



Last word

Alistair Yeomans, Director of Forestry, SYLVA Foundation

Throughout history trees have formed an intrinsic part of our cultural landscape. Since antiquity woodlands have been managed and worked by woodsmen supplying timber, the most noble of building materials, and firewood for heating homes and cooking food.

Growing trees and using their wood is increasingly recognised as one of the most environmentally sustainable land uses. Yet, in recent decades our relationship with our trees and woodlands has waned, with the UK importing an estimated 80% of its timber, whilst only 20% of the countries' woods are actively managed.

The University of Cambridge's Department of Land Economy has been running a long-term study investigating trends in the management of private woodlands on traditional estates in England and Wales. The study commenced in 1963, continued through the 80s and 90s and the findings from the latest survey in 2006, strongly suggested that there has been a deterioration of the financial performance of many estate woodlands to the point where management has been reduced or even suspended.

WH Auden wrote 'a culture is no better than its woods' and it is with the revival of our 'woodculture' in mind that the SYLVA Foundation has launched the myForest website. This online forestry service provides a range of tools and resources with a view to supporting woodland owners and managers in managing their woods and creating links with local and regional wood-using businesses and craftsmen.

The principle behind myForest is simple; for a sustainable forestry sector to thrive in the UK, we need to know the species and quality of the trees that are growing in our woodlands. This is not a new idea, as the importance of mapping and recording woodland resources was first recognised and commissioned in the 1662 publication *Sylva, A Discourse on Forest-Trees and the Propagation of Timber in His Majesty's Dominions* by the English writer John Evelyn.

The myForest service builds on this concept by enabling woodland owners and managers to create a free woodland account to map their woodlands using online aerial



Above: A typically neglected woodland in the South East of England. Below: Bluebells thriving in a well managed oak stand in Hertfordshire.

"myForest is a stunning use of new technology in a traditional industry. It has the potential to be a major step forward in the regeneration of our woodland management culture"
Paul Orsi, Blenheim Palace

photography, record inventory information and then market timber and wood products on the myForest map. Photographs can be uploaded of each woodland compartment and all this information is easily converted into a management plan which is

compatible with the Forestry Commission's template and can be printed, saved or emailed as a PDF document.

Wood-using and forestry related businesses such as sawmills, firewood merchants, woodland contractors etc., are able to promote their business for free by signing up to the myForest map-based business directory. A direct link is provided to each business's website, letting local woodland owners and members of the general public know the products and services that the business offers.

The service is continually being improved and developed with SYLVA aiming to provide a central platform for forestry stakeholders to communicate and link with each other. Stakeholder focus group meetings are organised, made up of individuals from a cross-section of the forestry sector, ranging from Forestry Commission representatives to self-employed contractors to review and suggest improvements to the site's function.

A core aim of the site is to create an easy-to-use system to market and raise the profile of local woodland products. Timber can be marketed as standing or as felled lots, ensuring flexibility to achieve the best possible price at the forest gate. Optimising timber values for woodland owners is seen as key towards funding woodland management activities.

The site is well positioned to support the recent upsurge in interest in wood as a biomass energy source. The map-based system enables searches to be carried out on a local basis, thereby supporting close to source procurement of wood, ensuring 'woodmiles' are kept to a minimum.

Forestry and how we can best use our woodlands is moving up the political agenda with the range of environmental, social and economic benefits being clearly detailed in the government's UK Forestry Standard, 2004. SYLVA hopes that the site will promote the beauty and benefits of home-grown timber, support low-carbon communities and ensure that our woodlands are properly cared for in the 21st century.

SYLVA Foundation
Find out and sign up to SYLVA's myForest service at:
www.myForest.org.uk