooding, significant grassland ecology, drainage ditches, mature spreading trees.	Walmore Common. (As for Character Type).
<u>Vale Hillocks</u> – distinct limestone hills and ridges rising above the surrounding landscape, covered by pasture and scrub, with some long distance views.	Corse Wood Hill. (Prominent lowland ridge rising abruptly from gently undulating vale, with mixture of woodland, pasture and scrub).

	Woolridge (Soft gradients, with more intensive farming and settlements).
<u>Low Hills and Outliers</u> – discrete domed unit of low, convex, interlocking hills, with wide views; fertile soils used mainly for market gardening and orchards; some large woodlands; incised valley of River Leadon; dispersed pattern of isolated farmsteads and other buildings with some distinctive architectural features).	Bromsberrow Heath. (Hillocks, heavily wooded or cloaked in gorse; a mixed agricultural landscape, with numerous modern intrusions). Botloe’s Green. (Low hills, orchards, arable farming with some pasture; some important woodlands).
<u>Undulating Hill Farmland</u> – varied landform, extensive views and sense of exposure on some hillsides; small semi-natural woodlands along valley sides and larger deciduous woodlands integrated by a strong hedgerow network.	Kilcot and Gorsley Farmland. (As for Character Type).

Appendix 2 The FODIRD programme in the context of six parameters

The terms of reference for this evaluation requested, *inter alia*, that the consultant consider the programme in the light of six criteria. It is appropriate therefore to reflect specifically on these six criteria though the approach taken in the main text – setting the ‘projects’ against a list of 13 ‘objectives’ - itself effectively responds to this requirement. But, briefly

1 The Board Resolutions that initiated the IRD Programme.

The Countryside Agency Board affirmed in September 2000 that ‘the needs of the Forest of Dean could best be achieved through an IRD approach’ and resolved to launch such a programme and to return to the issue of special status in three years time. *We have found that the IRD approach has brought significant benefits to the Forest of Dean, that it deserves to be rolled forward albeit with significant modifications, and that it has not of itself resolved the Special Status issue.*

2 The Countryside Agency’s working definition of IRD. That definition states that ‘IRD is a way of working that seeks to deliver sustainable development in rural areas by benefiting social, economic and environmental objectives, bringing equal benefit to all three wherever possible, whilst seeking to avoid damage to any one of them’. It embodies the principles of integration, individuality, involvement and innovation. *We have found that though the FODIRD programme has been broadly consistent with that definition, and with ‘the four I’s’, it has not advanced our understanding of IRD in any significant respect. But it has reaffirmed the importance of being ‘locality specific’ of devising and implementing programmes tailor-made to the particular locality.*

3 The Aims, Objectives and Outcomes detailed in the Project Document. We distilled 13 specific objectives that appeared to underlie the FODIRD programme and much of the report is devoted to assessing their degree of attainment. *We concluded that two of them had been attained to a ‘substantial’ degree, five to a ‘significant’ degree and six to a ‘modest’ degree.*

4 The Degree of Fit with the Corporate Plan. The FODIRD programme has been relevant to several of the Agency’s Programmes as set out in its 2002 / 03 Corporate Plan. In particular the ‘Countryside Capital’ programme includes a commitment to deliver ‘nine Land management initiatives and an IRD initiative.’ *More generally we can conclude a good deal of congruence between the FODIRD and the Corporate Plan.*

5 The hopes and expectations of key partners We may assume that the ‘key partners’ included the District and County Councils, the Forest Regeneration Partnership, the Regional Development Agency, the Rural Community Council and Forest Enterprise. *To the extent that those partners expected assistance in promoting social / economic and environmental regeneration, then they may well feel satisfied with what has been achieved. But disappointment has been expressed about both the lack of resolution of the landscape management / Special Status issue, and about the Agency’s allegedly modest readiness to work in partnership at least in the first year or so.*

6 Value for Money As explained we have not attempted a quantified exercise of measuring outputs in relation to inputs. *But our judgement is that by and large good value for money has been achieved. This has varied somewhat between projects and where appropriate, reservations have been made in the main text.*

Appendix 3 Oral and written evidence

3.1 A list of those attending either one or both of the ‘Cinderford workshops’ on Jan / Feb 2003

Lance Allan	Association of Town and Parish Councils
Sue Bartlett	Dean Archaeology Group
Rich Daniels	Dean Forest Voice/Dean by Definition
Kate Biggs	Dean Heritage Museum Trust
Peter Chard	Action Against Quarrying
Tim Fretter	Forest Voluntary Action Forum
Rob Guest	Forest Enterprise
Tim Holden	Gloucestershire County Council
Mike Jones	Dean Forest Voice
Chris Lewis	Dean Oak Cooperative
Mary Newton	Wyedean Environmental Alliance
Roger Smith	Business Link Gloucestershire
Jim Stewart	Forest of Dean District Council
Stephen Wright	Gloucestershire Rural Community Council
Owen James	Forest of Dean District Council
Tony Burley	Gloucestershire County Council
Jeremy Gissop	Forest Enterprise
Edward Odim	Dean Oak Cooperative
Phil Horsley	Association of Town and Parish Councils
Meg Holborow	Forest of Dean District Council
Alison Childs	Farmers Markets and Forest Showcase organiser
Ros Daniels	Forest Regeneration Partnership / Dean by Definition
Caroline Anderson	Tourism Association
Andrew Nixon	Wye Valley AONB
Gill Young	Royal Forest of Dean College

3.2 A List of People Interviewed in the FODIRD Evaluation

Val Kirby	Countryside Agency	General comments
Kaley Hart	Countryside Agency	General comments
Meg Holborrow	Forest of Dean District Council	General comments
Stephen Wright	Gloucestershire Rural Community Council	General comments
Sarah Owens	Gloucestershire Rural Community Council	Parish Plans/CSGs
Mike Foster	Landscape Design Associates	Landscape Character Assessment
Mary Newton	Wyedean Environmental Alliance	General comments
Rob Guest	Forest Enterprise	General comments
Jon Hoyle	Gloucestershire County Council	Archaeology Survey
Jan Wills	Gloucestershire County Council	Archaeology Survey
Nick Rawlings	Forest of Dean District Council	Forest Showcase
Colin Studholme	Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust	Biodiversity Survey
Kathryn West	SWERDA	Tourism Study
Tim Orson	Dean Oak Cooperative	Dean Oak
Rob Daniels	Forest Regeneration Partnership	Dean By Definition
<i>Sue Dubois</i>	<i>Forest Big Art Web project</i>	<i>Local Grants Scheme</i>
Jim Chapman	Hartpury Historic Land And Buildings Trust	Local Grants Scheme
Alison Childs	Organiser	Forest Showcase and Farmers' Markets
Tim Fretter	Forest Voluntary Action Forum	Rural Transport Partnership
Carolyn Mitchell	Forest of Dean District Council	Local Grants Scheme
<i>Linda Thomas</i>	<i>Cinderford Skate Park project</i>	<i>SRB6 funding</i>
Sue Fellow	CANDI project	SRB6 funding
<i>Kate Biggs</i>	<i>Dean Heritage</i>	<i>Environment and Rural Skills</i>
Alistair Chapman	Forest of Dean District Council	Biodiversity Survey
Owen James	Forest of Dean District Council	General comments
Jim Stewart	Forest of Dean District Council	General comments
Peter Chard	Action Against Quarrying	General comments
Mike Jones	Dean Forest Voice	General comments
Ruth Waycott	Forest of Dean DC	Tourism study / strategy

Note: the views expressed by workshop participants and interviewees do not necessarily reflect the views of the organisation(s) they represent.

3.3 Some of the Documents Consulted During the Research

Cotswold AONB Historic Landscape Characterisation
(Archaeological Service, Gloucestershire CC)

(Glos) County Scoping Study
(Landscape Design Associates)

Gloucestershire and Wye Valley AONB Historic Landscape Assessment-Project
Design
(Archaeological Service, Gloucestershire CC)

Herefordshire Landscape Character Assessment
(Herefordshire County Council, 2002)

Forest of Dean Archaeological Survey-Project Design
(Archaeological Service, Gloucestershire CC, 2001)

Forest of Dean Community Radio- mid term evaluation, January 2003

‘Forest of Dean-Review of Special Status’ Report of findings Volume 1
(Countryside Agency)

‘Forest of Dean-Review of Special Status’ Technical Report Volume 2
(Countryside Agency)

Royal Forest of Dean By Definition Final Report- ‘What Makes the Forest of Dean
Special?’

Forest of Dean District Landscape Character Assessment
(Landscape Design Associates)

Forest of Dean District Landscape Strategy
(Landscape Design Associates)

‘Forest of Dean View’ back catalogue
(Countryside Agency)

