

KENT DOWNS FOREST DESIGN PLAN

2012 – 2042

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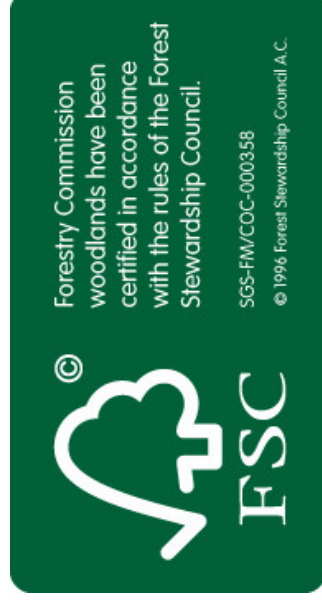
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**PROTECTING
AND EXPANDING
ENGLAND'S FORESTS
AND WOODLANDS,
AND INCREASING THEIR VALUE TO SOCIETY
AND THE ENVIRONMENT.**



1. What are Forest Design Plans (FDP)?

Forest Design Plans are produced by us, the Forestry Commission, to set out the management proposals for the next thirty years for the woodlands we look after. They aim to fulfil a number of objectives:

- They provide descriptions of our woodlands to show what they are like now
- They show the process we go through in deciding what is best for the woodlands' long term future
- They show what we would like the woodlands to look like in thirty years time
- They show our management proposals, in some detail for the first ten years and in outline for the succeeding twenty, so that you can understand how we hope to get to our vision
- The planning process provides an opportunity for you to get involved in the development of the plan, whether you are a user, a neighbour or a member of one of the many statutory agencies that have an interest in the woodlands.

Our aim is to produce a plan that meets your needs for the woodland, meets the needs of the plants and animals that live there and meets our needs as managers. Sometimes there are compromises to be made but we hope that these are explained within the plan or have been explained during the consultation process.

The plan does not set out the detailed yearly management operations for each small piece of a wood, known as a compartment. These detailed site plans are prepared for each operation and their timing and scale is taken from this plan. It is not possible to say which year a particular operation will take place, but we can say in which five-year period it will happen. Further details on timing can be obtained from the local Forest Enterprise office.

Another part of the Forestry Commission is responsible for checking that the plan meets all the relevant standards and statutes. If it does, full approval is given for the management operations in the first ten years (2012 - 2022) and outline approval for the medium term vision (2022 - 2042). The plan will be reviewed after the first five years (2017) to see if it is meeting its objectives. Natural England will approve management proposals for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) which are in our woods.

We use some 'forestry' words and phrases in the text because they best describe what we are doing. There is a glossary at the back of the plan that will help you to understand these. If any aspect of the plan is not clear to you, please contact your local Forest Enterprise office.



2. Standard Practices and Guidance

Underpinning the management proposals in Forest Design Plans is a suite of standard practices and guidance described briefly below. Some of these practices are strategic national policy, whilst others are local expressions of national policy to reflect the particular conditions found in SE England - the policy level is indicated in brackets.

1. The United Kingdom Forest Standard (national)

The UKFS sets out standards for the sustainable management of all forests and woodlands in the UK and describes, in outline, good forest practice.

2. The Certification Standard for the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme (national)

This certification standard sets out the requirements which woodland and forest owners and managers and forest certification bodies can use to certify woodland and forest management, under the United Kingdom Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS). It is the document which guides all of the Forestry Commission's management, and against which the FC is certified by outside consultants to ensure our compliance.

3. Deadwood (national and local)

Deadwood is important in the forest as a host for birds, beetles and some primitive plants. Guidance is given on how we will provide deadwood in the forest of different sorts and sizes and how this will be distributed.

4. Natural reserves (national and local)

Natural reserves are areas of the forest where little or no management activity will take place, to create quiet conditions for trees, plants and animals. These are important in our otherwise actively managed holdings.

5. Ancient Woodland (national and local)

Our ancient woodlands are those areas of the forest where trees were known to be present in 1600. They are not all in good condition and some are covered by non-native species, especially conifers. SE England's project to return these sites to native broadleaves is called Woodscape, and there is a strategy and implementation guidance.

6. European Protected Species (national)

In August 2007 amendments to the Habitat Regulations came into force in England and Wales. Those European Protected Species (EPS) most likely to be found in woodland include all species of bat, hazel dormouse, great crested newt, otter, sand lizard and smooth

snake.

In Forestry Commission managed woodland where one or more of these species has been confirmed, or in the absence of confirmed records the habitat and local distribution of EPS are such that their presence could reasonably be expected, the FC will manage the woodland in accordance with the good practice guidance documents that have been produced by FC and Natural England (NE). On the rare occasion when woodland management operations cannot be undertaken in compliance with the guidance, NE will be consulted and where necessary, an application will be made to undertake the operation under licence.

It is recognised that EPS can occur beyond woodland, and the management of open habitats identified in this Forest Design Plan (FDP) will also need to consider the presence of these species.

7. Corridors (local)

Corridors are the veins and arteries of the forest, centred on streams, roads and tracks and carrying people, wildlife and those working in the woods. This document covers how we manage these, and in particular, how we provide attractive and wildlife rich features.

The local guidance notes have been prepared as separate statements so that we do not have to repeat them in each Forest Design Plan. When they are revised, only one document requires amendment to effect changes to all of the FDP's that refer to them. When national Policy changes, this is usually addressed at the next revision of the Forest Design Plan.

Along with the standard guidance documents, we have individual plans for each of our protected sites - Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Scheduled Monuments (SM's). These describe work required to maintain and enhance the designated features. We will gradually integrate these into our Forest Design Plans where appropriate.

In addition, the Forestry Commission has a number of practice guides and specialist bulletins which further inform our management. These have a national context but provide a good general background to working with a particular aspect of forest management. Titles are available on archaeology, birds, water, nature conservation, community woodland design, soil conservation and recreation.

If you wish to look at any of these documents, please ask at the main office in Bucks Horn Oak, near Farnham in Surrey, or contact a member of the Forestry Commission directly.

3. Introduction

This Forest Design Plan covers the Forestry Commission woodlands in the Kent Downs, (incorporating West Wood, Park Wood, Elhampark, Beveridge Bottom, Covert & Covert Woods, Denge & Eggringe Woods) which amount to 1598 hectares. It sets out our management proposals for the next thirty years. Denge Wood is a new plan with the remaining being revisions of plans dating from 1995, 1996 and 2000.

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

1.1 The Government's Priorities

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 Kent Downs 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 Kent Downs lie within the Downland strategic zone.

- 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.

Several of these priorities have been overtaken by policy changes. All of the Kent Downs 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 good quality and/or valuable 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 2012/12.

Two additional priorities can therefore 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 and to maintain condition thereafter.

1.3 The Kent Downs AONB

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

"The Vision for 2029 describes the Kent Downs AONB that we wish to be passed on to future generations.

- Landform and landscape character ... the rich diversity of landscape character and qualities distinctive to the Kent Downs are protected, enhanced and managed to the highest standards in a coordinated and continual programme.
- Biodiversity-rich habitats ... the rich tapestry of distinctive wildlife habitats are in favourable, resilient condition and individual species flourish.
- Woodland and trees ... the network of ancient and new woodland is conserved and enhanced for its landscape, wildlife and historic value and its extent is intact.
- Historic and cultural heritage ...the rich heritage of historic buildings, settlements and sites that characterise the Kent Downs' historic and cultural fabric are maintained in favourable condition and are enhanced to reflect their local character.
- Natural resources, tranquility and remoteness ... great care is taken by farmers, landowners and managers to conserve and manage the natural resources of the environment particularly soil, ground and river water.
- Access, enjoyment and understanding ... the Kent Downs AONB is a place where there is opportunity and access for all people and they feel welcome to participate in quiet recreation for relaxation, enjoyment, understanding, and for cultural and artistic expression which does not detract from the natural beauty.

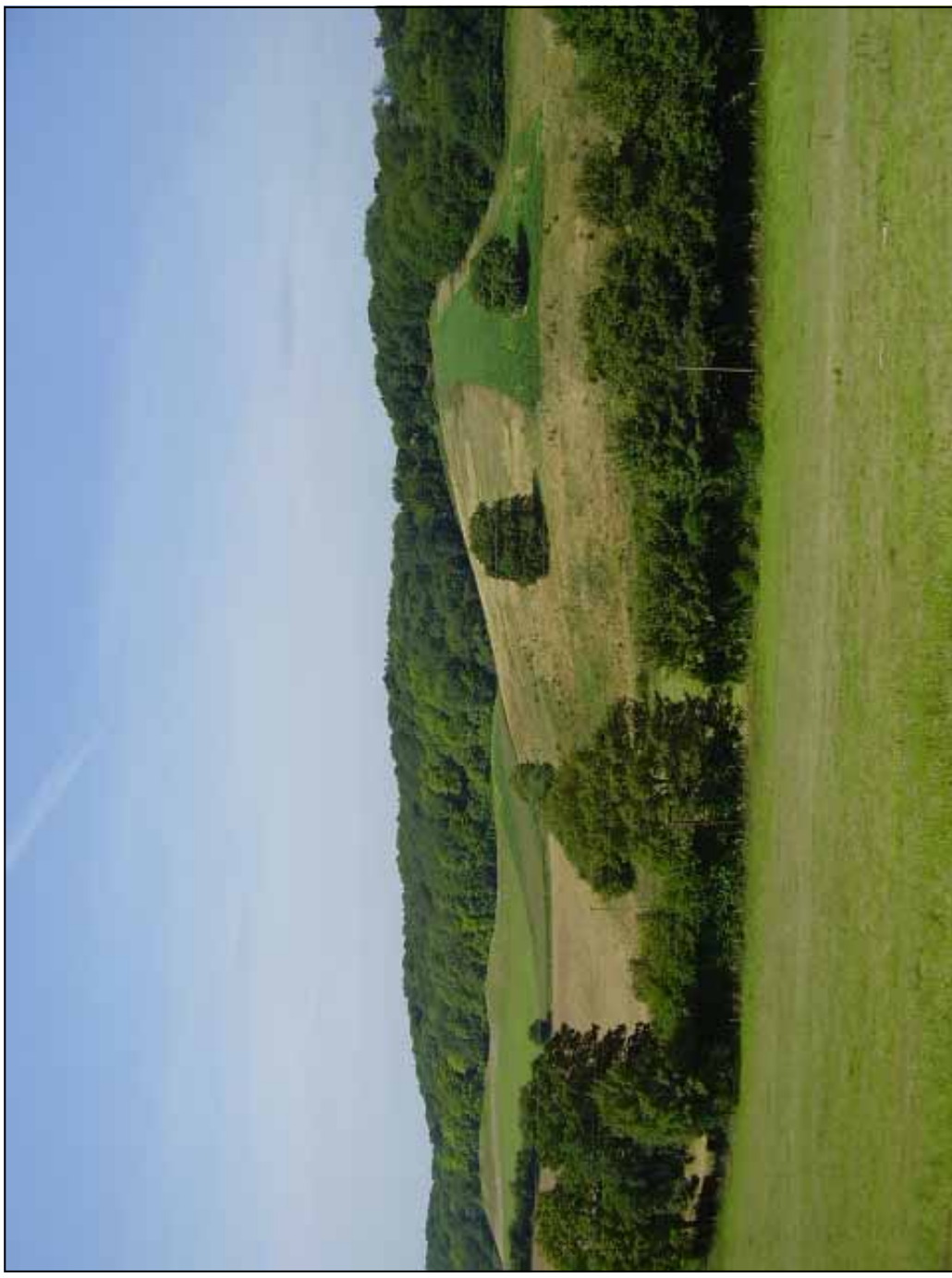
3. Introduction

- [Climate change](#) ... the impacts of Climate Change are being felt but the mitigation and adaptive responses taken to this major challenge are intelligent, effective, measure up to the challenge and are carefully chosen to enhance the qualities and distinctiveness of the landscape rather than detracting from it.

Positive partnerships, local people and land managers act together to conserve, enhance and promote a nationally recognised and valued landscape.” (Kent Downs AONB, 2009)

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.



Landscape view of Covert Wood

(Steve Peters, FC)

4. Design Brief

Land and Natural Environment

- The group of woodlands making up the North Downs Complex are all ancient woodland sites. The plans should maintain and where appropriate enhance the remnant features of interest, with the long term aim of restoring much of the woodland to site native species in an appropriate and effective way.
- The woodlands are all part of a large SNCI. Management proposed will take account where appropriate of the SNCI features.
- The ride network and open space are an important feature of the site and help to support a number of key species.
- A number of the woodlands are notable sites for butterflies according to the Species Action Plan.
- A number of the woodlands are important sites for native downland floral communities.

Communities and Places

- The woodland complex is bounded on its north-east by Canterbury and south-west by Ashford. The woodlands should provide an attractive backdrop to the lives of local people.
- Public usage is high, so careful design and management will be needed to maintain a good balance between providing a safe and enjoyable visit and supporting important habitats and species found in the wood.
- The North Downs Complex of Woodlands are integral parts of The Stour & Elham Valleys. The Plan should aim to deliver a sensitive concept for the future of this fascinating woodland landscape. The plan should reflect the interests and expectations of the partners and the FC.

Working Woodlands

- Approximately 34% of the woodlands are conifer. These areas should be gradually restored to native species throughout the life of the plan.
- Western hemlock is an invasive conifer. It should be targeted for removal in a way that restricts its regeneration.

- A continuing sustainable harvest of timber is vital for the 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.
- In the absence of mature broadleaves, some mature conifers should be retained to maintain diversity and a wide age structure.
- Natural regeneration will rapidly colonise sites with native broadleaves but these may be of limited timber value. Some planting may be required to maintain the wood's productivity.

The next three sections describe the Kent Downs 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.

5. Consultation

Twenty five letters were sent to Statutory consultees, Non Governmental Organisations, user groups, neighbours and known interested parties in December 2008, 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.

Five responses were received and two received a reply. Most comments covered immediate management issues but some took a longer term view of the woods. Views were received in particular on misuse of the woods by ravers, deer numbers, dormouse and butterflyflies. A detailed response was received from the AONB unit and from Butterfly Conservation.

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