

Surrey Hills Forest Design Plan

2011 — 2041

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**PROTECTING
AND EXPANDING
ENGLAND’S FORESTS
AND WOODLANDS,
AND INCREASING THEIR VALUE TO SOCIETY
AND THE ENVIRONMENT.**



1. Introduction

This Forest Design Plan (FDP) covers part of the Forestry Commission woodlands in the Surrey Hills, (Effingham Forest, Ranmore and Highridge Wood) which amount to 256 hectares. It sets out our management proposals for the next thirty years. A further 392 hectares comprising the woods of Buryhill and Redlands currently have an FDP. These will be revised in due course to bring our forest plans for the Surrey Hills AONB up to date with policy.

We are guided and directed by a number of policies and strategies - the two main documents are summarised below.

1.1 A Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests

The Government's priorities for England's trees, woods and forests, and its approach to achieving them, flow from "The Coalition: our programme for government" (Cabinet Office 2010).

Whilst Government formulates the detail underlying this programme, our priorities are to make sure that trees and woodlands help in meeting Government's goals for natural resources, climate change, improved urban environments and a better quality of life for all.

1.2 Forest District Strategic Priorities for the Surrey Hills woods

The main priorities listed below are taken from the South East England Forest District's Strategic Plan written in 2000 and due for revision in 2010. The Surrey Hills straddle two strategic zones - Downland, and Greensands and Gravels.

- Use continuous cover systems to regenerate and diversify beech woodlands.
- Maintain landscape character within AONB's.
- Diversify species composition when thinning by retaining appropriate minor species.
- Promote downland flora and fauna by gradually widening rides when thinning.
- Maximise conifer production and financial return on all sites capable of achieving at least yield class 10.
- Encourage Annex 1 bird species by diversifying woodland age structure and creating a succession of open space.
- Maintain existing open heath and support heathland restoration on less productive sites.

- Retain heathland flora along key rides.

Several of these priorities have been overtaken by policy changes. With the exception of Highridge Wood, the majority of the Surrey Hills woods are on the Ancient Woodland register, so the maintenance of conifers as a significant productive resource for the very long term may no longer be appropriate - current guidance prohibits the replanting of conifers (2011). However, it is even more appropriate to grow quality broadleaves to maintain the economic sustainability of the woodland. The relative importance of heathland on Forestry Commission land has been the subject of a separate policy debate - strategy and implementation will be determined at a National level during 2011/12.

Two additional priorities can be added to reflect policy changes in our management of Ancient Woodland sites and in the delivery of Favourable Condition for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

- To rejuvenate areas designated as Planted Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS), maintaining and where appropriate enhancing the features of interest. (The Woodscape programme – see glossary)
- To bring all SSSI's into a 'Favourable' or 'Unfavourable Recovering' Condition by 2010.

1.3 The Surrey Hills AONB

The whole of the FDP area lies within the Surrey Hills AONB. The key elements are taken from the vision statement below.

"The Vision (for 2030) for the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty for all local partners to embrace and work towards is:

- [Ancient woodlands](#) and other woodlands of high environmental quality are sustainably managed and linked in ways that protect and enhance the landscape, ecological, archaeological and recreational value of the wider Surrey Hills landscape.
- [The biodiversity](#) of the Surrey Hills is enhanced through the management of important habitats and their extension in the wider landscape.
- [The historic and cultural heritage](#) that defines the distinctive sense of place within the Surrey Hills is recorded, protected, managed and celebrated.
- [Local visitors and tourists](#) enjoy and cherish the Surrey Hills as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty for its own intrinsic qualities and in ways that contribute to

1. Introduction

the economy of the area, without having a significant adverse impact on local communities and the quality of the environment.

The Surrey Hills is an [attractive, affordable](#) and sustainable place to live, work and enjoy for all members of the local community.”

These priorities are in accord with the priorities of the FC for these woodlands.

The strategic priorities of the Coalition and the Strategic Plan for SE England set the general direction for the future management of the woodland. We take these and our own local knowledge of the site to prepare a ‘Design Brief’. This sets out the main factors we need to take into account within this plan. These may be subsequently modified following consultation. Both the Brief and the rest of the FDP are still arranged around the three themes in the ETWF; Land and Natural Environment, Communities and Places and Working Woodlands. The brief has been consulted with key stakeholders and their responses have been addressed in preparing the proposals.



Crossways, High Ridge Wood

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2. Design Brief

Effingham Forest (East Horsley) is a complex of three freehold woodlands; Dick Focks, Oldlands and Mountain Wood amounting to 145 hectares. It consists of a mixture of conifer (principally Douglas Fir) and broadleaved (principally Beech) species. The key features of these woodlands are the Lovelace Bridges, the woods' designation as Planted Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS), invasive non-native regeneration (Sycamore), one small geological SSSI and some small areas of Yew.

Ranmore is a small freehold woodland of 71 hectares, mixed in character with some larger stands of Beech and other hardwoods. The northern half of the wood is PAWS and Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland. It lies on an escarpment with excellent views to the north. It contains one small SSSI.

Highridge Wood is a small, outlying woodland of 39 hectares to the east of Dorking. Its key features are a wide variety of species (principally conifer), heavy clay soils and an abundance of public rights of way.

Land and Natural Environment

- Areas of this woodland complex are PAWS. The plans should maintain and where appropriate enhance the remnant features of interest, with the most shade casting conifers targeted for early removal.
- There are two small SSSIs in this FDP area. Plans should take account of their management requirements.
- The Lovelace Bridges are a significant cultural resource. Where appropriate, woodland design should support the aspirations of the Project.
- Open rides and road habitats need to be maintained and where possible expanded to provide a variety of edge habitats.
- There are several areas of neglected coppice within Highridge Wood that may be suitable for re-working.

Communities and Places

- The woodlands are close to Dorking and Leatherhead as well as several local villages. The woodlands should provide an attractive backdrop to the lives of local people.

- All the woods are well used for recreation, both by local people and more travelled visitors. Ranmore in particular borders National Trust ground and the wood is bisected by the North Downs way. Design should maintain and where possible improve the attractiveness of the woodlands for visitors.
- Highridge Wood is prone to anti-social behaviour, notably fly-tipping and car dumping. Design cannot prevent this but active management and continued legitimate public use should reduce this activity.

Working Woodlands

- Design and management of the woods, which are in places exposed and on clay soils, should aim to minimise the risk of windblow, particularly in Dick Focks Wood.
- These are mainly small woods and difficult to manage economically. Opportunities should be maximised to develop the quality of the hardwoods where appropriate and to maintain an economic cycle of conifers on non-ancient woodland sites.
- A continuing sustainable harvest of timber is vital for the continuing maintenance of other programmes which deliver an enhanced environment, secure the woods for the future and thus provide employment opportunities. Plans should reflect these underlying needs.

The next three sections describe the Surrey Hills Woods as they are now and current management proposals. At the end of each section, the descriptive information will be evaluated with reference to the Brief. Future management options to deliver the brief will be discussed and then objectives set, with indicators of how these will be measured.

3. Consultation

Fourteen letters were sent to Statutory consultees, Non Governmental Organisations, user groups, neighbours and known interested parties in March 2009, seeking comment on what is important about the woods, what problems they may have, what opportunities there may be and what are the priorities for future management.

At the same time, notices were posted on the entrances to the woods, notifying visitors that a new FDP was being produced and inviting comments on future use and management of the woodland.

Eleven responses were received and seven received a substantive reply. Comments mainly focused on immediate management issues but some took a longer term view of the woods as a valuable resource for the next generation. Views were received on archaeology, especially support for the Lovelace Bridges, misuse of the woods by motor vehicles and fly tipping, signage/access/path surfacing issues, education opportunities and various suggestions on tree management and operational timing.

On completion of the draft, a final opportunity to comment will be offered before final amendments and then signing off by the Forestry Commission's regulatory officer.



A footpath through Ranmore

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