

Mobilising the Timber Resource

GiB awakes in northern England



Since Peter Stenner set up WoodFuelBarn six years ago, the business has seen a steady, year on year growth in the supply of kiln dried hardwood logs to the Woodsure+ quality standard. This year he expects to see a 30% increase in turnover and continues his ongoing investment in machinery and equipment.

The recent additions of a Binderberger SSP 520 firewood processor and a Binderberger forwarding trailer have moved the firewood processing facility forward in terms of speed and efficiency. A 6m bunk on the trailer allows for raw material to be sorted by diameter at the stack, with two selections being brought down to fill the infeed racks of the processors.

While the Dalen 2054 can process material up to 44cm in diameter, the WoodFuelBarn system sees it concentrating on the smaller diameter material. The Binderberger 450 is at its most efficient handling the mid-diameter material, but the acquisition of the SSP 520 has opened the door to processing the considerably more bulky logs that are delivered to WoodFuelBarn's stockpiles.

So far, three selections can be made for delivery to the firewood processors, and the precise dimensions are not too critical. With the

arrival of the Binderberger forwarding trailer, crane and grapple at the Tyne and Wear business, adding a fourth option seemed like common sense to Peter Stenner.

The Binderberger L920 hydraulic cleaver works alongside the trailer and reduces the bigger hardwood butts, up to 80cm in diameter, into material suitable for the processors. The grapple presents the oversize logs to the cleaver and can reload the timber onto the trailer in dimensions suitable for any of the processors.

The mobility of the Binderberger machinery has allowed Peter Stenner to provide a service for his woodfuel producer colleagues in the area. One Northumberland supplier sets all his oversized material aside throughout the year. WoodFuelBarn can process his material into saleable produce in a couple of days.

Consistency of the products sold – both in terms of size and low moisture content – is seen as the key to the success of WoodFuelBarn. All of the raw material processed is grown in Britain. Hardly surprising, then, that Peter Stenner has signed up to the Grown in Britain Woodfuel Standard...

Will Richardson and Andrew Kitching of Northwoods were pleased to be able to use the WoodFuelBarn premises to promote

the Grown in Britain standard for all players involved in the forestry chain. Andrew has laboured over the groundwork and found that promotion of the scheme is eligible for funding under the European, time-limited project SIMWOOD – the Sustainable Innovative Mobilisation of Wood.

has to be said that it is one of the most innovative ideas in the SIMWOOD project, where many partners are concentrating on consolidating relationships within the timber supply chain itself.

Grown in Britain (GiB) has presented the vehicle for moving the initiative forward through its stand-



The 6m bunk of the Binderberger forwarding trailer can carry two diameter selections from the stack to the firewood processors. The Binderberger L920 hydraulic splitter comes into its own reducing the largest diameter material alongside the trailer. The combination is extremely efficient for delivering to the processors from the stockpile, but also gives the option of working offsite.

This project is concentrating on 11 regional programmes and has the support of 28 partners. The Yorkshire and North East England regional scheme has the backing of Northwoods, Forest Research and the Smallwoods Association. Across Europe, project partners have identified widely varying constraints limiting the increase in usage of the timber resource.

In southern Sweden's Småland province, for example, the increased usage and more efficient extraction of harvesting residues for fuel have been the focus. The Slovenians, amongst other initiatives, are looking into the practicality of 'machinery rings' to increase production from the woodlands. In south-east Ireland the focus is on expanding the role of producer groups.

In Yorkshire and the north-east of England, the branding of forest products to communicate to the consumer their British provenance has been seen as one possibility for mobilising the timber resource. It

ards schemes, but Andrew Kitching pointed out that the success of all the proposals – and the possibility of future funding – is dependent upon positive results. Involving the end user is an ambitious idea, but the long term benefits may be considerable.

Will Richardson stepped up to explain the GiB standard scheme and brand. It is worth pointing out that it is not a replacement or substitute for certification schemes such as FSC or PEFC. It does, however, assure that timber and products are sourced from forests managed under the government's UK Forest Standard and comply with public procurement policy.

There will be a certain amount of auditing, but as it is the only product that will be licensed, this will not be as intrusive or wide-ranging as under the larger certification schemes. Certificates of competence for chainsaw or machine operation, for example, will not need checking. The cost of enhancing the product with the GiB logo



The Dalen 2054 still has an important role to play in the processing yard, handling the smaller material. It is, according to the operator, a satisfying machine to work. Skill and experience can reduce to a minimum the inevitable splitting chamber blockages associated with the more simple processors. Power is supplied by a John Deere 2450 tractor.



Will Richardson (left) and Andrew Kitching. Enabling businesses in the forestry chain to benefit from the sustainable, innovative mobilisation of wood (the European SIMWOOD project) is their mission. Product branding under the Grown in Britain standard is seen as having a real potential in this respect.

reflects limited yet still rigorous requirement for auditing.

Owners with more than 20 hectares of woodland in the project area will pay 50 pence a hectare in the first year; the fee will be waived for owners with less. Chain of custody licence holders with a turnover of one to three million pounds will pay £200. Audit costs will start at £20 per member. In subsequent years, when the initial funding will no longer be available, costs will rise, but Will Richardson hopes to be able to keep the increase to around 50%.

The GiB standard is open to all players in the timber chain, from woodland owners through to sawmillers and on to retailers. The key requirements for licensing are UK provenance, legal felling, sourcing

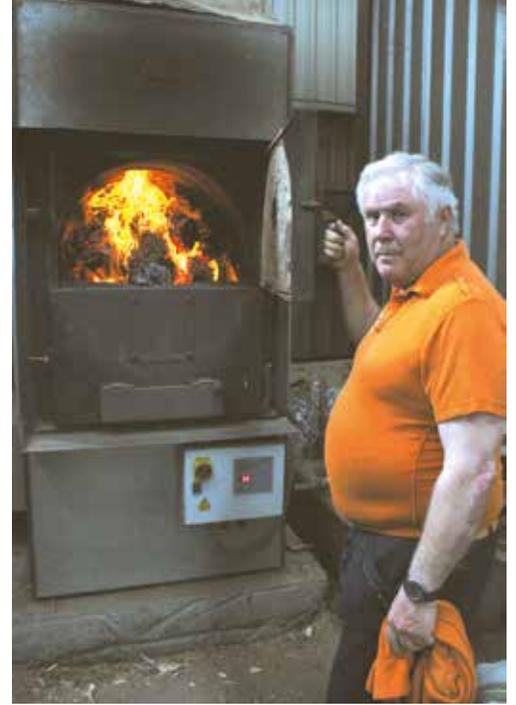
from sustainable woodlands and an effective chain of custody for inputs and outputs. The GiB woodfuel standard (as opposed to the GiB standard aimed at the timber products sector) allows a certain amount of leeway in sourcing material. It must all be legally felled, but as long as at least 70% is from sustainably managed sources, the product will be compliant.

It is notable, in Will Richardson's view, that some large sawmilling businesses have signed up to the GiB standard. It has also had a high take-up amongst hardwood sawmillers in the south of England who can see the advantage of applying the GiB logo to their products. Interest is also being shown in counties such as Lincolnshire and Cheshire.



The new Binderberger SSP 520 is powered, like the Binderberger 450, by a Hatz Silent Pack diesel engine. Accepting material up to 52cm in diameter, the splitting force of 30 tonnes is applied to the sections as they meet the 16-way splitting knife. The output conveyor is suitably wide to conform with the machine's high output. The mobility of the two Binderberger processors eases the logistical problems of working offsite.

Peter Stenner with the most powerful of the three boilers he can call upon for drying his bagged firewood. A moisture content of less than 15% is guaranteed for both hardwood and softwood products. Bag sizes of 0.6, 1.0 and 1.3 cubic metres are available for free delivery within five miles.



Andy Howard of Pennine Biomass was instrumental in initiating the project. FSC certification would have cost him in the region of £8,000. What he required was simply to make it clear to his current and future customers that the products he supplied were locally sourced from sustainable woodlands. The GiB woodfuel standard fitted the bill admirably.

One woodland owner wondered whether the GiB standard would ensure a premium was paid for his sawlogs, as would happen if he were certificated under FSC. Andy Howard had to admit that there was no guaranteed financial benefit at the moment. In his view those benefits were a few years down the line; he saw the branding as a 'Red Tractor' for British timber that would gradually gain the public's confidence.

WoodFuelBarn's Peter Stenner disagreed. Selling directly to the public, he is convinced that signing up for the GiB woodfuel standard has already increased sales to existing customers and found him some new ones. It is also, in his opinion, the best way for British woodfuel producers to compete with the growing trade in imported hardwood logs and the potential risk of pests and diseases they present, notably the emerald ash borer.

Located on the edge of historic Chopwell Wood – devastated by a few hurricanes over recent centuries but also a supplier of timbers to the Royal Navy – WoodFuelBarn has certainly played its part in mobilising the timber resource of north-east England. As for innovation, Peter Stenner is always ready to increase the efficiency of his system in a 'hands on' style.

A large conveyor and hydraulically

operated cleaner have been fabricated to cope with the prodigious output of the three firewood processors. The bagging system – a 1.3 cubic metre bag can be filled in six minutes with the equipment in full flow – is also a self-build model. Welding a new Hardox splitting knife for the Binderberger 450 took some considerable skill and effort but ensured a consistently sized product arrives on the conveyor from each of the processors.

The small amount of woodfuel products not conforming to the strict specification is used to fire the three boilers used for kiln drying. The 65kW HDG chip boiler and the 130kW Eco Angus log downdraught gasification boiler feed a 10,000 litre heat accumulator. Heat from the 240kW direct air boiler is blown straight into the large kiln, raising the temperature to 70°C or 90°C, as conditions demand. Whatever the climatic conditions, uniform moisture content of the product is assured.

Will Richardson was cautiously optimistic that the GiB scheme would enable other forestry businesses to emulate the success of WoodFuelBarn. "What we will focus on with this group scheme is the local element rather than the high end of the certification system – that is the remit of the likes of FSC and PEFC." Businesses and organisations certificated by those bodies are, of course, welcome to join the GiB standard. They will find it a painless, and hopefully profitable, investment.

Hilary Burke

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