

Poplar tree production



raw material for renewable energy

Project Summary

Diversification of part of an arable farm into commercial timber production, growing poplar for UK and overseas markets.

Background

Concerned with being reliant on solely growing crops for the cattle feed industry, this farm on the outskirts of Swindon looked into diversifying part of its operation.

The Project

The Great Western Community Forest was able to help by providing technical input and information about financial assistance for woodland planting. As a result, 25 hectares were converted in to a commercial poplar plantation. This met both the farm's economic objectives and the Forest's purposes of increasing tree cover in the area and providing greater public access to greenspace around towns.

What has been achieved?

31,000 trees have been planted. Since fast-growing poplar clones were used, the plantation will generate income just a few years after planting – the trees have grown 5 metres high in 3 years. In addition, because less management time is needed than with conventional farming, the farmer is able to earn extra income by doing contract work for other local farmers.

The rapid growth of the crop means that it now screens the nearby town from a major landfill operation. There is public access across the site, with a car park and signage. Visitors include students on educational trips and interested landowners learning about commercial timber production.

There has been an increase in wildlife. Birds of prey hunt over the rough grassland, indicating that a healthy small mammal population has returned. And, because the fields are now wetter in autumn and winter, there is excellent feeding habitat for over-wintering snipe, curlew and woodcock.

| KEY FACTS | |
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| DATES | 1998-1999 |
| Partners | The Poplar Tree Company, landowner |
| Costs | £40,500 |
| Funders | Woodland Grant Scheme (FC), Farm Woodland Premium Scheme (DEFRA), landowner |
| Size/scale | 25 ha planting, 31,250 trees |