

OUR forests

**A vision for England's
woods and forests**



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- Woods and forests are vital for our economic, social and environmental welfare
- Our public woods and forests must be protected for ever, for everyone
- More must be done to harness the benefits of all England's woods and forests
- An ambitious programme of new planting and positive management for all existing woodland
- A long-term plan and national effort over the next 50 – 100 years
- The Forestry Commission – the foundations for a new, publicly-accountable, more independent body.

23 From dreams to reality...

Chopwell Wood, Gateshead

Woods for health and well-being

Chopwell Wood is a 360 ha mixed woodland near Gateshead in North East England managed by the Forestry Commission. Under the Government's disposal proposals, Chopwell was...up for the chop. Yet the woodland is the site of a visionary project designed to improve the health of local communities surrounding the wood.

Doctors advising their patients to increase their physical activity levels can refer them either to a local leisure centre or to Chopwell Wood. In the wood they can choose activities from walking, tai chi, cycling and conservation work. Referred patients agree to undertake a 13-week programme of activities. Completion rates for patients referred to leisure centres or gyms are often low. In contrast, over 90 percent of people referred to Chopwell Wood finished the 13-week programme of activities. Patients emphasised the greater benefits and attraction of being out in the woodland surroundings, relaxing and being physically active. One simply saying that being in the wood, "strengthens heart and mind".

In England the cost of mental health problems has been estimated at £32 billion with more than a third of this attributed to loss of employment and productivity. The cost of physical inactivity in England is thought to be £8.2 billion annually.¹

¹"Strengthening heart and mind": using woodlands to improve mental and physical well-being, L. O'Brien, Forest Research, Farnham, Surrey, United Kingdom. www.forestresearch.gov.uk/fr/INFD-5Z5ALT

The vision – England in 2050

Where we could be – with vision, national effort and political support.

England's woods and forests are embraced as vital to the health, wealth and well-being of the Nation and its people – recognised as having a key role in curbing climate change and enabling human society and wildlife to contend with its impacts. The more frequent and violent cycles of drought and downpour predicted by climate scientists at the end of the last century are now a reality. Our woods and forests are classed as a national network of strategic natural defences.

Following the country-wide outcry against its plans to dispose of England's public woods and forests, the Coalition Government of 2011 changed tack, turning public brick-bats to bouquets by granting the Public Forest Estate (PFE) full and lasting protection. It received international acclaim following the UN International Year of the Forest with a commitment to restore England's tree-cover over the next 50 years back to what it was at the time of the Domesday Book in 1086 – around 15% of our total land area.

This effort proved to be all the more urgently needed following the near decimation of our native oaks by a series of invasive diseases, benefiting from England's warmer, wetter climate. Spending on research into pests and diseases was substantially increased, with strong public support.¹

Unable to refute the hard evidence of the economic, environmental and social benefits delivered by well-managed woodland, the Treasury approved a long-term budget line for this visionary initiative – unleashing a collective effort from local communities, councils, businesses, private landowners, conservation groups and public bodies across the country. By 2050, over half a million hectares of new planting has been achieved – England's 21st Century 'Domesday Forest' is on-target. As well as helping the country withstand and

adapt to the impacts of accelerating climate change, new woods and forests are making communities across England better places to live, pulling in investment and creating thousands of new jobs.

An equal effort has been directed at bringing long-neglected woodland into positive management. Tens of thousands of privately-owned and community-run woods hum with activity – delivering valuable harvests of timber and fuel for heating homes in addition to providing vital 'social services' of carbon-storage, flood protection and a thriving network of wildlife habitats.

By 2050, England's precious heathland habitats have been cleared of inappropriate plantations and returned to their former purple glory. Our remnant ancient woodlands long-overdue protection as 'the jewels in our woodland crown', form the cornerstones of the Domesday Forest – all those damaged by coniferisation are now under restoration.

Forty years back, foresters and those seeking to make a living from woodland were an endangered species. In 2012, England's woods and forests supported just over 100,000 jobs²; in 2050, there are double that number, requiring people with a wider range of skills to maximise the many and diverse benefits that well-managed woods provide. Jobs for young people – a key concern

in 2012 – have been boosted by the much sought-after National Forestry Apprenticeship Scheme.

As thousands of long-neglected, shaded-out woods have been brought back into active management, so the numbers and variety of woodland wildlife have burgeoned. With sunlight once again reaching the under-storey, dormant seed-banks have sprung to life - bluebells and other woodland plants carpet the forest floor. The decline of woodland birds has been reversed – the nightingale's liquid song is no longer confined to poet's verses.

For all the efforts by individuals, communities, private woodland owners and commercial foresters, this vision could not have been realised without the leadership and strategic oversight of Forests for England – the publicly-accountable successor to the Forestry Commission. Forests for England (FFE) is tasked with sustaining the character and diversity of England's existing and future woodland, while ensuring the long-term commercial viability of our woods and forests. Its advisory and research role is underpinned by decades of practical experience on what is still known as the Public Forest Estate (PFE).

To those familiar with the jargon, what FFE does is 'integrated land use'. To the rest of us, that means making sure our woods and forests offer them the best they can, hectare for hectare, for the good of all – producing valuable timber and fuel, providing access and recreation for people, protecting homes and businesses from flooding, and helping our wildlife to hold on during this period of rapid change through a network of linked habitats.

In 2011, politicians questioned whether the country could afford to care for our woods and forests. In 2050, woods and forests are central drivers of a booming low-carbon economy. Vibrant markets exist for timber, woodfuel and carbon-capture. No urban development is conceivable or permitted without an equivalent investment in green infrastructure – trees, woods and forests are as integral to our urban quality of life as energy, water and sewerage systems.

Something else. Beyond their obvious strategic and economic value, the effort to renew England's woods and forests has drawn people together, creating a sense of community, place, well-being, and that most elusive of cultural concepts, national identity – which like our woods and forests, seemed under threat in 2011.



Photo: Gabriel Hemery

References

¹ UK government launches tree biosecurity plan, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-15386617>

² 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.

The opportunity

This opportunity for stepping back and considering a renewed national vision for the future of England's woods and forests is only possible due to the derailing of the Government's original intentions to dispose of the whole 258,000 hectares of what is officially termed the Public Forest Estate (PFE) – but which most people think of as 'their woods'.

Those ill-conceived proposals provoked over half a million people to sign the 38 Degrees 'Save Our Forests' petition and raised grassroots protests across the country.

The main focus of those 534,000 signatories and the myriad grassroots campaigners was to stop the planned disposal of the 1,500 woods and forests that make-up the PFE, and to keep them in public ownership, managed for the good of local communities and society in general.

People power – David Cameron's 'Big Society' in action – forced the Government to abandon its disposal plans, creating the public and political space to move forward more constructively. Without that public outcry from across the political spectrum, the Independent Panel wouldn't exist. With the disposal halted, people have been prepared to give the Independent Panel the benefit of the doubt as that body formulates its recommendations to government. From its recently published interim 'Progress Report'³, there are grounds for optimism. The Panel has shown mettle in declaring that far from being a burden on taxpayers, the PFE "appears to represent very good value for money" – something blindingly obvious to most people outside the Treasury, but good to see it stated.

Our Forests was set up to help hold the Government and others to account over the disposal proposals, to scrutinise the activities of the Independent Panel, and, most importantly, to contribute to the

on-going public campaign by offering an outline vision for the future of England's woods and forests. This has been put forward initially in our own names, as seven individuals involved in challenging the Government's earlier sell-off proposals, all of whom share a passionate interest in what now happens to England's woods and forests. By working with 38 Degrees and other grassroots networks, we want others to help shape the final form of this vision – owning it and adding to its ambition and achievability.

References

3 <http://www.defra.gov.uk/forestrypanel/reports/>



Burning Big Ben at public rally against disposal plans in Forest of Dean.

Working with 38 Degrees, we want others to help shape the final form of this vision – owning it and adding to its ambition and achievability (see page 22).

Principles underpinning our vision

1 Full and lasting protection for the Public Forest Estate

As a national resource providing long-term benefits to the Nation, our public woods and forests must be granted 'inalienable status' in perpetuity, which means them being:

- Set-free from short-term party political interference
- Owned by the public, part-funded by the public.



Photo: John F French / Hands Off Our Forest

2 Active management for ALL our woods

Over 60% of England's woods outside the PFE are under-managed, producing less than 40% of their annual potential harvest of timber, woodfuel and other forest products – under-managed woods mean less wildlife too. Maximising the potential of those over 600,000 hectares of private woodland is an equal, if not greater, priority to creating new woodland.



Photo: Forestry Commission

3 Taking the long view

Forest and woodland management runs on rotations of a minimum of 30 to 50 years; for hardwoods, 100 years or more. By contrast, politicians come and go as chaff in the wind. A sustainable strategy for all our trees, woods and forests (not just the PFE) requires long-term, consistent planning, not the 'stop-start' 5-year cycles of Westminster.



Photo: Ros Daniels / Hands Off Our Forest

4 More trees: 'A Domesday Forest for the 21st Century'

A step-change in ambition and scale of planting is needed to maximise the benefits of woods and forests. Our vision is for a new 'Domesday Forest' - returning England's overall tree-cover to 15% of our total land area.



Photo: Gabriel Henery

5 Robust leadership

Such a scale and ambition of vision calls for a coordinated national effort. 'Big Society' rose up against 'Big Government's' high-handed disposal plans, yet the majority of those people and communities still saw the need for a national body dedicated to looking after our trees, woods and forests – answerable to the public, but more independent of government; responsive to local situations, but with the authority and expertise to provide real leadership.



Photo: Rod Leslie

Principles into practice

1 Full and lasting protection for the Public Forest Estate

Setting out a vision for all of England's woods and forests is critical – but that does not mean side-stepping the priority of achieving full and lasting protection for our public woods and forests.

The PFE needs to be dynamic and have the flexibility to take on and create new woodland closer to urban populations or for other key purposes such as flood protection. That means being able to sell woods that deliver little if any public benefit.

But until the PFE is provided with stronger, lasting protection as a national resource of public woods and forests, there must be no sales.

Our public woods and forests represent a unique national resource with a far higher and longer-term value than the crude market price placed on their head by Ministers interested only in short-term asset-stripping.

The first priority, therefore, is to apply the designation of 'inalienable status' to the vast majority of our public woods and forests. Current law states that the Public Forest Estate is 'owned' by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. That legislation must be repealed – and a 'fire-break' created against short-term party political interference.

Ownership doesn't come for free – the PFE delivers public goods way above the costs of providing them. Where no direct means to pay for those goods and services exist, then continued taxpayer support is justified. The public benefits derived from such an investment (currently 30p per person per annum) represent astonishing value for money.

2 Active management - making the best of all our woods

An equal, if not higher, priority alongside an ambitious new planting programme is to maximise the potential of a much greater proportion of existing woodland outside the Public Forest Estate. We know the PFE is well-managed, with 100% of our public woods and forests certified under sustainable forestry standards. By contrast, the majority of England's woodlands in private hands are under-managed if not entirely neglected.

A popular fallacy is that woods are best left alone. Yet all of our remnant ancient woodlands will have been worked by human hand and axe over time.⁴ It is the cycle of harvesting and regeneration over hundreds of years that has encouraged and maintained their biodiversity. As acknowledged by Wildlife Link (the umbrella body for the UK's conservation organisations) commenting on the Forestry Commission's Woodfuel Strategy for bringing an additional 2 million tonnes of woodfuel to market by 2020, "*The Woodfuel Target could play a key role in contributing to a new low-carbon economy and in addressing the urgent need for positive management of many woods and forests across the country.*"⁵

We need to bring our neglected woods back into productive rotation to kick-start local, low-carbon economies, boost rural employment, and create the right conditions for wildlife. Realising their potential for woodfuel could create at least 15,000 new jobs, deliver carbon cuts equivalent to the emissions of 250,000 households, help save iconic wildlife species like the nightingale and bluebell, and generate £200 million of new business in the countryside.⁶

Increasing the amount of available annual timber harvested would help reduce our reliance on imports and improve our balance of payments. Over 80% of the UK's domestic demand is met by imports at a cost of around £6 billion annually – with one million tonnes of hardwoods alone shipped in each year; a high proportion of which is either cut illegally, destructively, or both.

References

⁴ The History of the Countryside, Oliver Rackham, 1986.

⁵ http://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/2009/Link_position_statement_Woodfuel_Strategy_03Jul09.pdf

⁶ Report for the Forestry Commission published by the Centre for economics and Business research in 2010 <http://www.biomassenergycentre.org.uk>

3 Taking the long view

Politicians of all parties fall prey to the scourge of short-termism, disregarding the interests of future generations, bringing forward one quick fix after another. From a forestry perspective, that's a complete nightmare. Our vision for a near doubling of tree cover requires the galvanising and resourcing of a consistent national effort over at least the next 50 years – a time-scale that will see the passing of 10 Parliaments.

Politicians who question the wisdom of enabling communities, public and private foresters, and other land-managers to work to such time-scales should look up next time they are strolling through Westminster Hall in Parliament. The famous 14th century hammer beam roof at Westminster Hall, completed in 1399, is made from oaks many of which would have already been 100 – 200 years old when felled from the ancient Alice Holt forest, at that time owned by William of Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester and founder of Winchester College.

Wykeham was also Chancellor of the Exchequer and charged with the building of Westminster Hall. The timbers weighing some 650 tonnes have been in place for over 600 years, locking away within their mass over 1000 tonnes of carbon dioxide⁷ – providing any lobbyist for the timber industry with perfectly-located proof of the value of wood for construction and long-term carbon storage.

Alice Holt was passed to the Forestry Commission from the Crown Estate in 1923, along with the New Forest and the Forest of Dean. Despite its clear origins as an ancient forest, it was not one of the sites deemed worthy of being designated as a 'Heritage Forest' in the Government's consultation on its disposal plans.

References

⁷ 1 tonne of wood = 0.5 tonnes of carbon
1 tonne of carbon = 3.7 tonnes of carbon dioxide



The famous 14th century hammer beam roof at Westminster Hall.

The Government estimated it could raise £500 million from disposing of all of the public woods and forests.

Yet an earlier independent economic study estimated that the PFE delivers ecosystem services worth £680 million annually. When all the recreation, biodiversity, landscape and carbon sequestration values provided by our public woods and forests were taken into account that figure rose to £1.8 billion at 2008 prices.ⁱ

Less than 30% of the 914,000 hectares of privately-owned woodland in England is in receipt of government grants, which require landowners to meet sustainable forestry standards – leaving 70% without any form of approved management plan.ⁱⁱ

At under 20% of total woodland in England, the PFE produces 60% of all home-grown softwood timber; harvesting 90% of its annual potential increment of softwoods and 44% of the hardwoods – this contrasts with 37% and 11% respectively for private woodland.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ <http://www.eftec.co.uk/spotlight/economic-value-of-the-forestry-commission-estate-in-england>

ⁱⁱ <http://gabrielhemery.com/2011/04/18/englands-wall-of-moribund-woodland/>

ⁱⁱⁱ [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/eng-pfe-econmicresearch-final.pdf/\\$FILE/eng-pfe-econmicresearch-final.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/eng-pfe-econmicresearch-final.pdf/$FILE/eng-pfe-econmicresearch-final.pdf)

4 'More trees' - A Domesday Forest for the 21st Century

Two messages rang out loud and clear from the public outcry against the Government's disposal proposals: Firstly, people from all walks of life and across the political spectrum set a very high value on the PFE, as a national body of public woods and forests. Secondly, they want more of them.

Both messages are completely consistent with those from the public consultation of 2009 on the future of the Public Forest Estate carried out under the previous government. When asked then what the over-riding priority should be, the majority response was, "Plant more trees!" How many times do Ministers need to hear the same message?

The public's instincts are sound. England is one of the least wooded countries in Europe with less than 10% of its land area under tree cover, compared to an EU average of 30-40%.

Our Forest's long-term vision is for a near doubling of England's tree cover over the next 50 years.

Doubling England's woodland cover from its current area of less than 10% of overall land-use to 20% by 2060 would require 26,000 hectares of new planting each year. Ambitious indeed – given that current annual planting amounts to around 2,500 hectares per year.⁸ But with ten times more people in our densely populated country, we should at least match Scotland, which has set a national planting target of 10,000 -15,000 hectares per annum, so creating 500,000 – 750,000 hectares of new woodland over the next 50 years.

Translated to England, such a scale of ambition and planting would bring the country's tree-cover back to around 15% of total land area, close to the woodland cover believed present at the time of the Domesday Book in 1086.⁹ Creating a 'Domesday Forest' for the 21st Century', restoring the remnant ancient woodland and wider wooded pastures, commons and forests of 1,000 years ago would be an

inspiring public call to action and provide a clear remit and long-term work-plan for a refocused Forestry Commission.

We are not proposing some blunt, brutish planting of 750,000 hectares of single-species, fast-growing conifer invading our hills and surrounding our cities – but rather 'Planting with Purpose', with a diversity of species appropriate to locality and region, and which delivers a wide-range of economic, environmental and social benefits. Wherever possible new planting should bring woods closer to people, where they add the greatest value. Every major urban area (125,000 inhabitants and above) should aspire to have a significant area of woodland (10,000 hectares) within reach by public transport.

This requires a far more strategic vision than glib Manifesto pledges, 'to plant a million trees'.¹⁰ Our proposal for expanding our woodland cover is about integration with and support for other land uses, not setting one sector against another (see Big issues – Forestry and food security on page 18).

With ambition and imagination, that scale of planting could accommodate a wide range of woods, from large-scale, multi-purpose national forests to more modest community woods meeting local people's needs. Just imagine:

10 Forests of Dean (10 new forests of c.10,000 hectares each)

A dozen Thetford Forests (10 new forests of c.19,000 hectares each)

50 Mersey Forests (currently equals c. 6000 hectares of former industrial wasteland renewed as a network of community woodlands).

References

⁸ Current rates of woodland creation in England are c. 2,500 hectares a year. Forestry Facts and Figures, Forestry Commission in 2011 <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-7aqf6j>

⁹ The History of the Countryside, Oliver Rackham, 1986

¹⁰ The Government's 'Big Tree Plant' aims to plant 1 million trees over 4 years. See: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-8BHLV4>

Photo: Forestry Commission / Isobel Cameron

That's a lot of trees...

15,000 hectares of new planting per year tot up to more than 30 million trees planted per year – assuming a mix of conifers and native broad-leaved trees.

A commercial conifer plantation is normally planted at a rate of around 2,000 – 2,500 trees per hectare before thinning. A mixed-woodland will be planted at a similar rate, but should allow 10 – 20% for open spaces. So 750,000 hectares of new planting would amount to well over a billion trees!



5 Robust leadership

A new outspoken champion for England's trees, woods and forests is needed that is more independent of, but can act as a critical friend to government, and lead public policy and guide practice for all our woods and forests. One that meets the expectations and aspirations of those hundreds of thousands of people who demonstrated the core place our woods and forests hold in the national psyche.

That requires a body with the authority and confidence to show robust leadership. The one voice missing throughout the months of public and political furore over the disposal programme was that of the Forestry Commission itself. Gagged by Ministers, the nation's forestry experts and 'tree people' stood stiff and silent as a Corsican pine struck by needle blight. Nevertheless in our opinion, as well as that of other notable commentators, the Forestry Commission has transformed itself over the last 25 years.

But we also believe that the Forestry Commission has to evolve into a body that can become the trusted guardians of the kind of vision that we are setting out here. On page 20, we look at three possible future models that might lead to the new champion for our woods and forests that the public is looking for. The Independent Panel should now consider these in more detail (we will also be doing more work on this).

Whatever happens, an evolved Forestry Commission must be:

- Independent
- Publicly accountable
- Properly resourced
- Working nationally and locally
- Research-led
- Follow an integrated, not a sectoral, narrow focus.

Why people value the Forestry Commission

*"Many made reference to the Forestry Commission's paradigm shift over recent decades. Its historical evolution from pure conifer production to a multi-purpose approach (including 'protecting environments' and 'promoting access' in its many forms) was described by a large proportion of writers and felt by many to show how responsive the organisation is to change. Terms such as 'fantastic', 'excellent' and 'professional' were regularly used to describe its work."*ⁱ

"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."

*"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."*ⁱⁱ

Above comments collated from aborted public consultation on disposal proposal and from Independent Panel's call for views.

“ From wildlife vandal to saviour

Are they destroying nature - which might have been a criticism over 30 years ago? Well, as a measure, 99% of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest in their care are in favourable condition, which is better than we in the Wildlife Trusts achieve, so there isn't much room for improvement there. ”

Tony Whitbread, Chief Executive, Sussex Wildlife Trustⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ PFE public consultation correspondence, summary report drafted despite that 2011 consultation being halted due to public outcry against Government disposal proposals.

ⁱⁱ Independent Panel on Forestry, Progress Report, public responses to Question 2 – 'What is your vision for the future of England's forests and woods?' <http://www.defra.gov.uk/forestrypanel/files/Independent-Panel-on-Forestry-Progress-Report.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://tonywhitbread.blogspot.com/2011/02/forestry-commission-sell-off-3-how-much.html>

The big issues:

1. Climate change – A real and present danger

A succession of governments have failed to provide any national unifying initiative to communicate the real and present danger of climate change. There is still a lack of national urgency and no real sense of the need for collective action.

Policy-makers need to engage the public far more creatively in the battle to curb climate change and to make the threats and impacts that seem far off in time, real and visible. Trees can help bridge that reality gap – foresters in the UK are already selecting species varieties that will be more resilient to the 2°C temperature rise predicted by the middle of this century.

There is common understanding that trees and forests are a key part of our planet's life-support systems ('the Earth's lungs') and can play a part in curbing climate change. In comparison to other technological fixes that have been put forward – huge reflective mirrors in space, for instance, or planes spraying sulphate aerosols into the atmosphere¹¹ – planting more trees stands out as sensible and doable, something people can grasp, will support and be part of.

The recent report by Professor Read and others calculated that planting 23,000 hectares of new woodland each year for the next 40 years, along with existing woods

and forests across the UK, could take up around 10% of the country's current annual greenhouse gas emissions.¹²

Unlike any of the other technical-fixes on offer, that increased woodland area would bring many other benefits as well as locking away dangerous greenhouse gases:

- More space for people for access and leisure
- More places for wildlife to live and thrive
- More resources of timber, reducing reliance on imports
- More supplies of woodfuel to burn in modern, efficient boilers heating our schools, hospitals and homes and replacing non-renewable fossil-fuels.

A national programme of tree-planting (expanding the Public Forest Estate, but going well beyond) – our proposed new 'Domesday Forest' – would put climate change 'front of mind' for the public, communicating its real and present danger and the scale of practical action needed to combat it and contend with its impacts.

Our woods and forests should be seen as key front-line defences against climate-change.

References

¹¹ All scientific, geo-engineering, tech solutions for combating climate change compiled by Royal Society in 2009. Start cutting CO2 before Captain Bonkers does, Charles Clover, S.Times - 6th September 2009

¹² Combating Climate Change, A Role for UK Forests – Synthesis of the Read Report. Read, D.J., Freer-Smith, P.H., Morison, J.I.L., Hanley, N., West, C.C. and Snowdon, P. (eds) 2009

Acting on climate change

Under pressure from campaign groups such as Friends of the Earth and their supporters, the Climate Change Act was passed in 2010, setting a target to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions driving climate change by 80% by 2050, with an interim target of 26% by 2020. Whilst the UK stands a chance of meeting the shorter-term target, the IPCC (the international body of climate scientists) warns that there is now virtually no chance of limiting global average temperature rise to 2°C – the point when 'dangerous climate change' events become inevitable.

Nature's air-conditioners, trees help cool our cities – a 10% increase in tree cover would reduce the surface temperature of major cities, such as Manchester and London by 3-4 degrees.ⁱ

ⁱ Gill, S.E., Handley, J.F., Ennos, A.R., Pauleit, S. (2007). Adapting cities for climate change: the role of the green infrastructure. Built Environment, 33 (1), 115-133 See also: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/urgc-7EVE82>

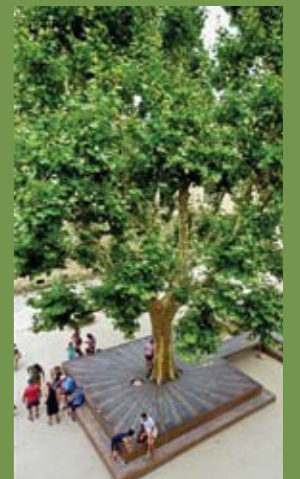


Photo : Gabriel Hemeny

Westonbirt arboretum

Moving maples

At the Westonbirt arboretum, famous for its autumn colours, the Forestry Commission is using its collection of maples to communicate the reality of climate change to visitors. Central to the annual flaming display of autumn leaves, the maples will need to 'move' if they are to survive predicted higher temperatures and lower soil moisture levels. By relocating the collection to available moister areas and choosing more temperature and drought tolerant species, the Forestry Commission is securing the survival of this popular visitor attraction, whilst bringing home the real and present impacts of climate change. The maples act as indicators of the far greater and more challenging changes human society faces.

This is merely the public face of much more detailed work. Using an 'Ecological Site Classification' database and the latest projections for climate change under three possible scenarios Forestry Commission scientists are analysing which tree species will be viable under a range of possible temperature change, soil moisture levels, and extremes of weather across the UK. Complementary research is sourcing and trialling different varieties of trees that can tolerate the most likely future scenario of at least a 2 – 3 degrees temperature rise.¹

¹ <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestresearch.nsf/ByUnique/INFD-5VGEXU>

The big issues:

2. The money – Does our vision add-up?

The majority (70%) of the costs of running the 258,000 hectares of the PFE are met from income generated through timber sales and other activities, leaving an annual cost to the taxpayer of around £16 million (2009/10 figures)¹³ – equivalent to less than 30p per person per year. As people commented in response to the 2009 public consultation and during the furore over the Government's sell-off proposals, that level of support from the taxpayer (less than the price of a second-class stamp) for everything that the 258,000 hectares of the PFE's woods and forests provide across the country is hardly excessive.

On-going taxpayer support is justifiable to sustain the PFE and the benefits it brings for which no obvious 'market mechanisms' exist – or should exist. The Government's own Impact Assessment of the sell-off plans admitted that "it is not known whether there will be a net cost or benefit to society of the disposal"¹⁴ – in particular because all the social and environmental goods provided by the PFE would not be delivered for free by any new owners or managers, but would require public grants. The Impact Assessment noted that "...the government may have to pay new owners more than they pay the FC at present for public goods".¹⁴

A study carried out by the independent consultants EFTEC, as part of the 2009 public consultation on the future of the PFE, showed those benefits to be an order of magnitude greater than the costs:

"PFE provides non-market benefits an order of magnitude greater than the costs, providing a substantial subsidy to the nation in the form of non-market benefits, most notably recreation, which is the biggest single benefit at present, and greenhouse gas regulation, which is set to become the

largest benefit sometime around 2030, not because of physical changes but because the official value of carbon (DECC 2009) rises steeply over time."¹⁵

Our woods and forests can offer real value for money as national carbon stores. As well as there being considerable unrealised value locked away in the trees and soils of the PFE, the growing and harvesting of trees for timber represents good value for money as a means of abating climate change. The Read report calculated that the cost of locking away carbon in trees was £25 per tonne of CO₂ – and that was for multi-purpose mixed woodlands, rather than fast-growing conifers or energy forestry – leading it to conclude that, "woodland creation provides highly cost-effective and achievable abatement of GHG emissions when compared with potential abatement options across other sectors".¹⁶

£25 a tonne is just a quarter of the £100 a tonne considered as cost-effective by the Committee on Climate Change.

The Forestry Commission has also engaged in partnerships with private businesses to maximise the income-generating capacity of the PFE, while seeking to tread a careful path between maintaining a public natural resource and 'wild space' and realising its commercial possibilities. A balance well described by Adventure Forest Ltd, a private business which has been a commercial partner of the Forestry Commission since 2001, building and operating 14 Go Ape! Tree Top Adventure courses on the PFE as part of a 26-year national agreement:

"In our view, one of the greatest successes of the Commission to date has been the way in which it has balanced the competing demands of forestry operations, amenity/leisure and conservation. To its enormous credit, the Commission has neither followed the money nor capitulated to the loudest pressure groups, but continued to steer a middle course. Each

References

¹³ The annual cost of running the PFE has reduced to £10 million according to latest figures.

¹⁴ <http://archive.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/forests/20110127-forestry-ia.pdf>

¹⁵ <http://www.eftec.co.uk/spotlight/economic-value-of-the-forestry-commission-estate-in-england>

¹⁶ Read, D.J., Freer-Smith, P.H., Morison, J.L.L., Hanley, N., West, C.C. and Snowdon, P. (eds). 2009. Combating climate change – a role for UK forests. An assessment of the potential of the UK's trees and woodlands to mitigate and adapt to climate change. The synthesis report. The Stationery Office, Edinburgh

land holding will have unique characteristics that will inform that balance, from the large tracts of commercial forestry at Kielder to the wholly uneconomic small community woodlands on the outskirts of conurbations, where the leisure/amenity interest is uppermost, to areas of particular ecological value. The proper role of the Commission is to balance these, often competing, interests to maximise the social benefits of the Estate whilst also maintaining its commercial viability.¹⁷

The Forestry Commission is no slouch at producing timber – accounting for 60% of all home-grown softwood timber from less than 20% of the woodland area. With timber prices on the rise and likely to continue to do so (as wood becomes competitive against other carbon-intensive materials like concrete and steel) revenues raised from timber and woodfuel will rise too. But as both Adventure Forest Ltd and EFTEC underline, the PFE is about producing far more than just timber – society’s needs have moved on from 1919 when the Forestry Commission was founded. At that time, the Great War had exposed our near-total dependency on imported timber, with the UK’s tree-cover down to an all-time low of just 5% of total land area. So the goal set was simply to plant quick-growing conifers to produce the volumes of pit-props for the coal-mines and planking for the trenches that it was thought a future war and linked industrial effort would require.

Our long-term strategy for woods and trees does need to be on the scale and urgency of a ‘wartime’ effort, but one to

meet a different type of national emergency – climate change – and without sacrificing those nearly £2 billion’s worth of public benefits – which can’t all be provided through market mechanisms.

That principle applies to private woodlands delivering ‘non-market benefits’ – some form of on-going subsidy or grant-system is needed if all our woods and forests, public and private are to deliver their full potential to the good of the Nation.

Woods and forests offer a means to integrate the apparently competing interests of farming, water catchment protection, flood protection and wildlife conservation, softening and blending the edges where these different land-uses rub against each other. Such integrated land-use could deliver huge savings – providing the funds to support the increase in woodland cover we propose and the continued delivery of those non-market benefits. Trees are not a ‘nice to have’ add-on at the end of a built development, but an integral part of essential infrastructure. Huge sums of money flow around and into any major development – a proportion of that money should be ‘tithed’ for creating the new woods and forests that complement and provide services to those new developments.

80% of operations carried out on the PFE are contracted out to private businesses, so supporting the local economy and employment.

References

¹⁷ Response of Adventure Forest Limited T/A Go Ape! to the Call for Views by the Independent Panel on Forestry.

Containing the floods

The floods of 2007 (harbingers of the regular extreme weather events that climate change is predicted to bring) across South and East Yorkshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire are estimated to have cost those local economies (in terms of clean-up and losses to business) some £4 billion.ⁱ The Environment Agency has put the annual costs of protecting the 2.4 million homes vulnerable to flooding at £1 billion. Attempts to reduce diffuse pollution from agriculture and road run-off that damages our rivers and affects water quality cost the taxpayer £8 million in 2008-9, but had ‘little impact’ according to a National Audit Office review.ⁱⁱ Strategically planted woods and forests protect water catchments, slow run-off, and filter pollutants. In Pickering, North Yorkshire, a town with a history of flooding, trees are being planted as buffers to hold back flood waters in an £800,000 soft-engineering plan to ‘Slow the Flow’.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ <http://publications.environment-agency.gov.uk/PDF/SCHO1109BRJA-E-E.pdf>

ⁱⁱ http://www.environmental-auditing.org/Portals/0/AuditFiles/UnitedKingdom_s_eng_Tackling%20Diffuse%20Water%20Pollution.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Climate and Environmental Resources, Evidence Report, September 2010, Yorkshire www.yorkshirefutures.com

It’s about more than money

During the public outcry over the sell-off, the people and community of the Forest of Dean were prominent and early opponents of the Government’s plans. Their uncompromising hostility led to some rapid back-peddling as Ministers sought to contain the grassroots conflagration by describing the Dean and its inhabitants as ‘unique’, ‘an exception’, ‘outside the norm’ of the public woods and forests that make up the Public Forest Estate. This culminated in the Government’s attempt to designate it and other ‘difficult’ areas like the New Forest as ‘Heritage Forests’ – a term hitherto unknown and quickly cobbled together as it became clear some communities were not going to play ball.

At just over 10,000 hectares, the Forest of Dean is not the biggest of the existing woods and forests of the Public Forest Estate – yet it encapsulates much of what makes our public woods such special places and so strongly held in the hearts and souls of their local communities, as well as by their many visitors from further afield. The Foresters have ‘rioted’ on numerous occasions over the centuries in defence of, but never against, their community.

Hands Off Our Forests, (HOOF), the community campaign group, describes The Forest of Dean as ‘a living, working entity, with its inhabitants within it’ – i.e. those 35,000 people who live and work within the boundaries of the Forest. ‘Foresters’ have a deep sense of community & place: ‘Growing up here or coming to live here, with no barriers to access over thousands of acres of woodland, engenders a deep appreciation and understanding. Many, who as children roamed these woods from dawn to dusk, would agree “that the Forest soaks into you”. There’s something to be drawn from the unifying spirit the Forest of Dean provides to the people that live there. That same spirit was manifest in the outpouring of support for retaining the Public Forest Estate in public ownership from people across all political, class & ethnic divides – a shared sense of ‘ownership’ and cultural connection. Despite some modest funding directed at considering the economic impacts of ‘well-being’, reinforced by David Cameron’s personal interest in a ‘Happiness Index’, the Treasury lacks the mind-set or evaluation tools to measure and account for many of the inherent values that led so many people to oppose the disposal proposals.

Places like the Forest of Dean should not be ‘exceptions’. Every effort should be made to engender the same sense of place, community and

purpose in other parts of the country, through new community woods in closer proximity to urban areas. That’s why our vision for a major and sustained effort of new planting across England over the next 50 years calls for replicating woods and forests in ways that we know will work – providing that sense of place and spirit, livelihood and well-being, as a critical part of this country’s natural defences.

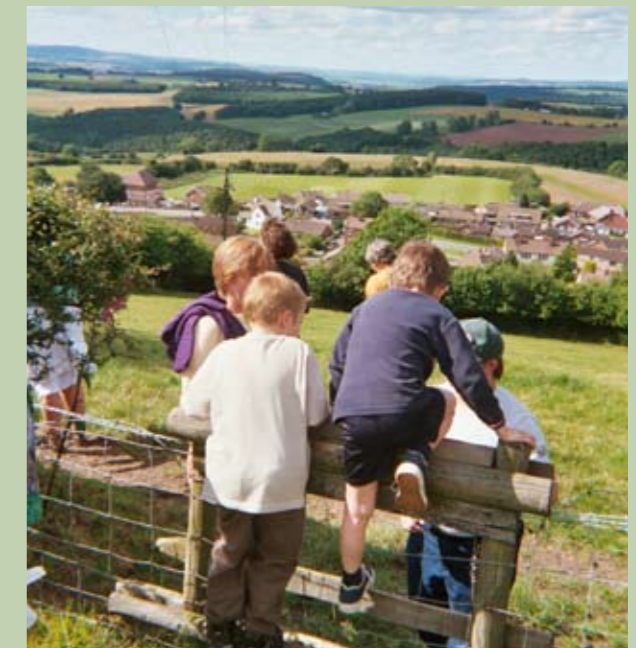


Photo: Ros Daniels / Hands Off Our Forest

“ This other figure which really amazed me, do you know how much it is per person, per year, to each person in England, the government spends? 30p, that’s the £14m divided into, 30p, so if we were all willing to spend 60p [laughs], you could almost, it’s almost having a little box in the village shop where people come in and say “put my 10p change into the charity box”. It’s such a trivial amount, yet governments for years have agonised over and said the Forestry Commission, the cost, it doesn’t make a profit but 30p for free access to Alice Holt and your motorbikes and your cycling and ... ”

ⁱ [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/eng-pfe-socialstudy-report.pdf/\\$FILE/eng-pfe-socialstudy-report.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/eng-pfe-socialstudy-report.pdf/$FILE/eng-pfe-socialstudy-report.pdf)

The big issues:

3. Forestry and food security

England's total land area is around 13 million hectares, of which farmland accounts for around 9.3 million hectares. If all our proposed new planting (i.e 500,000 – 750,000 hectares) was to be located on current farmland (which we are not proposing!), that could take up between 5-8% of England's agricultural land. That would be a significant land-use change, especially given the challenges of climate change and the long-term uncertainties of our relying on imported food and agricultural inputs.

But many more trees and woods can be planted within urban areas and integrated into new developments – with the accumulation of street, garden and parkland trees adding to existing areas of inner-city woods. Our capital city already boasts some 65,000 woods, totalling 17,500 acres, providing a real 'Forest of London'.¹⁸ Some 60,000 hectares of brownfield land (an area equivalent to the West Midlands conurbation) are available for development, which could also absorb significant numbers of trees.¹⁹

At present, the UK is around 60% self-sufficient for all foods – i.e. 40% of what we eat is imported. With almost 60% of our best farmland (Grade 1) lying below sea-level, as climate-change bites there will be significantly greater risks of flooding and salt-water incursion. One study has suggested that arable farming could eventually become unviable on 86% of the Fens and 10% of the rest of East Anglia.²⁰ So we do not underestimate the importance of maintaining a strategic reserve of farmland to feed us in the face of an uncertain and changing future. But it should also be remembered that at the height of the set-aside policy, over 350,000 hectares of arable land was taken out of active farming altogether and lay abandoned – albeit unintentionally providing some much needed habitat for farmland birds.

Our proposal for expanding our woodland cover is about integration with other land-uses. Trees, woods and forests

provide eco-system services that should work in partnership with agriculture – buffering against potential water pollution; reducing flooding from farmland run-off, as well as holding excess water off farmland; providing windbreaks and shelter for crops and livestock. Agro-forestry is an important feature of our vision for a new Domesday Forest – as wooded pasture, providing grazing and fuel-wood, was 900 years ago.

With summer rainfall predicted to decline by up to 50% in the south and east of England by 2080, availability and efficient use of water will become a limiting factor for the viability of farming in some areas. Carefully sited woods help maintain and build water catchments. Managing such ecosystems will be a key part of the farmer of the future's work – to sustain their individual businesses as well as providing a paid-for service to society.

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¹⁸ <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/leafy-london-gets-official-forest-status-656045.html>

¹⁹ National Land Use Database - 2001 Survey. Position statement (May 2003) setting out the Environment Agency's policy position on brownfield land redevelopment. <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/library/position/41237.aspx>

²⁰ An inconvenient truth about food, Neither secure, nor resilient, Maynard, R, & Hewlett, K, Soil Association 2008



Carbon gold!

The overall annual contribution to society from all the ecosystem services provided by the PFE was calculated to be £1.8 billion, over three times the total sale price the government had hoped to get for disposing of the PFE. Some of that £1.8 billion in benefits can be paid for or recouped via market mechanisms, especially as the price of carbon increases and assuming new planting can be included in the offsetting market. Currently, the market price of carbon is £12 a tonne; analysts predict the price will triple over the next couple of years, reaching £200 a tonne by 2030. ⁱ The Public Forest Estate is estimated to hold around 70 million tonnes of carbon in its trees, shrubs, forest soils and peatlands.

ⁱ [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/eng-pfe-econmicresearch-final.pdf/\\$FILE/eng-pfe-econmicresearch-final.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/eng-pfe-econmicresearch-final.pdf/$FILE/eng-pfe-econmicresearch-final.pdf)

The big issues:

4. A renewed role for the Forestry Commission

The failure of vision that led Defra ministers to think that disposing of the PFE wouldn't provoke much public fuss stemmed from a wholly outdated view of the Forestry Commission and the Public Forest Estate as a hang-over from the days of the nationalised coal, steel and railway industries as some monolithic State Forestry Quango long overdue for breaking-up and handing-over to the private sector or other independent organisations. This outdated, crude caricature is also held by some NGOs and journalists, who looked back 25 years to when the Forestry Commission was focused on planting serried rows of conifer monocultures, causing serious damage to highly-sensitive landscapes and valuable wildlife sites.

Since then, the Forestry Commission has radically transformed its priorities. For instance, it is now recognised for looking after the largest number and area (bar the Ministry of Defence) of key wildlife sites (SSSIs) in England – 99% of which are in 'favourable' or 'favourable recovering' condition i.e. the two top condition classes, a better record than for any other public, private or charitable organisation.²¹

This profound transformation is borne out by the diversity of groups and interests that came out against the disposal proposals: archaeologists; astronomers; bird-watchers; car-rallyers; disabled access groups; former coalfield communities; horse-riders; mountain-bikers; orienteers; timber processors etc etc. Indeed, a notable voice opposing the government's disposal proposals was the commercial timber processing industry for which the PFE is a key and secure source of raw material. David Sulman, Executive Director of the UK Forest Products Association, called the proposals:

"A recipe for disaster. If these leasing plans go ahead, thousands of jobs in the forestry and forest products sector will be put in jeopardy; many businesses could be starved of their wood supply and would face closure as a consequence."

As demonstrated, the The Forestry Commission found it had many more friends of all shapes, sizes and political hues than it had thought – friends who leapt to its defence in the face of the Government's attack and proposed disposal of the Public Forest Estate. But that does not mean we are stuck with the status quo. Something new is needed.

There are a wide-range of possible models that might be appropriate for a new, invigorated body (our working title for that new body is 'Forests for England') to lead and enable the expansion of our woods and forests that we envision. We give outline case studies of three possible future models below:

- 'Kew II' – a new Non-Departmental Public Body
- Going Dutch – Staatsbosbeheer, Holland's holistic forestry and wildlife body
- A National Trust for our Woods and Forests?

But it is not **Our Forests'** job to specify which is most fit for purpose – the essential point is that any new body must deliver on the principles we have set out in this Vision paper.

We have emphasised the benefits to the environment that well-managed woods and forests deliver – and that might be seen to suggest that we are proposing a merger of three current statutory bodies: the Forestry Commission, the Environment Agency and Natural England.

We are not.

Whilst offering some benefits for integrating over-sight of land-uses, any such merger would create a bureaucracy of gargantuan proportions that would lose the connection and contact that so many people expressed they felt and enjoyed with the Forestry Commission, thanks to its focus and local presence.

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²¹ [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/eng-corporateplan-2011-clear-type.pdf/\\$FILE/eng-corporateplan-2011-clear-type.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/eng-corporateplan-2011-clear-type.pdf/$FILE/eng-corporateplan-2011-clear-type.pdf)

[http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/eng-pfe-environmentalstatusreport.pdf/\\$FILE/eng-pfe-environmentalstatusreport.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/eng-pfe-environmentalstatusreport.pdf/$FILE/eng-pfe-environmentalstatusreport.pdf)

'Kew II' - A new non-departmental public body

Photo: RBG Kew



Independence from short-termist party political interference is a key principle for any new body, but not total separation from government and public support. That delicate balance is one apparently already achieved by the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew and also by English Heritage, the national defender of our historic built environment.

Ironically, given recent history, it was an earlier Conservative Secretary of State for the Environment, Michael Heseltine, who proposed that the protection of ancient

monuments and historical buildings should be separated from the then Department of Environment (regarded as 'lacking in public respect') and that a new body should be set-up 'free from day to day ministerial supervision'. The 1983 Natural Heritage Act put Heseltine's proposal into practice, creating the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission, commonly known by its working name of English Heritage.²²

In Whitehall-speak, Kew and English Heritage are Non-Departmental Public

Bodies (NDPBs), having charitable status, but continuing to receive a substantial proportion of their annual funding as grant-in-aid from their sponsoring government department. Other income can be raised from commercial activities, such as visitor admission charges, catering, trading, shops, hiring out of venues, and staging of events, as well as from grants and donations from individuals and organisations. Kew also has its own charitable Foundation.



Going Dutch – Staatsbosbeheer

Across the North Sea in Holland – the second most densely populated country in Europe after England with 398 people per square kilometre²³ (England has over 400) and a comparably low tree cover of just under 11% – the Dutch State Forestry body offers some interesting parallels. Staatsbosbeheer, the Dutch Forestry and Wildlife Service, is the state body charged with managing and expanding Holland's 250,000 hectares of forests and other nature reserves.

Originally founded in 1899, 20 years

before the Forestry Commission, Staatsbosbeheer began with a similar mission to replace a depleted national timber resource and reduce imports through single-purpose commercial plantings – primarily of conifers. A combination of finding it impossible to compete against imported timber from much larger producer countries, and growing public criticism of the environmental impacts of such monocultures led to a shift towards mixed, multi-purpose forests that provided space for people and wildlife, as well as a source

of sustainable timber to meet some of the country's needs.

Staatsbosbeheer describes itself as "a social organisation [which]...works for and on behalf of society". Its stated principles indicate a major shift in mind-set, seeing beyond sectoral interests (forestry, farming, conservation, water management, built development) to a holistic approach that seeks to optimise and integrate land-use. The organisation displays an intuitive understanding of the value of woods and forests to the citizens of a

highly-developed, high-pressure economy, most of whom live in crowded, urban areas, and gives voice to this in a way that speaks to people directly, free from civil service constraints:

"Sixteen million people on that tiny piece of earth. These should not be in a straitjacket. They need space."

And so do the 52 million people in England.

A National Trust for our woods and forests?

During the height of the outcry over the disposal proposals, the Prime Minister mooted in Parliament that perhaps groups like the National Trust or Woodland Trust, "could do a better job than the Forestry Commission". This is not a view shared by local people, who have made it clear they do not want a National Trust or Woodland Trust type of body taking charge of what they regard as already 'theirs'.

As a public body, the Forestry Commission has a duty to take into account and balance all interests. In contrast, a charitable organisation answers to its Trustees,

to some extent to its members, and is focused on a narrower set of interests and concerns. But the charitable trust route could be feasible. Forest Enterprise, the part of the Forestry Commission responsible for the Public Forest Estate, already meets the requirements for being a public corporation, as it raises more than 50% of its running costs from activities taking place on the PFE (timber, recreation and leisure facilities, cafes, car-parking etc.).

That could be developed further, allowing the Forestry Commission to follow the path taken by British Waterways, which has

moved away from government to become, 'a National Trust for the waterways'. By spring 2012, it will have separated itself completely from government to become the 'Canal & River Trust'. On its website, British Waterways states that the new body will set up 'Local Partnership Boards' to 'give local people more say in the running of the charity'.

Existing charities might be none too keen on the Forestry Commission joining them as a charitable trust, as it would then be able to apply for public grants. The Government's own Impact Assessment

concluded this would mean little or no saving to the taxpayer, as any new body, like the other NGOs, would be eligible for public funding to pay for the goods and services currently provided under the Forestry Commission's management. A new charitable body set up to look after large parts, if not all of the current PFE, would be a major competitor for such grants and other funding – possibly threatening the survival of some smaller, well-known charities such as the Woodland Trust.

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²² <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/about/who-we-are/how-we-are-run/history-of-english-heritage/>

²³ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/200910/cmhansrd/cm100301/text/100301w0036.htm>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1306213/England-populated-country-EU.html>



In a nut-shell

This vision is about looking forward to how we want to live. How we tackle the urgent challenge of climate change, and make the necessary shift to more sustainable patterns of land use. How we recognise the strong human urge for ‘spiritual’ space and well-being, alongside material needs, in our densely populated country. How we get smarter in making the most of the multiple benefits that forests and woods can deliver.

- **Woodlands and forests are vital for our economic, social and environmental welfare.**
- **England’s public woods and forests must be protected in perpetuity.**
- **Much more needs to be done to harness the benefits of trees, woods and forests, whether publicly or privately owned.**
- **That requires an ambitious programme of new planting (our new Domesday Forest) and bringing all existing woodland under positive management.**
- **A long-term plan and national effort over the next 50 – 100 years is needed.**
- **The Forestry Commission has the foundations, skill-base, and widespread support for forming a new, publicly-accountable, but more independent body to make all that happen.**

Over the next few weeks and months, 38 Degrees will be sharing this vision paper from *Our Forests* among its members, to find out their views about our vision for the future of England’s woods and forests. As *Our Forests*’ ideas develop in the future, we’ll be drawing on the input from 38 Degrees members and their perspectives will help inform our proposal for the future of England’s forests.



From dreams to reality...

An example of what can be achieved is the bold step taken by the Council and community of the degraded, depopulated Borough of St Helens. With help from the Forestry Commission and Groundwork, as part of the ‘Wasteland to Woodland’ project, they have regenerated abandoned colliery wasteland through a programme of tree-planting allied to an inspirational art installation.

Dream is a stunning, 20 metre-high regional landmark sculpture by the Spanish artist Jaume Plensa set atop the landscaped and planted former spoil-heap of the defunct Sutton Manor Colliery. Designed in collaboration with former miners, the white stone head of a 9-year old girl with her eyes closed in meditation, seems to hover above the tree-line. The focus is transformation and renewal. The planting of that new forest, with the sculpture set above it, has catalysed an economic resurgence. Formerly derelict, boarded-up miners’ terraced houses have been renovated and are family homes again; a new private estate has been built right opposite the old colliery gates.²⁴

Green growth – trees and local economy

According to the North West Regional Development Agency, a view of a natural landscape can add up to 18% to property in North West England, and residents in peri-urban settings are willing to pay £7,680 per household for views of broadleaved woods, equivalent to £4.2 billion across the UK.²⁵

Cynics may question whether ‘art and trees’ really do revive blighted landscapes and degraded communities. But when the North West Regional Development Agency invested £50 million in the Newlands community woodland restoration projects in greater Manchester and Lancashire in 2005 it did so on the basis of a hard economic analysis; if it was to attract new and international businesses to the area, it had to overcome an engrained negative perception of the North West as a damaged post-industrial landscape.²⁶

Attracting new investment and people into an area is about a lot more than high-speed train links and new airports. When those potential employers get off their trains and planes they will be thinking as much about where and in what sort of environment they and their work-force will live, raise their families, and enjoy their leisure time. Any development that destroys or degrades the environment it is set amongst will fail eventually – no matter how many tax-breaks and incentives it offers to tempt globe-trotting, footloose corporations to put down roots.

References

²⁴ for more information visit www.dreamsthelens.com

²⁵ Cousins and Land Use Consultants, 2009.

²⁶ <http://www.newlandsproject.co.uk>



Photo: St. Helens Council

OUR forests

A vision for England's public woods and forests

Our Forests

The Independent Panel on Forestry first met on 31st March 2011. The same day, a group of individuals, all of whom had been actively challenging the Government's disposal proposals, also met and agreed the urgent need to form a separate 'ginger group' to ensure the Panel focused on key issues, considered crucial available evidence, and took on-board grassroots views.

Individual members of Our Forests, in alphabetical order, are: **Hen Anderson; Richard Daniels; Gabriel Hemery; Tony Juniper; Rod Leslie; Robin Maynard; Jonathon Porritt**

See also:

www.saveourwoods.co.uk/category/our-forests

www.gabrielhemery.com/our-forests

www.38degrees.org.uk/

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