

# Strategic Plan for the Public Forest Estate in England

*“To secure and grow the economic, social and natural capital value of the Public Forest Estate for the people of England”*

## Chief Executive’s Introduction

The public forest estate makes up just under one fifth of woods and forests in England; a truly unique asset held on behalf of the nation and one that Forest Enterprise England is proud to manage.

The high value that the nation puts on its forests and woodlands has become resoundingly clear in recent years. Whether for countryside access, timber production, renewable energy or wildlife conservation, the role of the public forest estate is valued by people in all manner of ways across all corners of the country.

We aim to ensure that the estate continues to generate this significant contribution to the economic, social and environmental well-being of England. Working together with partners in the public and private sectors we will play our part to protect, improve and expand England’s woodlands for the benefit of generations to come.

Managing land is a long term business requiring professionalism, commitment and focus. This Strategic Plan sets out how we see the estate sustaining and growing its major contribution to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of England and overall achieving the nation’s aspirations for its woodlands and forests. Delivering this plan will require us to be responsive to shifts in our operating environment and increasingly flexible in our approach, and to sustain this responsiveness over decades to come.

This Plan is part of a long term journey that will take decades to fulfil. It is at the forefront of a number of England wide strategies and plans to address the need for increased forest resilience and the continued enhancement of the ecosystem services delivered by woods and forests in our care. As we work with the Government to take forward its commitment to a long term future for the public forest estate in England, and a new public forest management organisation to care for it, this Plan establishes the direction of travel and the core aims that will create the woods and forests of our common future.



**Simon Hodgson, Chief Executive, Forest Enterprise England**

## About the Public Forest Estate

Each of the public's forests cared for by Forest Enterprise England is home to cherished wildlife, provides a safe place to play and relax, and allows opportunities to be inspired and to get involved. They all support local jobs through timber and tourism and are all funded to a large degree by revenue from the sales of timber, woodfuel and recreational activity.

The Public Forest Estate is the largest single resource of woodlands and forests in England. Its size and distribution mean that it is able to provide a unique range of benefits to a great many people across the country. Spread from Northumberland to Cornwall, Shropshire to Norfolk, some 1,800 separate woodland and forest areas make up the public forest estate in England.

Some 60% of England's softwood production arises from the Public Forest Estate. This softwood production supports hundreds of small contracting businesses and several large sawmills that rely on a guaranteed supply of timber to attract capital investment. The broadleaved production from the estate is also now growing in importance with an ever increasing number of contractors and enterprises making use of the material and rekindling the contribution of native woodland to economic activity.

The 40 million day visits per year support over 80 private businesses on the estate delivering most of our Forest Centre services, bike hire and other outdoor activities.

And alongside all this economic and recreational activity, some 45% of the estate contributes to England's most precious National Park and AONB landscapes. Additionally, 68,000 hectares is designated SSSI in recognition of its value for nature, virtually all of which is in sound or recovering ecological condition and accessible to the public.

The role of the Public Forest Estate can alternatively be described in terms of the ecosystem services it can provide:

- Supporting services such as primary production, nutrient dispersal and cycling.
- Provisioning services such as timber, food (both farmed and wild), water, minerals and energy (from a wide range of renewables such as wind energy, hydropower and biomass).
- Regulating services such as carbon sequestration and climate regulation, flood management, water purification, decontamination of post industrial sites and biological reservoirs for crop pollination, pest control and disease resistance.
- Cultural services around recreational and learning experiences, cultural, intellectual and spiritual inspiration and the advancement of science and education.

## About us

Forest Enterprise England is the organisation responsible for managing the English Public Forest Estate. We aim to maintain our position as an international leader in delivering and demonstrating sustainable, integrated land management. Increasingly we work with others, nationally and locally, in looking after the estate for the good of everyone – today and for the future.

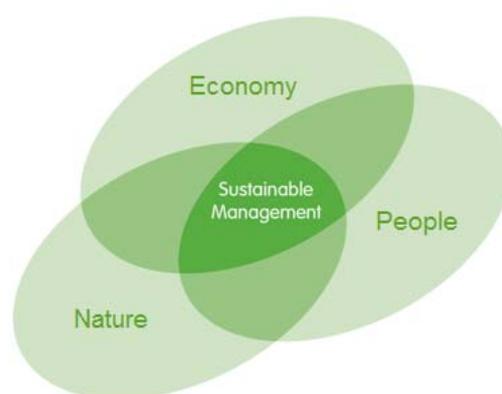
We think long term and are open to innovation and change, achieving internationally recognised standards for our land and business management. In our work we embrace both a public service and business ethos and aim to maintain and enhance the overall financial viability of the estate.

Our task is to realise the potential of each of the public's forests for sustainable business opportunities, wildlife and nature conservation, and the enjoyment and well-being of local people and visitors.

The heart of our organisation is our staff – some 770 passionate, responsive, talented and professional people - on whom all of our success depends.

## Our Mission for the Estate

To work with others to keep the Public Forest Estate as a special place for wildlife, people to enjoy and businesses to thrive- and achieve this by adopting a strategy that integrates all the three drivers of sustainable land management.



## Our Vision and Overall Goal

***“To secure and grow the economic, social and natural capital value of the Public Forest Estate for the people of England”***

# Our Strategic Goals

Our strategic goals are based around the three drivers of sustainable land management; Economy, Nature and People. Within each goal we detail our:

- **Aim** - What we aim to achieve
- **Objective** – How we will meet our aim
- **Strategy** – What we will do to achieve our objective

## An Estate that delivers for Economic Growth

The forestry, wood processing, woodfuel and paper industries, along with recreational visits to forest and woodlands, contributes £4.7 billion to the English economy. The Public Forest Estate is a vast natural resource that plays a key role in maintaining and supporting the development of these industries.

**Aim:** *"To make a significant contribution to economic activity, rural employment and green growth across England using the assets and advantages of the Estate".*

### **Objective**

To meet our Aim we will:

- Maintain the land within our stewardship under UKWAS certification
- Improve the economic resilience of our woods and forests.
- Encourage and support business activity on and around the Estate.

### **Strategy**

We will achieve our objective by:

- Developing operational systems and practice that enable our sustainable land management and business activities to be accredited to recognised standards.
- Maintaining the quality of data we hold about our woods and forests to allow accurate reporting and the publication of a 5 year production forecast to support business confidence within the forestry industry.
- Market timber and forest products to the timber sector through a planned calendar of sales events maintaining volumes consistent with approved Forest Plans in line with our commitments set out in the Timber Customer Charter.
- Publishing a timber strategy that addresses projected future reductions in timber production from the estate (arising from the peaks and troughs of patterns of past planting).

- Diversifying the tree species present on the Estate, and protecting them from damage by deer and other animals, to make the economic potential of our forests and woodlands more resilient in the face of a changing climate.
- Encouraging and supporting new and existing business activity associated with the Estate through longer term contracts for the supply of materials, franchise opportunities and the development of new market opportunities.
- Growing and diversifying our income from a wide range of sustainable activity on the estate, including non-forestry activities (e.g. renewable energy, mineral extraction, agriculture and letting of land and premises).
- Encouraging entrepreneurial activity within both the organisation and our commercial partners, seeking new ways of generating local employment through the development of apprenticeships, the development of tourism services and the provision of recreational and other business facilities and through the specialist use of the forest for activities such as filming.

## An Estate that delivers for the Environment, Nature and History

Woodland and forest biodiversity is a valued component of sustainable forests, contributing to the ecological functioning and health of woodland ecosystems and providing cultural interest and enjoyment for visitors. The public forest estate contributes through species diversity, genetic variability and the provision of larger, less fragmented forest and woodland habitats, integrated well with other habitats. The historic fabric of our woods inspires and informs, and we have a legacy of archaeological and historic features of national importance- particularly to the history and understanding of woodland and forests and their role in the history of the Nation.

**Aim:** *"To increase the environmental contribution made by the Estate to the range of ecosystem services delivered and to protect and enhance its overall biodiversity and heritage value at both the landscape and local level".*

### **Objective**

To meet our Aim we will:

- Improve the resilience of the natural environment of the Estate under our stewardship.
- Realise the potential of the Public Forest Estate for nature and wildlife.
- Maintain and improve the cultural and heritage value of the Estate.

### **Strategy**

We will achieve our objective by:

- Deploying a wide range of silvicultural systems to diversify species composition and structure in our woods and forests to increase resilience against a changing climate and the increasing incidence of pests and disease.
- Enter into partnerships that allow us to share expertise to facilitate the connectivity of habitats and support the delivery of species conservation projects across the woods and forests of the Estate and the landscapes in which they are located.
- Maintain 95% of SSSI within our stewardship in favourable or recovering condition, while over time increasing the area of SSSI in favourable condition.
- Over time, restore the large majority of our ancient woodlands to native woodland, retaining the majority in productive silvicultural management.
- Publish an “Open Habitat Strategy for the PFE” and implement this strategy over time through Forest Plans and partnership projects.
- Work in partnership to deliver a national programme to control invasive rhododendron, unwanted exotic plants and management of deer and other species to deliver good habitat condition.
- Work with partners to support enhanced woodland creation where this will help to safeguard clean water, manage flood risk and bring woodlands and their wildlife closer to people.
- Maintain the quality and condition of the Scheduled Monuments and listed buildings across the Estate and utilise local historic landscape expertise to enhance our understanding and conservation of other key archaeological and historical sites across the forest.

## An Estate that delivers for People

Forests contribute significantly to the quality of life for people in rural and urban communities alike, enhancing the local environment and biodiversity, and helping to mitigate the impact of a changing climate, assisting in reducing air pollution and providing important health and learning benefits. As the most extensive woodland resource in England the Public Forest Estate contributes significantly to these outcomes with an estimated 40 million visits a year.

**Aim:** *“To extend access across the Estate and to expand opportunities for communities to become involved with the Estate and take part in activities that improve quality of life, health and learning”.*

### **Objective**

To meet our Aim we will:

- Encourage communities to become involved in the Estate, its management and direction.

- Provide high quality woodland-based recreational opportunities for people and business.
- Enable everyone, everywhere to connect with the nations' trees and forests so that they understand their importance and act positively to safeguard forests for the future.

## Strategy

We will achieve our objective by:

- Ensuring woodland users are provided with opportunities to contribute to the development and revision of local Forest Plans which are made freely accessible via the internet.
- Exploring new ways of involving communities in their forests and in promoting a woodland culture across the country.
- Providing safe and accessible woodlands across England with high quality centres, car parks, walks and other trails in targeted locations.
- Developing partnerships with private businesses and public bodies to expand and improve recreational opportunities across the Estate.
- Providing opportunities for specialist outdoor activities to take place sustainably on the Estate.
- Creating a wide variety of opportunities through which schools, groups, families and individuals will be able to engage with, and learn about trees and forests.
- Encouraging third party environmental educators and other partners to offer learning opportunities on the Public Forest Estate.
- Keeping woodland users aware of land management activities in their local area and publishing information about the Estate and associated wider initiatives and opportunities.

## Enablers

The realisation of our strategic ambitions and goals is enabled ultimately by two underlying drivers: ***our exceptional people and our future financial sustainability.***

## Our Staff

Our success in achieving our strategic goals depends on sustaining the outstanding performance of our staff; in driving change in the work environment; in generating

innovation and in their commitment to professionalism and public service. We will continue to be an organisation which values its staff, that is committed to high levels of employee engagement, motivation and achievement, and one that openly encourages participation, professional development and personal growth at all levels.

**Aim:** *“To value, support, develop and utilise the full potential of our staff, to manage the changing work environment, and drive the change in a positive way ensuring the Public Forest Estate remains a stimulating and successful place to work”.*

## **Objectives**

To meet our aim we will:

- Increase leadership and management capability, ensuring an environment in which managers are given the authority to take/accept responsibility.
- Maintain a committed, motivated, flexible, professional and diverse workforce.
- Foster a work environment that improves occupational health, reduces accidents and where staff are encouraged and supported to consider their own health and wellbeing , as well as the wellbeing of others.

## **Strategy:**

We will achieve our objectives by:

- Investing in our staff in order to inspire and equip them to lead and manage the evolving organisation and estate.
- Motivating our staff to be part of our vision for the estate by clearly linking each individual’s objectives to our strategic goals through annual reviews and rewarding excellence in a variety of ways.
- Encouraging high aspiration and performance through excellent leadership, employee engagement and good communications.
- Continuing modern apprenticeship and graduate development programmes and supporting new staff to enable them to become effective.
- Providing safe and accessible working environments.
- Fostering a culture for health and safety in which we can learn about problems and identify the root causes of accidents, near misses and incidences of occupational ill health without unfairly blaming individuals.
- Working with others through the Forest Industry Safety Accord (FISA) to raise health and safety standards throughout the industry.

## **Our Finances**

Delivery of people’s ambitions and our strategic goals for the Public Forest Estate is dependent on short term financial viability and long term sustainability.

**Aim:** *"To improve our overall financial strength, by moving towards becoming as financially self-sustaining as possible, in order to deliver our strategic goals".*

**Objectives:**

To meet our aim we will:

- Secure a long term funding settlement for the delivery of agreed public benefits.
- Protect the asset base of the estate through capital maintenance and replacement programmes.
- Develop new or expanded business ventures, generating a positive financial contribution allowing us to;
- Increase reserves and liquidity to manage downturns in trading without calling on public funding.
- Deliver value for money from all of our activities.

**Strategy:**

We will achieve our objectives by:

- Prioritising and aligning available resources to our strategic goals and objectively appraising the short and long term financial implications of all major decisions.
- Regularly updating our short and long term financial forecasts, and using these to guide decision making.
- Managing our costs and driving efficiencies in the delivery of all our activities.
- Maintaining a comprehensive and effective risk management, internal audit and assurance framework and carefully managing financial risks to the organisation.
- Agreeing a funding settlement for the delivery of public service benefits that covers the costs of delivering the agreed benefits.
- Encouraging innovation and development of new business opportunities that maintain or improve the triple bottom line benefits for people, the environment and the economy.

## Duration of the Strategic Plan

This Plan sets out the direction and goals for the Public Forest in England and indicates the actions we will be taking to achieve these between now and 2020. It will take more than one plan period and considerable incremental effort to deliver our vision and aims for the Estate. Our ambitions are long term and we will use a normal cycle of review over 5 years to embed these in local Forest Plans and ways of operating. Such a speed of change is viable within the resources available to us and allows for engagement with people outside our organisation as we go about this.

**Jonathan Spencer**  
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**Forestry Commission England**  
**15<sup>th</sup> of July 2013**