



Independent Panel on Forestry

PROGRESS REPORT



Further information about the Independent Panel on Forestry is available via
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/forestrypanel>

Quotes used in the main body of the progress report and in the annex have been taken from responses to the call for views.

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Contents

Chairman's Foreword	4
Introduction	6
What you have said to us	6
Woods and Forests – good for people, nature and the economy	7
Section 1	11
Forests and forestry in England: facts and figures	12
Good for people	15
Good for nature	16
Good for the green economy	18
Section 2	21
Woodland creation and management	22
The public forest estate	23
The Forestry Commission: a forestry focus within Government	25
Woodlands in private, charitable and other forms of public ownership	27
Next steps: continuing the journey	28
Annexes	29
Annex 1 – Terms of reference and membership	30
Annex 2 – Call for views	31

Chairman's Foreword

The intimate connection between people and our natural environment has been a strong thread running through my own experience and work as a Bishop. One of my reasons for taking on the role of Chair of the Independent Panel on Forestry was an increasing awareness of the connections between people and place, between livelihoods and landscapes, rich or devoid of plants and animals. I have been struck by the heartfelt connections between the forests and woods of England and the people who live, work and relax in them. More than 42,000 people responded to the Panel's call for views.

They overwhelmingly expressed their passion for the public forest estate, and woods more generally, as places of recreation, a way to connect with nature and as a vital source of resources, not least of wood.

The Panel was born out of a fierce public debate about the future of the one fifth of England's woods which are managed by the Forestry Commission. This progress report sets out initial thoughts on this crucial issue. But our investigations have also shown us how important it is that we look at the future for all woods and forests in England and think how we can create maximum impact on a "triple bottom line" for the environment, people and the economy.





One comment that has stuck with the Panel was when we looked out over the Forest of Dean with its different types and ages of trees, and were told that this was in fact “a political landscape”. We heard that the pattern of land use and trees over the centuries had been shaped by the national politics of the day, such as the planting of great oaks to provide timber for the Royal Navy. For thousands of years it has been a landscape shaped by people, and even left to nature, forests are never static; they form dynamic landscapes.

Changes are in the wind as both Wales and Scotland look afresh at how the Forestry Commission can be best organised to match the ambitions of their countries post-devolution. These changes may have implications for the Forestry Commission in England and provide further impetus for the Panel’s work.

The Panel wants to see a more wooded landscape in England and believes that both the benefits and the costs of forests have been underestimated. A distinction has sometimes incorrectly been drawn between on the one hand, woodland activity and jobs to produce sustainable timber and on the other hand, work to enhance nature or improve conditions for recreational access. When managed well such activity is often complementary. We need to develop and appreciate a new culture of woodland skills.

Many of the people who responded so articulately to our call for views spoke about the need to unhitch the management of the forests from electoral timescales, which don’t match those of the lifespan of trees. In this progress report we take the first steps in framing some of the challenges for our final report next spring, which we hope will have a lifetime of decades.



Introduction

The Government's consultation on the public forest estate caused a huge reaction and catapulted forests and woods into the headlines. This and the amazing response to the Panel's call for views, underlines the fact that forests and woods hold an enduring and complex place in people's lives.

Some may be tempted to put forestry back in its box. However, we believe that out of this period of dispute must grow a new appreciation of woods and forests. This needs to encompass trees in all sorts of settings and forms of ownership. It needs to include and value the businesses that grow trees and use wood, as well as the other public benefits of woodland.

This report sets out the progress the Panel has made over six meetings and four visits to the Forest of Dean, Northumberland, Kent and Nottinghamshire. Our terms of reference and list of members can be found at the end of this report in Annex 1, and more information on our work is available at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/forestrypanel/>.

In this report we share our first thoughts. We are already clear that we need to go deeper into the issues and look more broadly than the recent debate has done. We believe there are some major challenges for the future of woods, forests and forestry in England which need to be understood and seized upon.

What you have said to us

The vigorous response to the curtailed Government consultation on the public forest estate, and more than 42,000 heartfelt and articulate responses to our call for views, are just the surface expression of the great passion which people have for trees and woods. We have been uplifted and challenged through our discussions with people we have met on our visits.

A number of themes clearly emerged from responses to the call for views. Evident across all of them is the important role woodland plays in so many people's lives, particularly as a place for personal enjoyment and appreciation of the natural world. The number of responses has been both a delight and a challenge. As well as the many responses from individuals we had several hundred detailed responses from representative bodies, conservation bodies, individuals, specialists and businesses.

The responses have already had a strong impact on this progress report and will continue to provide a source of ideas and evidence for the Panel as our work continues. An analysis of the responses is set out in Annex 2. We will also continue to draw on the results of other reviews of forestry in England that have taken place over recent years.

Many of the responses concentrate on the public forest estate and the immediate issues around the Government consultation. This is understandable. As a Panel we have been struck by the need to address these issues, but also to look deeper and wider and across a longer timescale. We need to look more deeply at whether the current set up for the Forestry Commission is the right one,

“The trees were my chosen place of escape and gave me a feeling of peace and tranquillity. The trees gave me a sense of permanence because of their age and what they had therefore seen and experienced themselves.”

more widely at all the forests and woods of England, and to think in terms of timescale which extends to the end of the century not just the end of the year.

Woods and Forests – good for people, nature and the economy

Woods and forests are places where people feel connected with history, with nature and with production of one of the basic and important materials of our everyday life – wood. A challenge for us as a Panel is to translate these issues into recommendations for policy and action on forests and forestry that will take place at a national level. We want to make full use of our broad terms of reference and look right across Government activity, very much including, but not only at, the public forest estate.

There are two broad themes which run through all of our thinking in this progress report. One is timescales. We need to reflect the life-spans and timescales of trees in the way we set and implement policy in relation to woods and forests. Changes in forestry policy which reflect electoral timescales, rather than those of the life-span of trees, do not provide the strategic underpinning for the public forest and wider sector to really flourish. We want to look for long term and sustainable ways to do the best for our woods and forests, so that we can all benefit from them to the greatest possible extent. This might not mean quick

wins but we hope it can create a clear path, with an enduring map for a journey which should continue steadily across decades.

The second theme that we have been struck by is the diversity of benefits from forests and woods and the strength and complexity of the interactions between them. This relates strongly to the idea of a “triple bottom line” that demonstrates benefits that are good for people, for nature and for the economy². Forestry, as an activity, has the potential to be a great example of a “win-win-win” for people, the environment and the economy.

This triple bottom line is not without some tensions. However, these are small compared to benefits of woods and forests which we believe are greatly undervalued. There is recent work, such as the National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA – see Box 1) which seeks to systematically understand the range of benefits we receive from nature and the current state of our natural environment. The NEA is a groundbreaking piece of work. While the authors themselves acknowledge some gaps and uncertainties within the analysis, it has the potential to make a significant contribution to ensuring that the wider benefits of nature are recognised and properly appreciated.

The NEA is a powerful framework within which to understand the relative costs and benefits derived from forests and forestry. It shows clearly where we have systematically

1. These quotes and those elsewhere in the text have been taken from responses to the call for views.
2. The term “Triple Bottom Line” was first coined by John Elkington in his 1994 book “Cannibals with Forks: the Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business”. It has since been adopted extensively into corporate social responsibility reporting frameworks ; for examples of best practice see the Global Reporting Initiative Sustainability Reporting Guidelines at <http://www.globalreporting.org/Home>.

“The countryside is not a museum, it is a working environment where woodland plays a major part and should be recognised as such.”¹

undervalued and therefore neglected the ways in which we depend on the natural environment. This provides us with strong pointers to where we should direct our attention. But the next step is to say what should be done in practice and in terms of policy.

There are two facts which give us cause for concern, but also optimism that we think major steps forward are achievable. The first is that only 52% of woods are actively managed³; that is, tended and cared for to deliver specific benefits, be that for nature, for leisure, for timber or for all three. The second is that rates of woodland creation in England have fallen in recent years.

There is huge scope to address these worrying trends. Trees and woods inspire and interest people for all sorts of reasons. This creates a bedrock of goodwill and inspires optimism in us for the future of England's woods and the profession and business of forestry.

Rising timber prices, the move to low carbon fuels and the passion in small and large firms for this sector provide sound business reasons for hope about the green economy. Our woodland habitats need concerted action to safeguard and enhance the multitude of benefits they provide. People have the power to change the course of national debates and to take action to enhance their local environment. If these forces are channelled in the right way, the returns could be immense.

The connection between the environment, people and the economy are issues that resonate around the world in dealing with global challenges, such as climate change

and deforestation. If we are to show global leadership, and persuade other countries to protect the environment, we need to take action to protect and enhance our biodiversity and ecosystems in England, in our woodlands as much as any other habitat.

The first section of this report expands each of the three parts of the triple bottom line for woods, forests and forestry, drawing on the wealth of material within the responses to our call for views.

In the second section, we then set out our first thoughts on how our aspirations for each of these areas link more specifically to the public forest estate, the wider work of the Forestry Commission, and to the potential to grow a greener economy.

Whilst the work and organisation of the Forestry Commission are covered later in the report, we want to make an important point upfront. The net public expenditure on the public forest estate, some £20 million this year, appears very modest and delivers benefits far in excess of this. This level of funding is small in government terms and, to us, appears to represent very good value for money. For comparison, £250million was recently allocated by the Department for Communities and Local Government to support weekly refuse collections⁴.

3. *Forestry Commission England Impact and Input Indicators 2011-15* published by the Forestry Commission in 2011 [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FC_ENGLAND_TOPSIX_INDICATORS_30SEP11_FINAL.pdf/\\$FILE/FC_ENGLAND_TOPSIX_INDICATORS_30SEP11_FINAL.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FC_ENGLAND_TOPSIX_INDICATORS_30SEP11_FINAL.pdf/$FILE/FC_ENGLAND_TOPSIX_INDICATORS_30SEP11_FINAL.pdf)

4. This fund will be available over the remainder of the current spending review period; details of the announcement are at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/corporate/1998987>

Box 1. The UK National Ecosystem Assessment⁵

The UK National Ecosystem Assessment analyses the UK natural environment in terms of the benefits it provides to society and the nation's continuing prosperity. It concluded that woodland is in relatively good shape compared to many other habitats but is changing as a result of changes in management, climate and new/emerging pests and diseases. Of any habitat woodlands possibly deliver the greatest number of ecosystem services including carbon storage, recreation, timber and a contribution to water regulation.

The benefits are grouped into four categories of "ecosystem service".

"Provisioning services" – these include the value of food, timber, and supporting a clean water supply.

- Domestic production of timber has increased, but is still just one quarter of the size of imports;
- English-grown timber and woodland management is associated with businesses which contribute £2.1 billion to GDP and employ 64,000 people;
- Woodland is a critical part of most lowland game shoots (40% of the 1.9 million shooting days in the UK) particularly in England;
- More use of firewood and woodfuel, and other products like fungi.

"Cultural services" – the importance of woods for what they mean to people.

- There are approximately 250-300 million day visits to woodland per year (GB);
- The social and environmental benefits of woodland are in the range of £1-2 billion per annum (2010 prices) (GB);
- Woods include about 5,000 scheduled ancient monuments (GB);
- They define many of our most treasured landscapes such as the Chilterns.
- 55% of people in England can access a wood of at least 20 ha within 4 km of home;
- In a survey of leisure visits in England 5% of all visits included a trip to a woodland or forest.

"Regulating Services" – factors that help keep nature in balance.

- The total carbon stock in UK forests (including soils) is around 800 megatonnes, with a further 80 Mt carbon in timber and wood products;
- Trees and woodlands can reduce local temperatures by 3–4°C providing beneficial shade in urban areas and for rivers.
- Woodlands in the right places can delay and reduce flood events
- Trees and other tall vegetation play a valuable role damping down noise pollution.

"Supporting services" – the broader contribution to UK biodiversity.

- Woods are amongst our richest terrestrial wildlife habitats.
- They include 10 woodland types listed under the EU Habitats and Species Directive and 6 priority habitats under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

5. *The UK National Ecosystem Assessment* published by UNEP-WCMC in 2011
<http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/Resources/tabid/82/Default.aspx>



Section 1

Forests and forestry in England: facts and figures

England contains about 1,294,000⁶ ha of woods and forests – an area about twice the size of Devon – as well as over 89 million⁷ non-woodland trees that contribute to the ‘woodiness’ of our urban and rural landscapes. The density and type of woodland vary considerably across the country (Figure 1); the high density of woodland in south-east England includes large numbers of small broadleaved woods, whereas the big blocks in Northumberland and in Norfolk are predominantly coniferous plantations. Nevertheless, very few places

are without at least a scatter of small woods or trees.

In England, 66% of woods are composed of broadleaved trees such as oak, ash, birch, and beech, while 34% is made up of conifers such as pines, spruce, larches and firs⁸.

Ten per cent of the land area of England is wooded⁹, well below European countries where the average is 37%. Much of the area of woodland has been planted or naturally established on open ground in the last century, but just under a third¹⁰, covering 2.6% of the country, is ancient woodland; this has been identified as the highest priority for nature conservation.

Box 2. Definition of terms

Forestry is defined as the practice of all aspects of tree management, including forest and woodland management, arboriculture, urban forestry, environmental forestry and research, education and training in these fields (Institute of Chartered Foresters).

Woodland is a minimum area of 0.5 hectares under stands of trees with, or with the potential to achieve, tree crown cover of more than 20% of the ground. (National Forest Inventory).

Wood/Forest are used interchangeably for defined blocks of woodland. Wood is used more often for small areas and forest for larger ones. Historically, the term Forest was used to describe land legally set aside as hunting grounds for nobility where game was free to roam, and which might include wooded areas but could be mainly heath, grassland or wetland.

Ancient woodland refers to a site ‘that is believed to have been continuously wooded since 1600AD’¹¹.

Open habitats are areas of largely unwooded semi-natural vegetation, for example heathland, moorland, acid grassland and wetland.

Woodland management activities can include the felling of trees followed by re-planting, the control of deer or cutting to maintain open space. These activities are undertaken in order to achieve one, or a number of, woodland management objectives. These can include timber production, benefitting wildlife, provision of access, game and sport management and conservation.

6. *National Forest Inventory Woodland Area Statistics: England* published by the Forestry Commission in 2011 [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/NFI_England_woodland_area_stats_2010_FINAL.pdf/\\$FILE/NFI_England_woodland_area_stats_2010_FINAL.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/NFI_England_woodland_area_stats_2010_FINAL.pdf/$FILE/NFI_England_woodland_area_stats_2010_FINAL.pdf)

7. *National Inventory of Woodland and Trees for England* published by the Forestry Commission in 2001 <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestry.nsf/byunique/hcou-54pg9u>

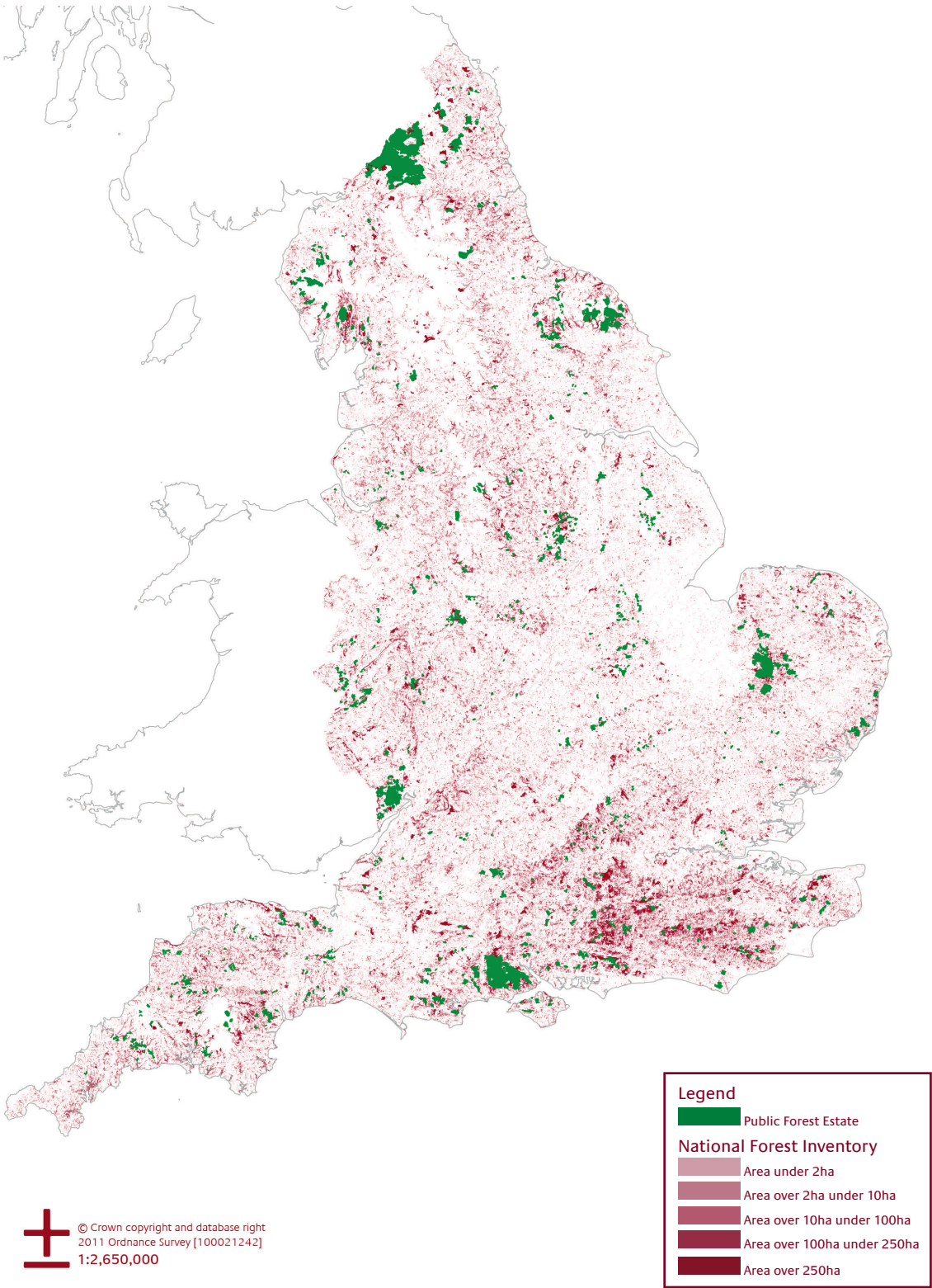
8. Refer to footnote 7

9. *Forestry Facts and Figures* published by the Forestry Commission in 2011 <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-7aqf6j>

10. Goldberg, E.A., Peterken, G.F. & Kirby, K.J. (in press). Origin and evolution of the ancient woodland inventory. *British Wildlife*.

11. Peterken, G.F. 1977 Habitat conservation priorities in British and European woodlands. *Biological Conservation*. 11: 223-236.

Figure 1: Distribution of woodland in England, showing also the public forest estate

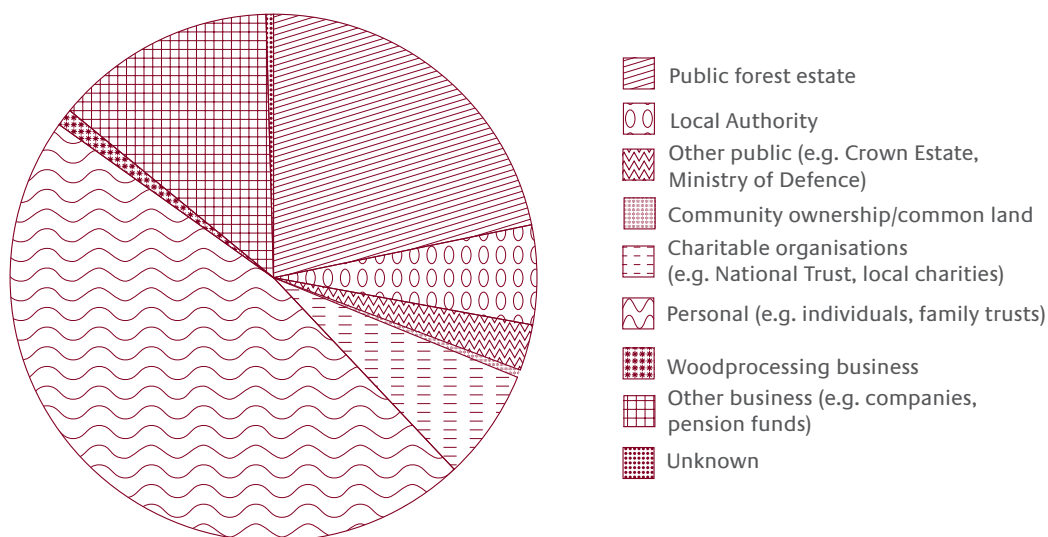


Our woods are owned and managed by a wide variety of people and organisations (Figure 2) to meet an equally wide range of objectives. These can include farmers with a small woodland that they value for shooting, estates integrating both farming and forestry enterprises, charities managing broadleaved woods primarily for conservation as well as companies harvesting many tonnes of conifers each year to meet a part of our demand for wood and wood-products. The public forest estate is the largest body of woodland under a single owner but the biggest single category are the ‘personal’ owners including, for example, individuals and family trusts.

Between 1976 and 1990 the rate of woodland creation in England was around 2000 ha annually; it increased to 4-6,000 ha between 1990 and 2004 but has been declining fairly steadily since. The current rate of woodland creation in England is about 2,500 hectares a year, mostly broadleaved¹³. It is virtually all on land outside the public forest estate, and without public funding would be likely to drop further.

For existing woodlands, the Forestry Commission reports that only about half appears to be actively managed¹⁴. Management of woods involves activities such as planting of trees or thinning to give more light for plants and to grow better quality timber.

Figure 2. Percentage ownership of forests by different types of owner¹².



12. National Inventory of Woodland and Trees 2001. England. <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestry.nsf/byunique/hcou-54pg9u>

13. See footnote 9

14. See footnote 3

“Forests and trees are part of our heritage and are enjoyed by so many people, as a low-cost healthy and sometimes educational amenity. A service to society in fact.”

Good for people

The message that emerged most strongly from the call for views was how important access to woods and forests, and particularly the public forest estate, is for people's well-being and enjoyment of the natural world. Many people wanted to make sure their woods and forests were protected forever.

For some people, woods and forests are at the centre of their lives. For example, we heard from several communities (including free miners, commoners, forestry contractors and heritage groups), some of whom have legal rights to use the resources of the public forest estate. All of their livelihoods depend on access to the public forest estate.

The National Ecosystem Assessment shows the value to the nation from recreational visits to forests and woodland to be £484 million per year in the UK¹⁵. In 2011 a Forestry Commission survey found that over two thirds of people asked had visited a wood. Not everyone has the same opportunity to access woodlands, for example the proportion of accessible woodland varies from 65% in the North East to 29% in the South West of England¹⁶.

We know that these visits encompass a huge variety of activities for people of all ages. Often these activities can co-exist easily but sometimes this takes careful management. Recreation includes physical activity such as walking, cycling and horse riding. This has health benefits, but also improves

people's mental health and can be a way of connecting with nature and with our heritage.

We recognise the role of education in improving the value and enjoyment people, and particularly children, get from forests, through formal programmes and through visitor centres. These activities are part of wider efforts to encourage a woodland culture, and an understanding of how the natural, social and economic aspects of woods connect.

The Forestry Commission has dedicated the majority of its freehold land as Access Land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, giving walkers statutory rights. Other users (including cyclists and equestrians) enjoy permissive access. Many respondents to our call for views felt that the Forestry Commission also put a lot of effort and investment into making it easier for them to visit their forests by providing well-maintained paths, car parks, cafes and other facilities. This investment is reflected in visits; there were 317 million visits to woodlands in the year up to February 2010¹⁷.

The public forest estate often sets a gold standard in recreational access. It also accounts for 44% of accessible woodlands in England with only 18% of the woods.

While there are private woodlands and forest estates that welcome and are open to people to visit, there are also many owners who view their woods as private property. We have heard different views about the

15. See footnote 5

16. *Space for People: targeting action for woodland access* published by the Woodland Trust in 2010 <http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/en/about-us/publications/key-publications/space-for-people/Documents/space-for-people-summary.pdf>

17. *Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) 2009-10* published by Natural England, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Forestry Commission in 2010 <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/research/monitor/> Affairs and Forestry Commission <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/research/monitor/>

“A quiet place to be; to walk with family and friends; to ride my bike safely; to observe nature; for nature to be safe and maintained; to sit and rest; to just look and listen.”

compatibility between different sets of activities, such as shooting and recreation, and timber production and motorbike access.

We have noted that while most people feel very strong emotional connections to woodlands, data from two recent surveys¹⁸ revealed that significantly more people engage with woodlands and forests through access and recreation than through active management or volunteering.

This recognises the higher level of responsibility and time commitment required for these activities. We have commissioned research on community engagement and we will be looking at how to make it available to more people. We will therefore be considering how to support communities and individuals to maintain their level of engagement even where greater responsibility is required.

Our work is exploring how recreational benefits can be increased in the 80% of woodland not in the public forest estate, and we are exploring ways to achieve this through incentives. It is also important to address regional variation in the distribution of accessible forests.

We believe that as many people as possible, wherever they live, should be able to enjoy access to woods nearby. We support the Natural Environment White Paper's recommendations¹⁹ on reconnecting people and nature and feel that woodlands have an important role to play in delivering those recommendations. In keeping with our broad vision of providing a wider range of benefits to more people, we will explore how the various demands for access and use of forests can be accommodated in both public and privately owned woodlands.

Good for nature

Trees and woods are integral to the quality of our natural environment: to water, soil, air, our biodiversity and landscapes. This message was expressed in a variety of ways in the responses to the call for views; through the recognition of woodlands as a place of refuge for plants and animals; in the need to restore and protect ancient woodland; in the value of creating corridors for wildlife; or through the significance of veteran trees, and of trees in urban settings. Underpinning all of this was the sense that the quality and variety of nature within our woods and forests is key to the value people place on them.

England's woodland resource – plantation forestry, native woods, scrub, wood pasture and veteran trees – has a vital role to play in the provision of environmental, social and economic goods. Unfortunately this is a fragmented resource of variable environmental quality, with much of the native woodland component being in poor ecological condition and unmanaged. Many native woods and key forestry plantations are in need of appropriate management to best deliver for nature.

The current patterns and nature of our woodlands inevitably reflect the legacies of past policy priorities. Around 1900 woodland comprised less than 5% of England. Nevertheless distinctive plant and animal assemblages had survived, particularly in our ancient woods managed as coppice and in veteran trees in wood pastures. Concern over loss and damage to ancient woodland post-World War II led to the development of policies for the protection of designated sites, and later for the protection, management and expansion of woodland

18. *Public Opinion of Forestry* published by the Forestry Commission in 2011 <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-5ZYL9W>

19. *The natural choice: securing the value of nature* published by the Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs in 2011 <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/>

habitats. The condition of many protected sites has improved and the rate of loss of ancient woodland appears to have declined.

The planting of new woodland in the 20th century in response to concerns about timber shortages similarly led to criticism of the consequent large-scale conifer afforestation of lowland heaths, upland moors and bogs. Policies and procedures have therefore been introduced to set minimum environmental standards for future new planting and a framework developed to guide tree clearance for the restoration of open habitats. New broadleaved woodland is now being created while many of the large conifer forests are being restructured to give more mixed woodland. Some open habitats such as lowland heaths, upland moors and bogs have been restored from conifer plantations, but there is the potential to do more.

However many woodland species including some woodland birds and woodland ground flora still show recent declines²⁰. This is a cause for concern: the state of our woodland biodiversity is a visible barometer of the health of the underlying natural systems that deliver a much wider range of environmental, social and economic goods and services.

As well as coping with specific and immediate pressures such as from deer, grey squirrels, pests and diseases (such as *Phytophthora* and Acute Oak decline) England's woods and forests need to be in good enough shape, and sufficiently resilient, to deal with the unknowns that lie ahead, not least to the pressures of changing climate, continuing air pollution impacts, emerging diseases and other threats.

The Read Report set out the challenges facing woods and forests across the UK, where a changing climate is likely to lead to hotter, drier summers and warmer wetter winters, with consequences for the distribution of species, and risks like disease and forest fires²¹. It also summarised the challenge that climate change poses to England's woodland and non woodland wildlife which will need help to adapt to the changing environment, for example by getting habitats into good ecological health for a range of important species, in patches of appropriate size and connectivity.

The recommendations of the Lawton Report²², reflected in the Natural Environment White Paper²³, also acknowledge this and look to the creation of a coherent and resilient ecological network in order to address the challenges of

20. Studies include: "What's happening to our woodland birds" (2004) RSPB, British Trust for Ornithology, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Forestry Commission, English Nature <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-6MWL96>; "UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme" Butterfly Conservation <http://www.ukbms.org/>; and Kirby, K.J., Smart, S.M., Black, H.I.J., Bunce, R.G.H., Corney, P.M. and Smithers, R.J. (2005). Long term ecological change in British woodland (1971-2001). Peterborough: English Nature (Research Report 653).

21. Read, D.J., Freer-Smith, P.H., Morison, J.I.L., Hanley, N., West, C.C. & Snowdon, P.R. (eds) (2009) Combating climate change – a role for UK forests. The Stationery Office, Edinburgh

“Climate change will have significant impact on the natural environment, with woodlands no exception, but by retaining and planting new woodlands and improving the links between green spaces, a certain amount of resilience can be created.”

climate change. However, the Lawton report emphasised that an improved network was needed for biodiversity conservation, irrespective of climate change, because of the fragmented nature of our wildlife sites. The Lawton report called for a step change in our approach to the protection and appropriate management of existing highly valued habitats such as ancient woodland, to restoration of areas that have been damaged in the past, for example through inappropriate tree planting, and the creation of new areas.

The Government response²⁴ to the Lawton report was clear: “[It] concluded unequivocally that England’s collection of wildlife areas is fragmented and does not represent a coherent and resilient ecological network capable of responding to the challenges of climate change and other pressures. The review called for ‘a step-change in nature conservation [...] a new, restorative approach which rebuilds nature and creates a more resilient natural environment for the benefit of wildlife and ourselves’. The review made 24 recommendations, but summarised what needed to be done in just four words: more, bigger, better and joined.” The Natural Environment White Paper seeks to take this forward.

While our work is focused on woods and forests we believe these must be considered within a coherent strategy for the country’s natural environment and as one element of a resilient ecological network across the country. Fens, meadows, moors, and heaths also provide valuable ecosystem services that enhance and complement those provided by woodland.

We will look at where the priorities between the different forest and woodland activities that would be good for nature should lie, and how and where the biggest difference can be made. We will consider the scope to achieve these outcomes both on the public forest estate and in woods in private and other forms of public ownership, bearing in mind the value of enhancing and reconnecting habitats at a landscape scale. We will also draw on economics research to understand the potential impacts on other outcomes for the forestry sector.

Good for the green economy

Forests that support businesses and industries play an important role in a green economy by providing employment and opportunities for low-carbon investment. Wood is also a critical resource in the green economy, both in its own right and

22. *Making Space for Nature: A review of England’s Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network* chaired by Professor Sir John Lawton and published in 2010 <http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/documents/201009space-for-nature.pdf>

23. See footnote 19

24. *Government Response to the Making Space for Nature Review* published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in 2011 <http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/2011/06/07/government-response-making-space-for-nature-review/>

“Forests and woodlands are important natural habitats for a wide variety of native species. This includes not only numerous species of woodland birds, but also amphibians, bats, insects, squirrels, roe deer and many wildflower species, such as bluebells, wood anemones, wood sorrel, primroses and many more besides. However, forests and woodlands need to be managed wisely to promote and enhance the rich variety of biodiversity that they can sustain.”

as a source and creator of lasting jobs. We recognise that the long-term financial viability of public, private and charitable forestry enterprises is crucial if the potential benefits from woodland creation and management are to be realised.

The forestry, wood processing and paper industries directly contribute £4.2 billion of gross value added annually – 0.38% of England’s Gross Value Added (GVA)²⁵. In the last 15 years, more than £1.6 billion has been invested in the UK industry and, whilst the UK remains one of the world’s largest net importers of wood and wood based products (80%), it is estimated that the value of this investment has displaced more than £1 billion in imports annually²⁶.

Forest creation and management supports livelihoods by providing employment both directly and in downstream industries and activities such as sawmills, timber merchants, the wood panel industry and the woodfuel industry. It is estimated that forestry in England supports around 110,000 green jobs²⁷. Much of the direct employment is in rural areas where other employment opportunities may be scarce; and the industry is dominated by small businesses, with 94% employing fewer than 10 workers²⁸.

Forests in England have a wide range of owners including communities, charities, farmers and commercial forestry companies as well as the public sector. There is very little private ownership of more than 1000 hectares. Many woods are relatively small; about 40% of the woods in England are

under 50 hectares and over 25% below 20 ha (not counting those less than 2 ha). More recent work in the latest National Forestry Inventory shows that there may be more than 100,000 woods which are smaller than 2 hectares²⁹. Scale is important, not only in terms of financial viability for commercial timber production, but also because the impact of access provision may be greater for smaller woods.

The diverse nature of forest ownership, together with the multipurpose use of forests, results in many different business models. In the charitable sector, subscription and volunteering time may supplement grant income; in the private sector and the public forest estate, whilst there may be some income from recreational activities such as shooting and access opportunities, currently the contribution of timber income is crucial to financial viability. Even where timber is produced for the market, we have heard that many woodland owners and managers rarely make a profit.

The public forest estate plays an important role in the timber market in England – it is estimated to account for around 60% of English softwood sales in England in 2010³⁰ – and therefore has a big impact on timber supply to businesses and contractors that are dependent on home-grown timber. This provides relative certainty to its customers, allowing them to plan and invest with confidence. We would like to understand this relationship better, and to be sure that it delivers maximum benefits overall.

25. Figures for 2008 taken from the *Annual Business Inquiry 2009* and *Office for National Statistics Regional GVA December 2009* published by the Office of National Statistics

26. *Managing our forests responsibly* published by Confor in 2011
http://www.confor.org.uk/Upload/Documents/22_Confortopicpaper1Managingourforestsresponsibly.pdf

27. See footnote 25

28. *Trees and timber factsheet 2010-2011* published by LANTRA in 2011
[http://www.lantra.co.uk/Downloads/Research/Skills-assessment/Trees-and-timber-v2-\(2010-2011\).aspx](http://www.lantra.co.uk/Downloads/Research/Skills-assessment/Trees-and-timber-v2-(2010-2011).aspx)

29. See footnotes 6 and 7

30. Forestry Commission analysis. For data source see footnote 9

There is an exciting opportunity for the woodfuel market to contribute to the future viability of the industry and provide an incentive for the private sector to bring some of the undermanaged woodland into active management. Demand for woodfuel has increased, and the sales of domestic wood burning and multi-fuel stoves have more than doubled in UK and Ireland since 2005³¹. A recent study also suggested that the woodfuel supply chain could generate £1 billion GVA and 15,000 jobs in the UK by 2020³². We have also heard concerns regarding the potential negative impacts of large scale bio-energy plants, which could threaten wood processing markets and risk imports of woodfuel from unsustainable sources. These risks reflect potential tensions between Government objectives and policies.

There may be opportunities for forest owners to benefit from additional income through developing markets as carbon or flood protection services. Such models are in their infancy but experiences from other countries may help to inform development in England.

As a Panel, we are in the early stages of our discussion of the relevant economic issues. We have yet to come to any conclusions but our vision for the future is of a profitable, vibrant forestry sector providing varied employment opportunities and delivering

a wider range of benefits to more people. Business models need to be viable for the future and whilst timber, fuel and other products will remain key, they cannot continue to underwrite the other ecosystem services that society gets from forests. These benefits need to be supported in their own right.

31. Personal communication with David Spencer, Stove Industry Alliance

32. *The economic value of the woodfuel industry to the UK economy by 2020: Report for the Forestry Commission* published by the Centre for Economics and Business Research in 2010
http://www.biomassenergycentre.org.uk/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/BEC_TECHNICAL/RESEARCH%20AND%20STUDIES/ECONOMIC%20STUDIES/2010-06-30%20ECONOMIC%20VALUE%20OF%20WOODFUEL_REVISIED%20REPORT.PDF

“A flourishing and commercially viable domestic forestry sector, which provides at present around a third of the UK’s woods needs, principally in construction, packaging (such as pallets) and garden products, is economically essential for the health of the UK economy”

Section 2

In the first part of this report we have outlined the range of different benefits that woods and forests provide, across the triple bottom line of people, nature and the economy. We now turn to our emerging thoughts on what this means for organisations, policies and markets. All of this work, especially in relation to the woods and forests outside of the public forest estate, needs further development before our recommendations in our final report next spring.

Woodland creation and management

We believe there is a unique opportunity for tomorrow's landscape to be more richly endowed with trees, and that a step change in action is needed to deliver this. If we want to maximise the benefits that woods and forests can provide for people, nature and the economy then we need to increase both the number of trees in the English landscape and also the amount of well managed woodland³³. Neither woodland creation nor woodland management are at the levels they should be³⁴.

There are a large number of complex factors at play. We have heard reasons for owners not to actively manage their forests and woods that include their personal motivation, the costs involved, being uncertain on what action to take, for example to increase the number of species in their woods, and unfamiliarity with the associated grants and regulations. We note that where good management of woods is taking place it can also be for a wide variety of reasons, including the production of timber, to better enable sporting, recreation or tourism activities, and improvements to sustain or enhance nature. Often this is supported through Government grants, private funds or charitable giving. But frequently the costs of the practical work undertaken to tend to a wood exceed any income generated.

There are also multiple factors that influence the level of woodland creation, including the cost of land and the value of timber or crops which might otherwise be grown on that land.

The purpose for which new woods are created and brought into management must determine the types of trees planted, their location, the cost and the types of management activity encouraged. In creating new woods, it is important to use the right tree, in the right place, to achieve the desired goal.

We believe the financial viability of both managing existing and creating new woodland, activities that both cost money, is absolutely key to unlocking all the different benefits woodland can provide. Future woodland management must be viewed alongside the creation of new woods if we are to avoid creating the unmanaged woods of tomorrow.

We welcome the Government's ambition, shared by all political parties, to create more woodland in England and for a greater proportion of existing woodlands to be sustainably managed. The National Ecosystem Assessment, the Lawton review and other scientific studies tell us that there are compelling reasons to act now to make this happen, and that it makes economic sense to do so.

We believe there is great potential here to make a step change. Any action taken must be underpinned by the outcomes we are looking to achieve. The creation and management of woods should always be linked back to end goals of restoring and enhancing our natural world, of people being able to connect with this, and of supporting a greener economy.

33. See footnote 22

34. The UK Forestry Standard is the accepted benchmark for sustainable woodland management including environmental requirements: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/ukfs>

We will look at how, where and at what rate to increase the amount of woodland in our landscape, what types of trees we should plant, for what purpose; and in doing so will draw on the work of the Woodland Carbon Task Force and others with relevant expertise. We will look at whether the range of Government actions, like grants, relating to woodland management are the right ones, and whether they are being used in the right way, to encourage the right outcomes. And we will consider how to align these actions with other land management policies and incentives. Our commissioned economic analysis will consider these issues, alongside the potential of new and developing initiatives, such as carbon markets, and the fresh opportunities they may offer.

The public forest estate

By land area, the public forest estate is only 18% of England's woods and forests. However, in terms of what this means it clearly has a far greater role than this simple statistic would suggest.

We believe there is an important continuing role for a national public forest estate in England. It is right that the way in which this tremendous asset is managed and used should evolve to reflect people's aspirations and wider challenges like climate change. The managers of the public forest estate should strive to be exemplars of managing land for social, environmental and economic benefits, and inspiring other landowners to do the same.

We want this expectation to be enshrined in how the public forest estate is managed for the future, and for the benefits to be felt by a far greater number of people.

The manager of the public forest estate is Forest Enterprise England, an Executive Agency of the Forestry Commission with public corporation status. In 2011/12, it had a turnover of £70 million. Of this, £50 million (70%) was projected to come from trading activities, with timber the biggest single income stream at £27 million³⁵. There is a small income stream from joint ventures and commercial partnerships entered into within the last five years (£1.2 million in 2011/12). A further £20 million comes from the Government via the Forestry Commission budget; which, in turn, is funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. To us, this funding of the public forest estate appears to represent very good value for money.

A public forest estate that can adapt and evolve

The public forest estate needs to be managed for the long term, and in a way that allows it to adapt and evolve. This includes being able to respond to the threat of climate change and the need to decarbonise our economy. There is already a need to address disease and shift biodiversity loss to gain. The public forest estate has to continue to be responsive to the wider context, whether this is changes in the global economy; or challenges facing local communities. Going forward, it is right that land should be able to be bought and sold in pursuit of greater benefits from the estate as a whole. What should not happen is for land to be sold to make up for a shortfall in income, as has happened in recent years, as this undermines the viability of the estate.

35. *Current Business Model and Financial Management of the Forestry Commission* prepared by the Forestry Commission for the Independent Panel on Forestry in 2011 <http://www.defra.gov.uk/forestrypanel/files/Paper-4-2-Current-Business-Model-and-Financial-Management-of-FC.pdf>

But the public forest estate is more than just a large area of land owned and managed by the state. It is a wonderful asset that could, and should, deliver so much more for the nation. While the public forest estate is only 18% of our woodlands, it constitutes over one third of the woodland area in active management in England. Positive action for people, nature and the economy on the public forest estate can be achieved far more readily than in most other woodlands, if the will and ambition is there. We believe that greater access to capital investment, and new structures to allow individuals, community groups and local organisations far greater involvement in how their local woodlands are managed, could unlock a new and exciting future for the public forest estate.

A public forest enjoyed by the public

We believe that at least the current level and quality of access to the public forest estate should be maintained, for the long term, and for the benefit and health of the nation. There is a challenge to make this more financially sustainable. We want to approach this topic with an open mind, recognising that access already comes at a cost, and that greater or enhanced access will inevitably cost more.

A public forest that protects and enhances nature in England

The public forest estate, because of its size, diversity and geographic footprint, already plays a key role in the protection of our landscape, biodiversity and cultural heritage. There is the potential to increase that role so that the estate makes a more significant

contribution to the creation of a coherent and resilient ecological network within England.

In our final report we will explore how much habitat restoration and improvement should be taking place on the public forest estate, and where, within the context of the wider landscape, it should happen. This needs to include the costs involved as well as the benefits.

A public forest that contributes to a thriving forestry sector in England

The Forestry Commission is the largest single timber producer in England, supporting jobs and businesses through the timber supply chain. We recognise the need for consistency and scale across the public forest estate, so that businesses can plan and invest with confidence. We want to understand whether this is working in a way that delivers maximum benefits.

We should look to the Forestry Commission to innovate and lead by example; acting as a centre of gravity within local communities for advice, skills development and business innovation.

Electoral and forestry cycles are not in step: we need a new structure within which the public forest estate can thrive

Forestry, in common with other pressures facing our society is not a single-generation issue. The economic and ecological timescales of woodland management are simply not in step with electoral cycles. The number of forestry policies that have been brought forward over the last 50 years – within the lifetime of a single tree –

bear witness to this. We need to describe a new relationship between the public forest estate, public institutions and the public within which these different timescales are a source of strength and security, rather than of tension.

We want the ownership of the public forest estate in England to be secured for the future; with accountability mechanisms that extend upwards to political institutions (that ideally would adopt a cross-party position) as well as outwards to wider society, in order to harness the high degree of public interest in its management and future direction.

The business model is out of step with what the organisation is delivering

Forest Enterprise England operates a mixed business model – it is neither fully-funded by Government, nor financially self-sufficient. Historically, the focus of the public forest estate was on timber production, with the cost of producing that timber being met through its sale at market. The relatively recent shift towards the delivery of wide-ranging public benefits, including access and nature conservation (the value of which, as estimated by the National Ecosystem Assessment³⁶, far exceed that of the timber), is out of step with this model. The value of these benefits is not captured on the balance sheet. Compounding this, England's forestry legislation is complex and has evolved in a piecemeal fashion over the last century.

Now is the right time to review and consolidate this position. In our final report we will reflect on the purpose of the Forestry Commission and the legislation that underpins it. We will look at the

scope to develop new commercial income streams on the public forest estate as well as increase existing ones; and how payment for ecosystem services (for example carbon storage) might play into a future income mix.

The Forestry Commission: a forestry focus within Government

The roles and responsibilities of the Forestry Commission extend far wider than the woods and forests in state ownership, of course; and Forest Enterprise England, which manages the public forest estate, is but one arm of the Forestry Commission.

Forest Services is the part of Forestry Commission focused on creating the right conditions to encourage all landowners and managers to protect, improve and expand the woodland resource in England. It administers the English Woodland Grant Scheme, which provides around £30 million a year to woodland owners in support of woodland creation and targeted management activities³⁷; as well as setting and enforcing the regulatory framework within which these activities take place. Importantly, Forest Services staff work on the ground with woodland owners, giving them tailored support and advice.

Forest Research is the Forestry Commission's research agency, and is a GB-wide body. It provides much of the evidence base and scientific advice to inform forestry policy and practice. Two thirds of its income is derived from the Forestry Commission; with the remainder sought from external sources.

36. See footnote 5

37. See footnote 35

Looking beyond the Forestry Commission, the Government acts in a number of other ways to influence and catalyse action in the 82% of woodlands that sit outside the public forest estate. Environmental Stewardship schemes administered by Natural England represent another source of direct government funding for private forestry, contributing around £3.6m annually in support of forest activity³⁸.

But a forestry sector that becomes too reliant on Government subsidies is one that is likely to be vulnerable to the challenges of the future. Government needs to create an incentive and regulatory structure for forestry in which business innovation can flourish, and new markets for wood and wood products are able to emerge, in turn generating jobs and skills within the sector and beyond. Government should take a wide view and support woodland owners in identifying a sustainable – and ideally profitable – future for their woodlands which delivers for them personally, and for the triple bottom line.

The Government's Woodfuel Implementation Plan and Renewable Heat Incentive are opportunities to do this³⁹. Looking more widely, the review of the Renewables Obligation⁴⁰, planning policy reforms and reform of the Common Agricultural Policy are also relevant to this agenda. The wider regulatory environment

is as important for the forestry sector as any other business. Crucially, we believe that there are roles for Government, industry and the public in revitalising the forestry sector.

We welcome the recent report of the Forestry Regulation Task Force⁴¹, and look forward to the Government response in the New Year. The Task Force's remit was to examine, and where necessary make recommendations to improve, the effectiveness of the current regulatory regime and incentive schemes. We will be working with the Task Force to understand and consider their proposal for a Woodland Partnership Initiative, in particular.

In our final report will consider whether public money being spent beyond the boundaries of the public forest estate is cost effective in delivering the right level and mix of social, environmental and economic benefits, in the right places, and to as many people as possible. We have commissioned economic analysis to consider these issues within the framework of the full range of public benefits that can be derived from all woods.

The broader forestry context is also potentially changing, as the Welsh and Scottish Governments explore bringing Forestry Commission operations in their countries under the full control of their devolved governments. The Welsh Government has announced their intention

38. Personal communication with Natural England. Figure relates to 2011-12 Environmental Stewardship expenditure on woodland creation, management and restoration including wood pasture and parkland

39. *Woodfuel implementation plan 2011-2014* published by the Forestry Commission in 2011
<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-woodfuel>;
The Renewable Heat Incentive scheme was announced by the Government in 2011
http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/meeting_energy/renewable_ener/incentive/incentive.aspx

40. Details of the Renewables Obligation can be found here
http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/meeting_energy/renewable_ener/renew_obs/renew_obs.aspx

41. *Challenging Assumptions, Changing Perceptions* published by the Forestry Regulation Task Force in 2011
[http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/DEFPB13661ForestryLo.PDF/\\$file/DEFPB13661ForestryLo.PDF](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/DEFPB13661ForestryLo.PDF/$file/DEFPB13661ForestryLo.PDF)

to create a single body made up of the Forestry Commission Wales, Countryside Council for Wales and the Environment Agency Wales⁴².

We need to be ready for the impact of these changes in England. In our final report, we will consider what organisational arrangements might work best for the Forestry Commission as a whole, in a post-devolution landscape. We will also look at which activities are best carried out at GB level (for example, the setting of woodland management standards, research and innovation, and plant health monitoring and disease response) and what might work best as a local response to landscape and community needs.

Woodlands in private, charitable and other forms of public ownership

We recognise the importance of woodlands that are owned by private, charitable, local authority and community organisations in maximising the potential benefits of English forests; after all, they make up more than 80% of forests by area. We also know that there are a number of issues that make it challenging to deliver some of our desired outcomes, including the diverse ownership, the fragmented nature of these forests and difficulties for managers of small scale woods to build up the knowledge and skills necessary to manage woods in a multi-purpose way. We will take these issues into account when developing our vision of the future and the possible future business models. At this stage in our work we have

devoted less time to consideration of private sector forestry, than we have to the public forest estate.

Delivering more woodland management

The proportion of unmanaged or undermanaged woodland in the private sectors means that we will not achieve our aims unless we address the underlying issues. The development of the woodfuel market is one way in which more private woodlands may come under active management, but to achieve its potential there may be a need for advice to owners to enable them to access markets. We will also consider what other changes are needed to get more woodland into management.

Delivering greater access

The value of access is clearly demonstrated not only by work such as the National Ecosystem Assessment⁴³ but also by the response to the call for views. There are owners that are happy to give access to their forests. Others allow informal access for local people. For some any access causes issues, either because it is important to them to retain their privacy or because there are costs associated with access. These can include providing infrastructure, managing competing uses and potential liability. We will be exploring ways to incentivise, rather than compel, private forest owners to open up more of their estates for public access. We will also be looking at how more access can be built in from the start to new forests and woodland.

42. Welsh Government press release
<http://wales.gov.uk/newsroom/environmentandcountryside/2011/111129body/?lang=en>

43. See footnote 5

Long term financial viability

We recognise the need to ensure the long term financial viability of all sectors of English forestry. We will look to understand how effective grant schemes have been and how they could be improved. For example, we know that there are particular challenges to financial viability for small woodlands and we are keen to address these issues especially as small woodlands play a special role in many communities. However, we have also noted that profit is not always the primary motivation, particularly for small woodland owners. Information and advice services may have an important role in helping small woodland owners both to manage their woods and access markets, as might designing grant and certification schemes that appeal more broadly.

In addition we will look at the potential for additional income opportunities to enable woodland owners to benefit from the delivery of public benefits, such as carbon or flood protection.

Next steps: continuing the journey

This progress report reflects the journey of our work to date. We are excited by the challenge before us, as we work to deliver our final report to the Secretary of State next spring.

We have drawn much inspiration from the visits we have undertaken to forest and woodland locations around the country, and we will be making further visits during the course of our work. In addition to drawing on the call for views, we have commissioned a variety of research reports and workshops, spanning history, ecology and economics, which will all inform our work. We have commissioned a

review of work on access and community engagement. We will continue to meet with different groups and test out their ideas.

We hope that this progress report helps everyone to understand more about our work to date, our initial thoughts about the sort of vision needed for forests and woods, and therefore for forestry policy in England. We are not specifically seeking comments on our progress report, but as ever, we remain open to ideas and suggestions that our work may stimulate.

Annexes



Annex 1 – Terms of reference and membership

Independent Panel on Forestry Policy in England: Terms of reference

1. To advise the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on the future direction of forestry and woodland policy in England.
2. To advise on the role of the Forestry Commission in implementing policy on forestry and woodland in relation to England.
3. In formulating this advice, the Panel should consider:
 - a) how woodland cover can be increased, given competing pressures on land use for food production, energy and development;
 - b) options for enhancing public benefits from all woodland and forests, in the light of the Lawton Report and the Natural Environment White Paper, including;
 - public access for recreation and leisure;
 - biodiversity, wildlife protection and ecological resilience, including through restoration of open habitats and plantations on ancient woodland sites;
 - climate change mitigation and adaptation;
 - economic development, particularly to support a sustainable timber industry and a wide range of small and medium sized enterprises, including social enterprises; and
 - engagement and participation of civil society.
 - c) constraints and competing demands on public expenditure for this Spending Review period and beyond;
 - d) the role of Forest Enterprise England as the manager of productive forestry resources;
 - e) the value for money and cost-effectiveness of the public forest estate in England and options for its future ownership and management.
4. In formulating its advice to the Secretary of State, the Panel will be expected to engage and take evidence from the widest range of views and interest.
5. The Panel will report to the Secretary of State in April 2012, with a progress report in the autumn of 2011.

Membership

The Right Reverend Bishop
James Jones – Chair
Shireen Chambers
Dr Mike Clarke
Tom Franklin
Stuart Goodall
Stephanie Hilborne OBE

Sue Holden
Dr Alan Knight OBE
Dame Fiona Reynolds
Sir Harry Studholme
John Varley
William Worsley

Annex 2 – Call for views

On the 19th May 2011 the Independent Panel on Forestry launched its call for views. We wanted this to be an opportunity for anyone with a connection, whether a dog walker, environmentalist, forestry worker, wood processor, commercial forest owner, motorsport enthusiast, cyclist or a family who love weekends at the forest, to get involved, share their views on the future of forests and woodland in England and make their voice heard to the panel.

The response was incredible with huge numbers of individuals, clubs, charities, organisations and businesses putting pen to paper, keyboard to computer, or in one case paintbrush to card, in order to express their opinion. The Call for Views was featured widely online and picked up by numerous organisations including the Woodland Trust and the campaign group 38 Degrees.

We have used what you have said to us, alongside other advice about forests and woods (e.g. the Read Report – Combating Climate Change, A Role for UK Forests), what people have said to us when we have visited or spoken with them, and our own experience and knowledge to help form the ideas in our progress report. We will continue to use the information everyone has provided as we work towards our final report due in Spring 2012.

What did we ask?

Call for views

The Independent Panel on Forestry would like to hear your views on forests and woods in England, and what this part of our landscape can and should provide, now and in the future. This call for views is the start of an ongoing dialogue with everyone who is interested in forests and woods. We want your help with understanding:

- what forests and woods deliver for people, communities, nature and the economy;
- what it is about forests and woods that people value so much and why; and
- what works in the practice and can be repeated in other locations.

We would welcome your views and ideas on any aspect of forests and woods. The following list of questions may help frame your response. It would be helpful for us if you could respond under these broad questions.

Question 1 – What do forests and woods mean to you?

Question 2 – What is your vision for the future of England's forests and woods?

Question 3 – What do you feel to be the benefits of forests and woods to:

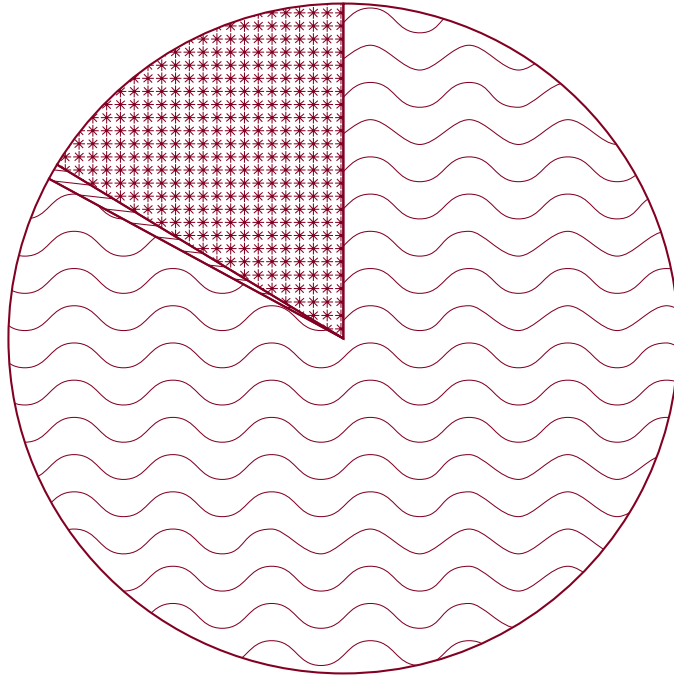
- a) you personally;
- b) society as a whole;
- c) The natural environment; and
- d) The economy?

Question 4 – We would like to hear about your suggestions of practical solutions and good practice which can be replicated more widely.

Question 5 – What do you see as the priorities and challenges for policy about England's forests and woods?

Who responded to the call for views

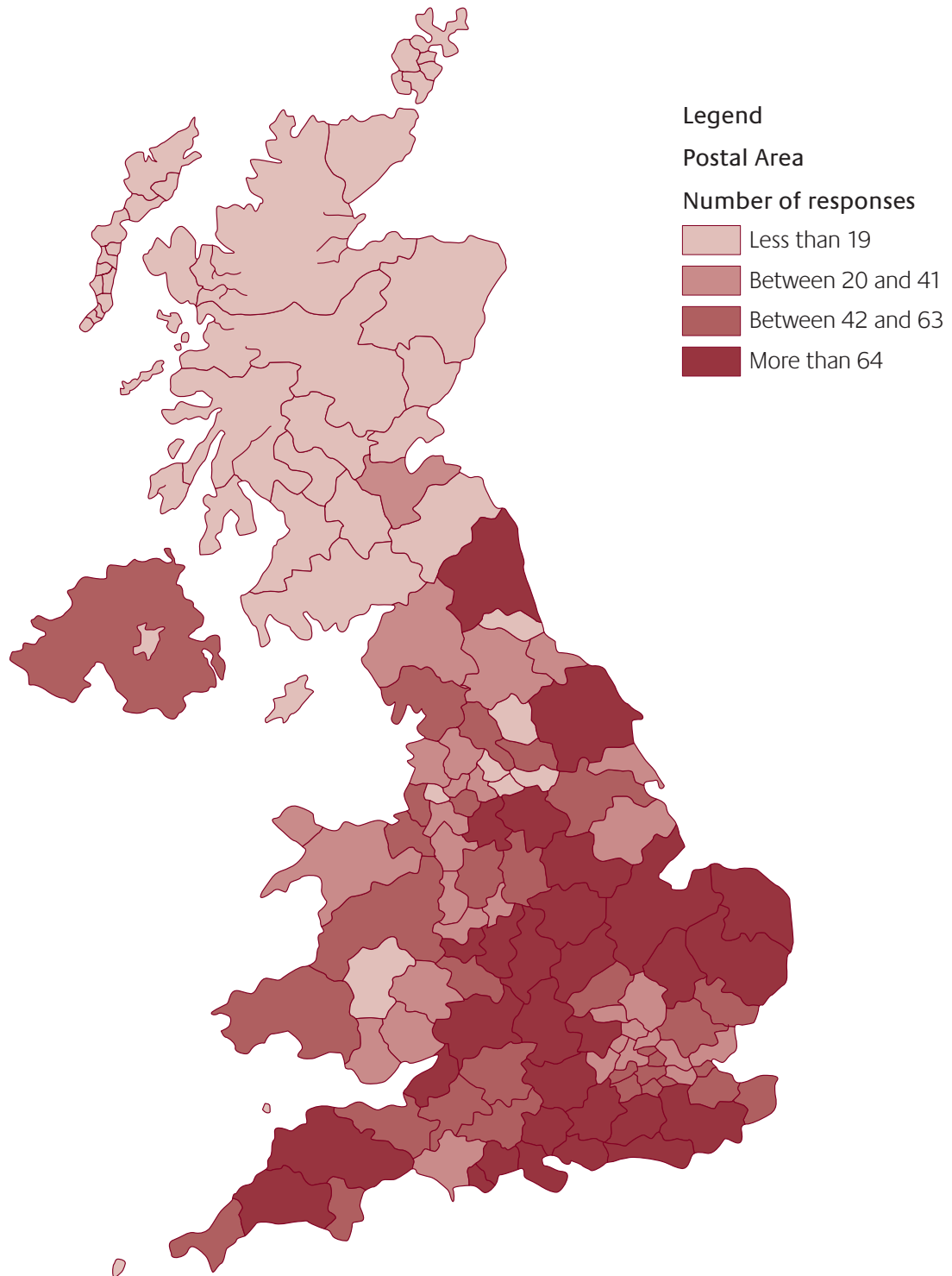
In total we received **42,159** responses to our call for views. These came from individuals, organisations and businesses across the UK. From the very first response we received to the last it was clear that each and every response represented a person's, or number of peoples, time, effort, interest and passion.



 223 letters,  7,063 emails  34,873 responses received via 38 Degrees

Of the emails we received direct, 3,841 responses came from individuals via the facility on the Woodland Trust website, and over 262 were based on a template response issue by the Motor Sports Association.

Number of responses to the Independent Panel on Forestry's call for views by Postal Area



This map shows the location of the 5572 respondents that included a postcode in their response, many of which responded via the Woodland Trust. The responses submitted by 38 Degrees did not contain post code information.

Analysis of key words

The following key words were taken from a sample of 500 responses sent directly to the Independent Panel on Forestry and those received from 38 Degrees. There was broad agreement between the two sets of responses. However because there

seemed to be more variation in the “direct” responses than the 38 Degrees responses, more of the direct responses were included in the analysis (300) than 38 Degrees responses (200). The key words and topics identified were then grouped by theme.

Access

Available for all	Freedom	Priceless
Public access	Freedom to wander	Free places
Access	Keep them public	Free to use
Freedom of access	Not for sale	Never be privatised
Community	Unrestricted	Inexpensive
Unhindered access	Stay in public hands	Not just [for] wealthy people
Not sold	Non profit making	Free
Protect from businesses	Freedom to roam	

Recreation and using the forests for enjoyment

Sport	Motor cycling	Keep fit
Rallying	Explore	Naturalists
Leisure	More public paths	Gentle exercise
Horse riding	Friends	Local craftspeople
Motor sport	Music	Bike rides
Walks	Nature watching	Walk
Recreation	Creative	Education
Walking dogs	Roam	Horseriding
Inspiration	Culture	Natural playground
Picnic	Wildlife watching	Paint
Stage rallying	Ball games	Draw
Running	Dog racing	Duke of Edinburgh Award
Tourism	Pets	Friends and family
Cycling	Visit	Playing in the woods
Enjoyment	Ramblers	Orienteering
Mountain biking	Interest	Campsites
Bird watching	Art	Festivals
Adventure	Photography	Celebrations
Exercise	Open space	Take photographs
Adventure courses	Fun	Learn to ride bicycles
Camping	Team building	Acorn battles
Family	Motorised trail riders	Climb
Children	Wander	

Escape, peace, health and wellbeing

Enjoy	Soul enhancing	Pleasure
Healthy lifestyle	Solace	Freedom
Caring	Exciting	Quality of life
Open quiet areas	Sanity	Refuge
Oasis	Haven	Fresh air
Mental health	Interaction	Tranquillity
Refreshment	Noise	Spiritual wellbeing
Silence	Meditate	Joy
Welfare	Wilderness	Solitude
Rejuvenate	Peace and quiet	Sense of identity
Content	Serenity	Life
Soothing	Safe	Contemplation
Energizing	Special	Unwind
Reduce obesity	Happy	Relax
Heal	Smile	A break from urban
Recharge our batteries	Quiet	Mental wellbeing
Essential	Think	Calm
Freshness	Breathe	Wonder
Community spirit	Rest	Feel alive
Creativity	Peace of mind	Reconnect
Restful	Pleasant	Escape
Lifeline	Stress relief	Ethical
Recharge	Sanctuary	Uplifting
Spiritual	Bereavement	Health
Retreat	Wellbeing	Peace
Social and psychological wellbeing	Antidote to modern life in towns	

Educational benefits

Education	Explore and discover	Teach
Children	Nature's classrooms	Feed their imaginations
Learn	Botanical study	Imagination
Learn about the natural world	Learning the names of trees	Interesting
Social and emotional development	Education for us and our children	

Wildlife and nature

Birds	Elder	Beech trees
Woodpecker	Birch	Nature
Tree creeper	Wildlife corridors	Habitats
Jay	Dormice	Mix of trees
Pea sticks	Hedgerows	Indigenous plants, animals and birds
Conservation	Meadows	Flowers
Trees	Deer	Mammals
Oak	Boar	Copses
Bluebells	Cuckoos	Birdsong
Wilderness	Colour and contrast	Dogs
Spring flower	Spring flowers	Fungi
Animals	Foliage	Snowdrops
Fauna and flora	Species	Wood anemone
Natural environment	Foxes	Wood sorrel
Wildlife haven	Scenery	Red squirrel
Beech	Bugs	Plant life
Insects	Flora	Green corridors
Leafmould	Fauna	Hedges
Yellow primrose	Broadleaf trees	Naturalist
Glades	Plant life	Bushes
Wildlife	Woods	Shrubs
More deciduous woods	Forests	Shelter
Biodiversity	Woodland	Groves
Natural world	Bird watching	Reptiles
Butterflies	Sweet scented	Broadleaf
Ponds	Green spaces	Bees
Woodland corridors	Nature preservation	Heathland
Ancient yew	Ancient woodland	Scrub
Life on earth	Wild flowers	Sparrows
Indigenous trees	Woodland creatures	Osprey
Native plants	Lake	Alders
Living creatures	Birds singing	Guelder rose
Reptiles	Hazel	

Environmental benefits

Oxygen	Environment	Help cut global warming
Sustainability	Renewable fuel	Absorb CO ₂
Slow wind	Obscure traffic noise	Producers of oxygen
Biomass	Hydrological management	Reduce flooding
Climate control	Clean air	Carbon neutral
Global warming	Conserve water	Carbon capture
Clean water	Noise pollution	Cleaner environment
Habitat retention	Flood	Purification of air
Greenhouse gases	Groundwater stabilisation	Harbour wildlife
Balance built up environment	Prevent erosion Soil formation	Life force of the countryside
Lungs	Environment	Water security
Capture carbon	Climate change	Where wildlife can flourish
Carbon	Air quality	Rich and thriving ecosystem
Ecology	Biodiversity	Pure air
Green energy	Ecosystem	Carbon sink
Renewable energy	Thrive	Carbon sequestration
Soil erosion	Refuges for wildlife	Unspoilt countryside
Ecosystems	Wood fuel	Diversity of ecology
Green space	Balance natural	Habitat

Wonderment and beauty

Scenery	Sights	Decorative
Beauty	Changing seasons	Useful
Landscape	Purity	Vital
Hear	Places of natural beauty	Nature's jewels
View	Beautiful	Heart of the countryside
Lovely	To be revered	Spiritual and creative refuge
Colour	Untouched beauty	Renew the soul
Smell	Very special places	Precious
Magical	Inspiration	Awe
Green colours	Shafts of sunlight	Beautiful landscape
Something the community can treasure	Enjoy the scenery	

Nature's larder

Food	Drugs	Herbs
Berries	Mushrooms	Vegetables
Fruit	Blackberries	Poultry
Raspberries	Cherries	Fuel
Nuts	Elderflower	Direct sources of food

Heritage and national identity

Ancient trees	Essential part of Britain's heritage	Famously painted by our great masters
Heritage	Lifeblood of the country	Past
History	British landscape	Memories
Ancient woodland	England	Britannia
Connect with past	Culturally important	Everlasting heritage
Reconnect	Vital to our island	National heritage

Economic benefits

Leisure industry	Cafes	Prevent overcrowding
Timber industry	B&Bs	Affect farming positively
Employment	Resources	Eco-tourism
Income for LAs	Tourist revenue	Wood, fuel and fodder
Tourism	Vitally important	Biofuels
Attract visitors	Renewable fuel	Coppicing
Local economy	Raw materials for industry	Charcoal production
Commerce	Renewable resource	Jobs
Valuable commodity	Fences	Revenue
Local trade	Woodland products	Timber
Rural employment	Economy	Firewood
Free	Cost	Furniture
Craftwork sales	Livelihood	Resources for future generations

Preservation and protection for the future

Increase % of land coverage devoted by forests	Protect woods for future generations	Remove invasive non-native species
Keep public out	Public ownership	Nurtured
Preservation	Extension of hardwoods	Happy and healthy
Maintenance	Future	Not a financial resource
Non profit lottery	Size	Protect by statute
Good paths	Maintained	Hold in trust
Expansion	Conserved	
Protection	Preserve them naturally	

Other benefits

Preventing anti social behaviour	Regain grounds lost to farmers	
Foundation of life	Community Control	

What forests mean

Local Communities	Everything Life	The survival of the planet
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38 Degrees

The largest single number of responses to the Panel's call for views came via the organisation 38 Degrees. Using the same technology that helps to analyse their regular member surveys, 38 Degrees worked out their members top three demands to the Forestry Panel:

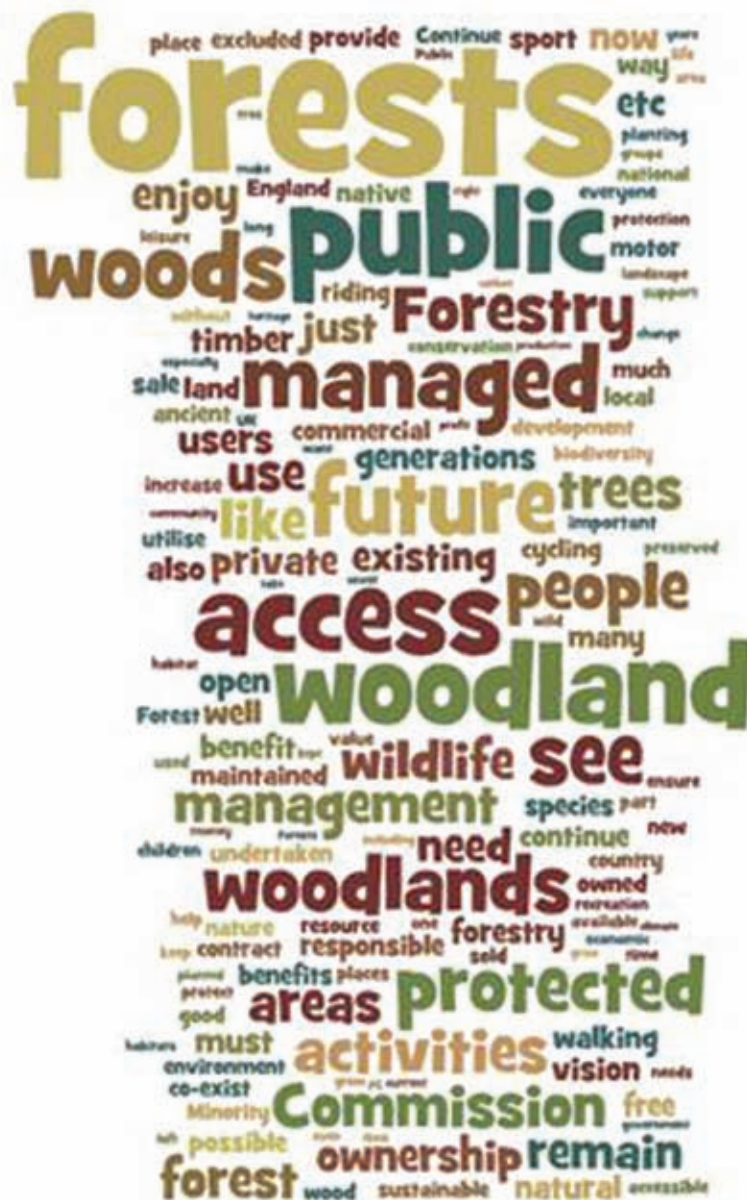
1. Keeping our forests in public ownership
2. Protecting the incredible variety of animals and plants that live in our forests
3. Making sure as many people as possible are able to enjoy our forests, including those who don't have access to a car, or use a wheelchair, as well as those who want to ride horses or bikes

Analysis of key topics

In addition to looking at what the key words and themes used in the responses were, we read as many as possible, to interpret what was being said about topics of direct relevance to our terms of reference.

Question 2 – What is your vision for the future of England’s forests and woods?

A Wordle of answers to Question 2 from 1500 Forestry Panel mailbox responses and 1500 38 Degree responses.



Access

Access is frequently referred to in relation to a particular recreational activity such as horse riding or orienteering. The majority of responses call for current levels of access to be protected and for increased levels of access in future. That the ability to enter woodland should be free and not limited by income is also a popular view.

Many responses call for unrestricted access with a number proposing amendments to Section 16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW). Section 16 of the Act provides freeholders and long leaseholders with the opportunity to voluntarily dedicate their land for public access.

The need for greater clarification on certain aspects of access law is also requested.

Managing access in order to minimise damage is also a theme with landowners requesting protection and clarity regarding their liability, in regard to litigation, from people entering their land with or without their consent. The negative aspects of access are also mentioned including instances of vandalism, theft and crop damage. The impact on sporting activity and forest operations (e.g. tree felling etc.) of access is also raised as an issue. The importance of maintaining and managing Rights of Way, particularly to those with mobility difficulties is also highlighted. If public forest is to be sold then there is consistent opinion that strong legal safeguards should be in place with regard to access.

The word “access” featured regularly with 20,714 mentions across all responses.

“We can take a picnic and have a day out without it costing lots of money which, as my partner has been unemployed for two years now, is quite important!”

“Keep woodlands in public ownership; they should not be restricted to use by elite

groups who can afford to own or pay for access.”

“Preservation of public access, especially including equestrian access, is a major priority, not least because the road network has become increasingly dangerous and drivers are less and less tolerant of horseriding on roads, creating frequent dangerous and potentially fatal situations. Allowing horseriders to use forests/ woodlands is one way to keep them off the roads and out of danger.”

“I am sure that you will have many people writing to you to explain the distress, expense and feelings of dispossession the granting of rights to non owners over private land will cause.”

“I do not want to see the day when public access to private woodland is forced on by government regulation, partly through ignorance and the fact there are very strong minded organisations who believe in people power and ironically will be the same people who will help to destroy the very countryside that they think they are protecting.”

“The hugely successful Kielder Water and Forest Park partnership has led to the development of a 3 million pound multi-user trail around Bakethin and Kielder providing 27 miles of surfaced path available to both able and disabled users.”

Recreation and local groups

A vast range of recreational activities are mentioned in the responses. From simply wandering or walking the dog through to, rally driving, festivals and acorn battles!

There is a considerable response from organisations relating to specific activities, for example orienteering and horse riding, with many groups representing their activity in a specific geographic area. The activity responses promoted the benefits of their activity, often mentioning their interaction

with other forest users, both positive and negative, and regularly compared access rights and cost. Minority pursuits did not want to be excluded and there was universal approval for responsible users utilising, and co-existing with, the forest and other forest user groups.

The local groups focusing on a particular area of land were in the majority of cases formed in response to a potential threat and aim to provide protection, often through education.

Both types of groups expressed a strong desire to be consulted, and their voice heard, in decisions, both locally and nationally, that could impact upon their activity, area or both.

“As a birdwatcher the forests and woods mean a great day out, leisurely exercise, fresh air and lots of wonderful birds to see.”

“Possibly the only time my children are happy without an Xbox controller in their hands.”

“Running sled dogs for us is far more than a hobby, it is (as for many others) a complete way of life due to all the hours of training, care and commitment involved. Without the Forestry Commission (FC) woodlands we would not be able to take part in this sport at all as we would have nowhere else suitable or accessible.”

Health and wellbeing

One major theme that emerges across all the response is the significant role forests have as places of calm and comfort. They provide areas of serenity away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life and the opportunity for personal space and contemplation. It is clear that woodland has rejuvenating properties and the ability to both soothe and energise. The word “peace” appears 10,768 times across all

the responses. Woodland clearly makes people happy. The physical benefits of recreation in nature’s “green gym” are often referred to along with the burden active woodland users remove from the National Health Service.

“In World War II, my father was reported missing for four and half years and never returned. As a result, as a small boy, I was often absent from school with stress related contagious diseases but when I was well enough, I wandered the woods, forests and old parkland on my doorstep at Windsor. Later in life I became aware that these experiences under the trees at Windsor had helped me through those very difficult times of uncertainty. The trees were my chosen place of escape and gave me a feeling of peace and tranquillity. The trees gave me a sense of permanence because of their age and what they had therefore seen and experienced themselves. I believe this is important for all humans.”

“There are four of us who drink together. I’m the only one who rides a mountain bike. The other three don’t do anything except watch TV, eat junk food and drink too much in the pub. Two of them have had heart attacks and the other had a stroke. None of us is over 55.”

Education

Forests allow people to interact with, appreciate and gain a better understanding of nature at first hand. Much weight is attached in the responses to providing people, especially children, with the opportunity to interact with forests so that through enjoyment and education they become relevant to them. This was particularly crucial for groups from urban areas that may not easily have the chance to visit woodland. Valuing forests is regarded as vital in ensuring support for

their future preservation. There are also calls for promoting a wider understanding, and therefore appreciation, of woodland management and the broad range of benefits woodlands provide. Increasing people's appreciation that timber from sustainably managed forests and woodlands, especially when locally produced, is a wonderful thing and to be encouraged.

“As a child I walked in woods with my parents, climbed trees with my friends, learned about the plants and animals that live there, and one day I want my children to be able to do the same. There is often little appreciation by the public that woodlands can and should be managed. I would like to see understanding of this improved. The emphasis on ‘Natural’ in policy terms does not help (Natural England, Natural Environment etc) people to remember that woodlands have been actively managed by humans for resources since the Neolithic.”

“When I was a teacher in Essex I taught in Dagenham where most of the children at the comprehensive where I taught were townies to a man. We took them for a camping weekend to Danbury Woods. I have never seen such a transformation. The cool of the streetwise kid disappeared in whoops of delight in the wood gathering, the stories round the campfire, the sheer delight of running wild. It brought home to me just how important that weekend was to them. I feel sure not one would ever have forgotten it, nor subsequent trips they went on.”

“A wider appreciation of Britain's woodlands is long overdue.”

Community engagement

It is clear community engagement is not just about ownership or the management of a forest or woodland it is about creating a strong sense of belonging, greater appreciation of woodland and improving

social, and community, cohesion. The responses contain examples of the diverse variety of successful community schemes in operation and clearly demonstrate that as woods differ, so must their style of community management.

We received hundreds of examples of community engagement. With examples of communities partnering with the Forestry Commission, local authorities, volunteer groups and charitable organisations. The responses highlighted the value of support when managing local woods and forests and advice of how to achieve greater community engagement. The onus on education was strong for the majority of groups.

“No project will be a success unless a group or an individual driving a group sees the long term benefit for them, they can be the focal point, generation of enthusiasm, planning, managing, and driving their individual part of the overall development, it rubs off, and soon fragmented groups come together to make the project and overall community involvement a success, both in acceptance of the overall design, and local authorities knowing they are on the right track to success, too many times large amounts of money are spent, just because the government makes a pot available through one form of initiative or another.”

“Reliance upon local volunteer community groups to take over the full running of local forests and woodlands is also quite unrealistic. Volunteers cannot realistically be expected to shoulder the continuing financial cost of forestry operations or the significant legal liabilities which ownership of woodland involves, particularly where there is extensive public access. Community groups need the support of a well-established, and adequately-resourced, national body, such as the FC, in order to play their own valuable part in multi-purpose forestry.”

Landscape and biodiversity

There is huge support from the responses for more and better management of woods (ancient/broadleaved woodland in particular). There was also recognition that some level of wood production was generally beneficial to landscape and biodiversity interests. However there was a stress on ‘appropriate management’ and some interest in some areas being allowed to go ‘wild’. There is support for woodland creation to expand and buffer ancient woods. However in some parts of the country a much higher priority is seen to be the removal of plantations to restore native woodland or open habitats. The need to protect ancient woodland and open habitats from development and other threats (e.g. fire or disease) was stressed.

Visual landscape and historic environment conservation needs were identified, but are much less well represented amongst the responses than nature conservation responses. The importance of non-woodland trees (particularly veteran trees) in urban and rural situations was noted, often being the first experience of trees for many people, with pleas that the Panel should include these in its deliberations. Given the increased priority given to landscape and biodiversity issues now compared to when the Forestry Commission was established the question was raised as to whether its remit should be revisited to reflect this.

Frequent references to specific animal and plants are made often as part of an experience or in the context of something requiring protection. The word biodiversity, or variations of it, are mentioned 5687 times across all responses. Woodland is recognised as a home, area or refuge for an abundance of animals and plant life and there is great support for retaining and increasing woodland and the level of biodiversity within it. Linking woodlands through the creation woodland corridors was frequently mentioned.

“Our urban forests, the trees and woodlands in and around our towns and cities, have a vital role to play in promoting healthy and sustainable communities. They provide numerous environmental, economic and social benefits that contribute enormously to the quality of life of everyone who lives and works in the urban environment. Because of this and the fact that some 80% of the Britain’s population now live in urban areas, it is vital that our urban forests are given significant attention by the Independent Panel on Forestry.”

“They are an incredible place for biodiversity to flourish, something we, as a continuously developing country, are much in need of!”

“Wildlife corridors are of vital importance to the survival and movement of species, particularly in times of climate change. A patchwork of woodland is essential to bio-diversity in the local environment. Larger forests provide different habitats for species which would not be able to survive elsewhere. If we are to pay more than lip-service to preserving the environment, we need both woods and forests as backbones in the structure.”

“Let’s leave more for the future than our ancestors left for us – we know so much more about biodiversity and science than they did, we have no excuse not to manage our precious surroundings with the respect they deserve.”

Climate change

The majority of respondents who commented on this topic thought that woodland creation and more use of wood products have a valuable role to play in the transition to a low carbon lifestyle, but they are only part of the solution. It is not a simple case that more trees are good anywhere and at any price; although carbon benefits can be part of the argument for woodland expansion in some areas.

The role of wood fuel for large-scale power generation is seen as controversial because it may divert material away from established markets that have a greater capacity to store carbon. At a small to medium scale, wood fuel is seen as having considerable potential to generate combined heat and power.

The benefits of shade trees in both urban and rural areas may increase as our climate warms. There is uncertainty about how woods will change under climate change impacts, which may include changing tree species and silvicultural systems. Potential new threats include increased pest and disease damage and increase fire risk. Overall it is important to look at forestry and woodland in conjunction as part of the wider changes in land-use that will be necessary over the next few decades.

“One of the most important roles that forests have to play to society is in terms of climate change. Well managed woodlands contribute to meeting the UK climate change targets, not just by absorbing CO₂ while growing, but also in the timber products that are produced from the harvested timber.”

Wonderment and national identity

Woodland clearly taps in to the nation's psyche and its history valued. The word “heritage” appears 7294 times across all the responses. Ancient woodland was regularly referred to. This was often in the context of protection and management. The term “natural beauty” was often used.

“There can be few places as central to our sense of being British as our forests. Where would Robin Hood have been without them, where would Shakespeare's Puck have lived, where would E M Forster's heroes have escaped to?”

“Forests have an awe-inspiring quality of permanence they share with the sea. I feel I am a part of the forest where I live, and the forest is a part of me and it is where I feel at home.”

“Preserving our forests for generations to come doesn't only require a vision for the future – it also means retaining a sensitivity to our past, and our heritage. We are only one generation in many that will enjoy our forests and woodlands. We must not be the generation that puts that inheritance at risk by ill-conceived reform for its own sake.”

Economy

There is widespread appreciation among respondents of the economic benefits that sustainably managed commercial woodlands provide. They provide livelihoods directly, by providing employment, often in remote areas where other opportunities are scarce e.g. forestry work or game and wildlife management. They provide wider social and economic benefits by supporting downstream industries and activities, such as sawmills, timber merchants, the wood panel industry, coppice products and woodfuel. These in turn provide employment, particularly in rural areas. Both public and private sector respondents emphasised the value of security of supply to downstream timber consumers, with uncertainty resulting in reduced or delayed investment.

There were different perspectives on the Forestry Commission's role in the timber market; Forestry Commission customers highly value the security of supply, while other private sector timber suppliers feel that they distort the market. Respondents emphasised the large range of non-monetary or indirect economic value of woodlands, including landscape and recreational benefits, carbon storage, flood protection, reduction of runoff, etc. Many of these are currently provided without

payment, but other values are rewarded by the market as for example they accrue to the forestry-related tourist industry.

There is significant support for expansion of woodland, and also to manage currently under-managed woodland, in order to generate significantly greater economic activity and wider benefits; some suggested the latter should take priority over new planting. Both expansion and improved management would increase forestry's contribution to mitigating and adapting to climate change and to energy security, indeed financial viability will increase as fuel prices rise, reducing the need for public support. Improved management would also allow better protection of trees against disease and pests. It was emphasised that ancient woodlands need to be managed too.

We should not expect all woodland to deliver the full range of potential benefits; the appropriate balance will depend on the context. Some felt that the primary emphasis should be on productivity and that only in special cases should timber production be considered secondary. A tension was noted between woodfuel and timber supply, in particular it was argued that the renewables subsidies are putting traditional buyers of timber at a disadvantage.

“Better management of timber production to reduce reliance on imports and this could be achieved through realistic encouragement by Government.”

“The totality of the forest, woodlands and orchards in our District is key – not just the heritage woodland. Clearly, timber production is an important activity. But the Forest, and all that goes with it, is the centrepiece of our attraction to visitors; tourism amounts to some 7% of our employment (nearly twice the national average) and generated £110M in 2009.

There is a need to increase that income while protecting the character of our landscape.”

“The economic value of shooting to the local and national economy should not be forgotten or ignored.”

Financial viability

There is broad support for multi-purpose forestry and a recognition that timber-production is one of several reasons to create and manage forests. The economic benefits of timber production to the country are frequently referred to as are fulfilling and safeguarding production of a sustainable home grown resource.

Management of forests to provide products or services is widely discussed with a view that more could be done by private landowners/managers. However, many private woodland and forest owners expressed the view that they rarely made a profit from their forest enterprises. Several respondents provide details on their sector's contribution to the economy through various activities (for example providing renewable energy, a wide range of recreational activity, shooting enterprises, timber production and processing). Respondents are aware that these businesses are not only important locally but can contribute to wider society and government objectives for example climate change mitigation and a low-carbon economy.

While there was not always a favourable assessment of the Forestry Commission's performance, there was recognition that the role of the Forestry Commission as the largest timber producer in the UK had its benefits: in particular the long-term contracts were seen to provide a security of supply that gave industry the confidence to re-invest in their businesses.

There are many suggestions on how the forestry sector could be better supported to become viable and vibrant. Many respondents are wary of the frequent reviews of forestry policy and would prefer that future policy not only reflected the long life cycles of trees (and forests) but also that objectives for forestry are aligned to other government policies. There are calls for changes to be made to current grant and certification schemes. Many thought that research should continue to be supported; that landscape scale approaches were needed to manage diseases and deer; and that the sector requires markets for all its outputs (not just timber). Information on successful businesses and partnerships are also provided – with the view that the Panel should consider some of these as models on how to manage successful forestry businesses.

“Start from where we are, not where we were. There is nothing wrong with monotonous mono-culture if that is commercially best for production of timber. However other woodland needs to provide the diversity of habitat for wildlife and the environment which visitors appreciate.”

“The countryside is not a museum, it is a working environment where woodland plays a major part and should be recognised as such.”

“Also the general policy has in recent years swung away from production of timber, to the restoration of native woodland. I feel this is a mistake in that the incentive to manage woodland has to have a commercial reason and the production of timber should still be a major factor in woodland management.”

Levers and interventions

There is strong support for better recognition and measurement of the non-market values of forestry as a basis

for providing the incentives to increase woodland cover. This evidence should include the economic and social, as well as the environmental and amenity benefits, and focus groups could provide a useful tool for setting land use goals alongside other valuation techniques.

There is extensive discussion of the disincentives to planting and maintaining woodland that exist, in particular agricultural subsidies and high agricultural land values. This could be balanced with increased targeted subsidies for woodland creation, and use of tax incentives (although these were criticised as being untargeted). Other levers included removing the commitment to maintain tree cover permanently, allowing owners to revert non-ancient woodland to other uses, with a requirement to plant an equivalent area elsewhere, and for the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and Natural England condition assessments for open habitat to allow up to 30% of woodland.

Another suggestion is to use the planning system to require tree planting by requiring individuals, councils and building companies to plant certain areas in return for permission to build houses or larger developments. At the level of national policy, it was argued that the uncertainty of changing policy priorities cause indecisive management and damage forestry benefits, and therefore that forestry policy should be set separately, on a more technical basis, by the Forestry Commission.

There is also support for market-based solutions where feasible; examples given included support for new markets in wood fuels and wood products, using UK forestry certification and the promotion of wood to substitute for more energy-intensive materials. Alternative decision-making management structures were proposed, with the potential for local or conservation

groups to take over woodlands, particularly broadleaf and multipurpose, on leasehold with the support of professional woodland managers, or as civil society/industry partnerships.

The case was made strongly for government investment in forests with public benefits via grant aid, particularly where ecosystem services benefits have no market value, and examples of successful grant-aided forestry projects were provided. It was argued that cutting support to forestry would damage a strategic long-term activity for a relatively small financial saving, and that the forestry funding should be allocated on a long-term basis.

The role of education in improving the value and enjoyment people get from forests was noted, with support for state-funded environmental education programmes to improve understanding and appreciation of woodland, including the role of commercial timber production. Forest schools could be an important vehicle for this. Within forestry, to maintain the necessary levels of skills and expertise there needs to be securely funded forestry training and apprenticeships, with employers supporting career foresters.

“I would therefore like Government to increase financial incentives (through taxation and grants) to encourage more individual woodland ownership.”

“My vision is therefore that the existing management regime should broadly continue with perhaps a reduction in the commercial side of the State Forestry and perhaps a swing back towards grant incentives from Government to encourage private ownership of woodlands to produce more commercial timber, rather than native broadleaves.”

“Joined up thinking is sadly lacking in current (and past) government thinking. Agricultural policy and Forest policy (and the NHS

amongst others) should be linked to avoid the absurd state of affairs where various grants fund opposing policies (eg subsidies for upland sheep grazing at the expense of natural woodland).”

“The Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex also feels that private landowners should be encouraged to contribute towards access improvements, possibly by way of grants, especially when these improvements will meet with the aims and objectives of rights of way improvement plans.”

Ownership

The overwhelming majority of responses wanted the public forest estate to be kept in public ownership as this was associated with protection. To sell a public forest was considered to be to lose it forever to private developers and inappropriate development along with access rights and the very trees themselves. The role, and benefits, of private ownership is referred to but in comparatively small numbers. The existing trade off between profit and function is discussed in relation to the public forest estate.

Views on the appropriate ownership structure for the forest estate are split, and corresponded broadly to opinions on the appropriate role and scale of the Forestry Commission. One vision expressed by many respondents was of public ownership, with unified management of the public forest estate under a well-resourced Forestry Commission. This view argued that public ownership protects a national industry of increasing importance in the face of climate change and energy supply issues, and that it enables disease control to be undertaken more effectively.

This view is supported, at least in part, by some private sector respondents who highlighted the impact of any change in ownership structure on the many businesses

dependent on the public forest estate, and arguing that any disposals would need to be assessed under strict criteria. Others were concerned about access rights if woodland were sold, arguing that access can be restricted within the law, even if land is sold with access rights. It is argued that diverse ownership and associated objectives allows a range of practices to be trialled, but that there is currently an imbalance with private ownership outweighing public and community ownership, and therefore a case to increase public and community management.

An alternative view is that there is no strong rationale for public ownership of forestry other than for national heritage forest assets. It was argued that even these could be structured under local management and accountability. The vision here is of the private sector being supported to deliver active forest management, as far as possible to UK forestry standards. Some argued that the 15% of the public forest estate that was identified as suitable for disposal should be sold as soon as possible, with the balance of the estate that is not of particular public interest disposed of in due course. These could be either sold outright, or leased, e.g. to local or conservation groups. It was noted in this context that in Scotland there is no conflict between commercial timber and public access to woodland.

“I have no faith in the government’s ability to introduce a regulatory regime with sufficient powers to protect adequately two features that we currently enjoy: (i) widespread free access, and (ii) truly creative and committed action on biodiversity.”

“We, as a nation, have nothing to gain from selling off the forests except a one-off sum of money and this could never compensate for their eternal loss.”

“They are a vital part of the English Countryside and a non-renewable community resource – if the government sells them off they are gone, there will be no way we will ever be able to create something similar again.”

“Make sure they do not fall in to the hands of private individuals or companies who seek to exploit them to the detriment of wildlife and people.”

Forestry Commission

A range of perspectives are expressed on the role and performance of the Forestry Commission. The majority of responses view the Forestry Commission positively but many pointed to areas requiring improvement.

There is broad consensus that some types of forest management, research, advice and support to forest owners, especially on reducing risks from climate change, are valuable and appropriate roles for the Forestry Commission, and that the Forestry Commission should take the lead on disease control, with adequate financial resources and access to any necessary legal measures. On regulation, it is suggested that if all timber were required to be certified as sustainable, supervision of the private sector could be undertaken by independent certification schemes.

On the Forestry Commission’s grant-administration there is broad agreement that the grant schemes should be simplified and made consistent, with the agricultural Entry Level and Higher Level Schemes being proposed as models. It is also proposed that this could be managed by Defra rather than by the Forestry Commission.

In terms of the appropriate scale and role of the public forest estate, and the role of the Forestry Commission as a dominant player in the timber market, there are very different opinions. Some support substantial

rationalisation of the public forest estate, arguing particularly that commercial plantations in remote locations with low public benefits should be sold. These respondents envisaged a reduced public role in commercial forestry, with the state managing only those of national significance or a strong balance of public benefits and non-market ecosystem services. They argue that the private sector is best placed to own and manage commercial woodlands, ideally under a lighter regulatory regime, that there is no justification for substantial public sector commercial forestry, and that the Forestry Commission's role in the timber market is distorting and inappropriate.

Others, however, argue that the Forestry Commission offers good value for money across the range of forestry benefits, and provides a role model for private sector; that the Forestry Commission's role in the timber market, ensuring a flow of raw materials from the public forest estate, is economically and socially valuable as it gives processing industry the confidence to invest, whereas private sector supply can be unpredictable and sporadic. Moreover, they argue that public ownership of (ideally an expanded) public forest estate, would provide scope to promote a green economy and ecosystem benefits. Some suggested a potential for the Forestry Commission's operations to be more efficient if, for instance, it could contract out some in-house operations, or if it were allowed to add value by investing in processing.

“You have only to look to the FC to see what good practice is. The FC works in partnership with major organisations of this country, and is a prime example of BIG SOCIETY which this Government is promoting. Because the FC is impartial, being directed by the Government as well as the private sector (Regional Advisory Committees), it is uniquely placed to develop its existing relationships with other organisations, and forge new ones,

and lead the way in the future for forestry in this country.”

“I now organise MTB races and am a leading international official of the UCI travelling to races across Europe at the highest grade of events and despite attending great facilities in ski resorts in Europe and America, National Parks and resource laden Government support to fund events, still none of the nations outside the UK have venues of the consistent calibre as FC sites. This is not only because of the high quality of management but the flexibility that the obligation for provision of recreation that is not hampered by purely economic timber production targets.”

“On some of the heath, intensive cultivation has succeeded in producing a timber crop (whereas over much of it, it will actually cost more to remove them than the timber is worth). After felling, absolutely unforgivably, the FC is now actually replanting conifers on the felled heathland areas. Not content with destroying the heathland in ignorance, they are now destroying it all over again, knowing full well its conservation value. So we have the ludicrous situation that the EU and UK governments are paying conservation organisations to remove pines from heathland, while another arm of government, the FC, is being subsidised to plant them back again!”

“The FC has a proven track record of providing sustainable multi purpose forestry across the whole PFE in a way that meets international forestry standards of providing economic, social and environmental benefits.”

The Future

Protecting, maintaining and increasing forests for future generations was a common theme as was the crucial role good management has to play in achieving these objectives. There is wide recognition of the long timescales woodland operates to. Across all responses the important contribution woodland makes to society as a whole, and must continue to make, is made clear.

“Completely protected 100% from destruction. With ambitious plans for growth of protected land areas and rehabilitation of non-forested areas back to full potential bio-diversity.”

“Woodland management is a LONG-TERM issue. We need to see how woods will be important in decades to come when we have less oil available, economies will more likely be more localised in their focus and local resources will take on a significant value. Traditional woodland management will need to become more widespread, both for timber and pollarding and coppice cycles.”

“Do not be too inflexible and dogmatic, allow for creativity and changing circumstances. Forestry policy has a habit of looking hare-brained to future generations, as times change quicker than the trees reach maturity, and no one can predict the future accurately.”

