

‘Wood to Warmth’

Just a load of hot air? or a business opportunity?

Many of us already use firewood in open fires or wood burning stoves but often wonder if woodfuel as a market for our lower quality wood will ever become a reality!

The Forestry Commission and Thames Valley Energy established the Woodheat Solutions project to transfer experience from Finland and Austria where the use of woodfuel is common. The technology of burning and supplying woodfuel is well developed but it is the concept of selling heat rather than just woodfuel that appears to offer a useful business opportunity to the farmer, estate or woodland owner in the UK.

Farmers heat the village of Straden with woodfuel:



Local farmers built a heating plant and sell heat to neighbours. Heat is supplied via a ‘heat main’ to metered heat exchangers in each property and owners pay only for the heat they use. Other properties can opt to connect to the heat main while retaining their existing heating boilers (in case the diesel price drops!). The system is built into the hillside to provide a sunken woodchip store with easy delivery by farm trailer. An accumulator tank (insulated hot water tank) and solar thermal panels are used to help the system run efficiently.



While district heating isn’t yet common in the UK many landowners have their own heat market in their home, farm business or let property. Existing farm buildings, machinery, staff and woods could be utilised to supply this heat market

Tractor based harvester operating in Sussex allows mechanisation and versatility in farm woods. Some equipment may be eligible for grants from your Regional Development Agency



Finnish farmer using farm machinery to produce and supply woodchips

There are then opportunities to supply heat to others: a group of Austrian farmers had installed their own woodfuelled boilers in their local school and had a long term contract to supply heat, adding significantly to the value of their ‘product’.