

Executive Summary

This report presents a cross regional development strategy for the National Forest area. The study area is shown in Figure 2.1 on page 5 of the main report. It covers the whole of the Districts of East Staffordshire, North West Leicestershire, and South Derbyshire together with that part of Hinckley and Bosworth within the former Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfields area. It also includes those parts of Lichfield District Council and Chamwood District Council which lie within the National Forest boundary. As the map shows the area contains a complex combination of regional and local authority administrative boundaries. The rationale behind the study was to identify those issues which are common to the study area as a whole and which would benefit from a co-ordinated or joint approach by the various authorities involved. A particular emphasis of the study was to identify current and future opportunities arising from the development of the National Forest.

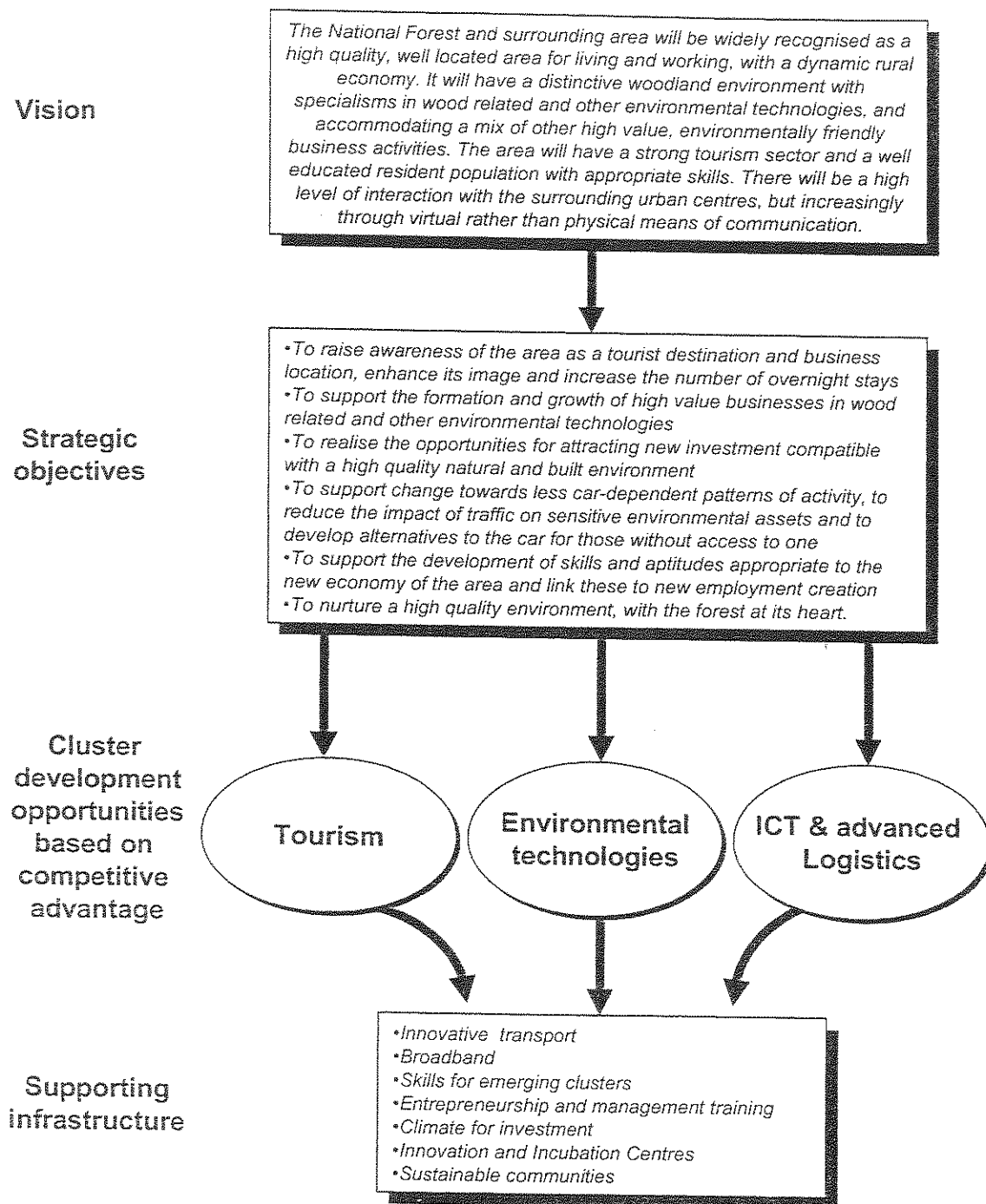
The study began with an initial round of meetings with representatives of the four District Councils and the National Forest Company and a desk based analysis of existing regional, sub-regional and local development strategies. Following these consultations a document was prepared by the SQW team which summarised the main common issues identified and posed some questions pertaining to what kind of strategy would be required to address these issues. This document was then circulated widely to regional development agencies, local economic partnerships, local authorities, colleges, Learning and Skill Councils and business support organisations. A second round of consultations followed and this draft strategy was prepared on the basis of these consultations and feedback from an interim report to the Steering Group. The intention is to present the strategy to a workshop later this year before finalising the document.

The various strategies analysed (around 40 in total) revealed a general consensus on priorities across the study area. Sustainable transport, tourism, learning and skills (particularly ICT), promotion of investment and innovation and the nurturing of sustainable communities are high priorities across the area. The consultations revealed that a great deal of cross boundary co-operation already occurs on all of these priority issues, however the main emphasis is on relatively short term problem solving and there is little time available for long term strategy development taking full account of the changes in social, economic and physical environments caused by the continued development of the National Forest.

Based on the opportunities presented by the National Forest, a vision for the study area was agreed:

"The National Forest and surrounding area will be widely recognised as a high quality, well located area for living and working, with a dynamic rural economy. It will have a distinctive woodland environment with specialisms in wood related and other environmental technologies, and accommodating a mix of other high value, environmentally friendly business activities. The area will have a strong tourism sector and a well educated resident population with appropriate skills. There will be a high level of interaction with the surrounding urban centres, but increasingly through virtual rather than physical means of communication"

To be effective strategies must focus on a limited number of objectives. Three sectors were identified where the study area possesses a competitive advantage which is likely to increase further in the future; tourism, environmental technologies and ICT, particularly relating to advanced logistics. The team then identified actions aimed at encouraging the development of an infrastructure which would support and encourage growth in these three key sectors and help them develop into dynamic business clusters, taking the priorities identified in the existing strategies as a starting point. The whole process is presented schematically below.



The three clusters were selected as ones in which the region has existing strengths which are likely to grow as the Forest develops. In the case of *tourism* the area will obviously benefit from the establishment of the forested areas, and co-ordinated branding and marketing of the study area should aim to stimulate more visitors. In addition, to maximise the economic benefits of increased visitor numbers, more overnight stays must be encouraged by facilitating the development of suitable overnight accommodation in response to demand.

The study area already has significant strengths in *environmental technologies*. These strengths should be built upon, particularly in wood related and renewable energy industries. The development of innovation centres linked to local colleges and the introduction of relevant courses with business and management skills as part of the curriculum, will stimulate local business development and provide an appropriately skilled labour market. Current provision of *ICT* skills and training in the

area is good, much of this linked to the distribution industry. The more widespread introduction of broadband services should be encouraged. An improved ICT infrastructure combined with an increasingly pleasant physical environment and relatively low-cost housing could do much to attract other knowledge based industries serving the surrounding major urban areas, such as advanced engineering services and the creative media sector.

The strategy defines seven areas where measures could be taken on a cross boundary basis to encourage development of the three priority clusters. The first of these is *innovative transport*. Car dependency in the area is high and it is necessary to take measures to limit growth which is not sustainable. Public transport within the area is relatively poor apart from directly between the major urban centres. This is exacerbated by the fact that the study area lays across the boundaries of three public transport networks. To improve the situation it will be necessary to increase local sources of finance for transport projects e.g. through co-ordinated charging for parking, investigate innovative methods of public transport and promote more environmentally friendly modes of transport.

Use of *broadband* should be promoted by providing support to local campaigns and aggregating demand to increase provision and improving training opportunities for effective use of the technology. There is scope to further develop *skills for the emerging clusters* within the area. The two main colleges in the area both have ambitious plans for expansion and are actively involved in outreach activities. It would be desirable for increased co-ordination between the colleges and the three Learning and Skills Councils to ensure adequate provision of relevant skills for the future. All of these courses should include options for *entrepreneurship and management training* to encourage and enable future young entrepreneurs.

The area has benefited significantly in the past from funding to facilitate regeneration and inward investment. However to continue to maintain this positive *climate for investment* it would be desirable to co-ordinate branding and marketing of the area as a whole both nationally and internationally. As previously mentioned, stimulation of indigenous businesses may be helped by the establishment of *incubator and/or innovation centres* based on the environmental technology sector.

All of the above factors should be taken onboard when developing more targeted strategies such as those focused on transport corridors such as the A50. The ultimate aim should be to foster and encourage the development of *sustainable communities* supported by good transport networks and a diverse sustainable economy within pleasant surroundings. A long term view is essential to ensure that the optimum balance is maintained between the pressures of local economic development and the environmental benefits arising due to the continued development of the National Forest.

The report concludes with some recommendations grouped under each of the seven action areas listed above. The recommendations are grouped into short term measures (less than three years) and longer term measures. They are summarised tables at the end of the report.

6 Recommendations

6.1 This final chapter summarises actions the study team feel should be progressed on a cross border basis in the short and medium to long term, and who should take the main responsibility for co-ordinating activity (bold and italics).

Within 3 years

6.2 A Cross Boundary Transport Strategy for the Study Area should be prepared (*District Councils to lead*), focusing on those aspects of local transport which are difficult to deal with in County LTPs or through the medium of Rural Bus Partnerships because of boundaries cutting across areas of service needs. For example:

- innovative public transport provision for cross border areas with diffuse demands that cannot be efficiently met by conventional services, drawing on the flexibilities identified in the recent report of the Social Exclusion Unit³
- proposals for developing a third Trent Crossing and links to the Ashby by-pass, making use of developer contributions as well as LTP funds. This needs to be done in a way that links the A511 corridor to the national network and meets local environmental and regeneration needs, but without attracting excessive through traffic 'end to end'.
- providing a coordinated approach to cross-boundary networks of cycleways, bridleways and footpaths, as recommended by the recent joint report by the Institute of Civil Engineers and the Countryside Agency ('Rural Routes and Networks'⁴).
- proposing a common framework for generating and applying locally-raised resources for transport purposes.

6.3 The existing collaborative marketing through the "National Forest and Beyond" initiative should be continued and if possible broadened to include other attractions such as Alton Towers. The activities within this marketing effort should be closely co-ordinated with marketing efforts by Local Authorities and the RDAs to attract inward investment. The websites of all local attractions should be linked to others in the study area. It should also be ensured that the National Forest website is featured on all relevant national websites such as

³ ODPM Social Exclusion Unit (2003) 'Making the Connections: final report on Transport and Social Exclusion'

⁴ Institute of Civil Engineers / Countryside Agency (2002) 'Rural Routes and Networks: creating and preserving routes that are sustainable, convenient, tranquil, attractive and safe'



“Visit Britain”. As soon as possible the DMS system should be utilised to facilitate booking of accommodation through any of the websites, whilst also allowing better tracking of tourist activity. An annual Wood Festival should be designed and promoted in the area as a whole (*National Forest and Beyond Initiative*).

- 6.4 Priority should be given to the stimulation of demand for broadband services. In locations with telephone exchanges which could be ADSL enabled, stimulation of demand will reduce the time required to achieve broadband “trigger levels”. Elsewhere, it should encourage the provision of wireless broadband to groups of villages not likely to benefit from terrestrial broadband services in the near future. (*emda, AWM*).
- 6.5 Further co-operation in the study area and beyond should be encouraged between the main further and higher education providers, in particular Burton and Stephenson Colleges. This might be achieved by expanding the membership of SURF (the Staffordshire Universities Regional Federation). (*Burton and Stephenson College*).
- 6.6 Research should be conducted to establish market demand and the feasibility of establishing the following in the study area:
- *innovation centre(s)*; this study should be focused on demand relating to particular sectors. We suggest that environmental technologies form the main focus, though the study need not be exclusive to these technologies in the first instance (*emda , LSEP*)
 - *incubation facilities*; Burton College is already considering providing incubator facilities as part of its ongoing expansion. Again the focus of the feasibility study should be environmental technologies. This study could be combined with the above to give to provide a single sector based feasibility study addressing market demand for Innovation Centres or Incubation Units (*SSEP, Burton College, other SSPs*)
 - *Centre of Excellence* in environmental technologies, in particular wood based industries e.g. woodland development, wood fuel installations. This idea has previously been proposed and could be based at the Centre of the National Forest (possibly at Stephenson College Moira site). Another possibility would be to combine the Centre with the wood fuel processing facility and/ or Innovation/ Incubation facilities (*emda, AWM, LSEP and Stephenson College, other SSPs*)
 - wood fuel processing facilities. Some work has already been completed on assessing the feasibility of setting up various types of wood processing facility with a view to using wood as an efficient and clean fuel source. This should be revisited in the light of changing legislation and economic conditions (*emda, LSEP*).



- 6.7 A visioning exercise should be conducted on the future of the main market towns in the area e.g. Burton, Coalville, Swadlincote, Uttoxeter. A particular emphasis of this work should be to assess the various roles of the towns in the future and how the different images can be branded and marketed as a package (*Local Authorities*).

Longer term (responsibility to be assigned later)

- 6.8 The expanded SURF, or its equivalent, should develop new courses to adapt to changing demand for skills. This should be an ongoing process and integrated with the development bespoke and modular courses.

- 6.9 Depending on the results of the feasibility studies some or all of the following should be established:

- innovation centre(s)
- incubation facilities
- Centre of Excellence in environmental technologies
- wood fuel processing facility.

There are also a range of other possibilities such as a Centre of Excellence based on the same site as the wood fuel facility.

- 6.10 Research should be conducted to investigate market demand for a large purpose built conference centre in the area to further encourage stop over trade.
- 6.11 Canals and river development is continuing in the region not least through the Central Rivers Project. The potential for further improvements should be investigated to ascertain how synergies with the National Forest development could be maximised.
- 6.12 Tables 6.1 and 6.2 summarise the actions proposed in tabular form.

Table 6.1: Actions within 3 years

Action Area	AIM	Possible Actions	Lead Responsibility	Other Actors
<i>Innovative Public Transport</i>	Develop Cross Boundary Transport Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Address Feasibility of innovative public transport schemes ▪ Assess feasibility of third Trent crossing ▪ Improve co-ordination of provision of cycleways and footpaths ▪ Look at feasibility of raising money locally from coordinated charging schemes eg: car parks ▪ Produce a National Forest and Beyond public transport/visitor attractions timetable. 	District Councils	County Councils NFC Rural Transport Partnerships
<i>Tourism Branding and Marketing</i>	Continue Co-ordinated Tourism Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure National Forest is featured in all relevant regional/sub-regional marketing. ▪ Broaden scope of marketing campaign ▪ Increase links with RDAs ▪ Link local websites together and to other national sites ▪ Increase the range and quality of overnight accommodation. 	National Forest and Beyond Initiative	NFC, RDAs, HNFF and Local Authorities
<i>Broadband</i>	Improve broadband provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promote schemes to concentrate and increase demand and reduce trigger levels 	LEPs	RDAs
<i>Skills for Emerging Clusters</i>	Provide skilled workers for emerging clusters from within area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pressure broadband providers to extend supply as quickly as possible. ▪ Increased co-ordination between Colleges and users of skilled workers 	Burton and Stephenson Colleges	LSCs, BLs, Job+, Connexions
<i>Entrepreneurship and Management Training</i>	Provide skilled workers for emerging clusters from within area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased co-ordination between Colleges and users of skilled workers ▪ Develop joint courses which combine entrepreneurial training with relevant skill such as environmental technology or wood related skills ▪ Conduct research into current and future skills requirements for local businesses 	Burton and Stephenson Colleges	SURE, other HEIS/FF's



Table 6.1: Actions within 3 years (cont.)

Asiibn Area	Aim	Possible Actions	Lead Responsibility	Other Actors
<i>Innovation and Incubation Centres</i>	Provide incubators and innovation centres if required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Feasibility study into provision of Innovation and/or Incubation Centres based on environmental technologies/wood based industry 	RDAs, LEPs	Colleges
<i>Sustainable Communities</i>	Ensure community developments are sustainable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conduct visioning exercise on the futures of the main market towns. ▪ Conduct corridor development studies. 	Local Authorities	



Table 6.2: Longer term actions

Action	Aim	Possible Activities	Lead Responsibility	Other Actors
<i>Innovative Public Transport</i>	Develop Cross Boundary Transport Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introduce innovative public transport schemes. ▪ Begin development or cancel/ postpone plans for third Trent crossing. ▪ Continue co-ordination of provision of cycleways and footpaths. ▪ Introduce schemes to locally raise money from road charging. ▪ Continue development of navigable rivers and canals in co-operation with other developments 	District Councils	County Councils
<i>Tourism Branding and Marketing</i>	Continue Co-ordinated Tourism Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Broaden scope of marketing campaign. ▪ Joint marketing with RDAs ▪ Promote appropriate tourist accommodation. 	National Forest and Beyond Initiative	
<i>Broadband</i>	Improve broadband provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase and extend broadband provisions and take-up. 	LEPs	RDAs
<i>Skills for Emerging Clusters</i>	Provide skilled workers for emerging clusters from within area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review current and future skill provision 	Burton and Stephenson Colleges	LSCs, BLs, Job+, Connexions
<i>Entrepreneurship and Management Training</i>	Provide skilled workers for emerging clusters from within area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continue co-ordination between Colleges and users of skilled workers. 	Burton and Stephenson Colleges	SURF, other HEIS/FES
<i>Innovation and Incubation Centres</i>	Provide incubators and innovation centres if required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provision of Innovation and/or Incubation Centres based on environmental technologies/wood based industry. 	RDAs, LEPs	Colleges
<i>Sustainable Communities</i>	Ensure community developments are sustainable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop integrated physical, economic, social and transport master plans for major development sites. ▪ Implement corridor strategies. 	Local Authorities	

