

5. Ringwood North & Somerley NEW 201

5.1 Location *(See Location Map)*

The forest covers a total area of 1082 hectares and is located on a broad ridge which rises from Bakers Hanging in the south east to North Plumley in the north and then swings west through Mount Ararat to Telegraph Plantation. However the FDP only covers 934 hectares as 148 hectares have recently been returned to the leasor for mineral extraction. For the period of the extraction the site will not be in the direct management of Forest Enterprise.

The villages of Verwood and Alderholt lie to the west and north east respectively and outlying residential areas of Verwood lie adjacent to the western boundary of the forest. The Ringwood to Verwood road (B3081) forms the southern boundary of the forest block separating it from the Ashley Heath to the south. The minor Ringwood to Alderholt runs north-south through the forest separating the eastern part of Somerley Forest from Ringwood Forest. The Hampshire Dorset county boundary runs through the forest along the course of Sleep Brook and the County Boundary Stream.

5.2 Landscape Context

Topography within the central and eastern part of the forest block gently undulates between 30 – 50 metres above sea level with average slopes rarely exceeding 1:40. In the vicinity of Mount Ararat the land rises to 90 metres above sea level and slopes of up to 1:5 are present. Much of the forest can be designed as if it were flat and felling will be generally screened from wider view by tree height. Felling coupes have been designed at a scale which reflects the generally flat topography and large scale of the forest. Some coupes have been designed to enlarge and consolidate small scale felling undertaken as part of the previous Forest Design Plan. The forest is seen primarily from the B3081 Ringwood to Verwood road and the minor Ringwood to Alderholt road and provision within the plan has been made to provide views into the forest and to screen the Blue Haze landfill site.

5.3 Current Woodland Structure *(See Habitat Structure and Age Structure Charts)*

Previous Forest Design Plans began a process of age class diversification and this is reflected in the fairly even distribution of woodland between 1 and 60 years of age. The relatively small proportion of woodland greater than sixty years of age reflects past practice in felling crops as they reached economic maturity. The inclusion in this plan of areas managed by continuous cover should increase the proportion of woodland reaching physical maturity.

The woodland is dominated on the podsollic soils by Corsican and Scots Pine which occupy 82% of the woodland area. Western Hemlock is scattered throughout the area and is generally planted in mixtures with Corsican and Scots Pine. The north eastern part of the block along the Sleep Brook at North Plumley has a more fertile soil structure and naturally regenerating broadleaves along with the existing remnant of broadleaved woodland have started to create an increasingly mixed woodland structure in this area. Douglas Fir has been planted and is naturally regenerating on the more fertile soils to the east of the area in Somerley Park.

Open space has been created throughout the block as a result of heathland restoration and ride widening carried out over the past decade and there are a number of relatively small permanent open heathland and wetland areas that have been created and developed by local staff. A larger area of permanent heath (8.1 Ha) was created at Plumley Wood during 1999 which, has links to Cranborne Common SSSI. This current design plans includes proposals to re-establish the a heathland link between Cranborne Common SSSI and Stephen's Castle which forms part of the Verwood heaths SSSI . The plans also builds upon the mire restoration work that has been underway for the last few years.

5.4 Conservation *(See Site Designation Map)*

Only a small part of Ringwood North is designated SSSI. Two small fragments of Cranborne Common SSSI lie just inside the northern boundary of the land managed by Forest Enterprise. These have been designated for their heathland vegetation. The remainder of Cranborne Common SSSI lies immediately to the north and adjacent to Forest Enterprise land. Verwood Heaths SSSI lies adjacent to FE land on the western edge of the forest at Wildchurch Bottom and Noon Hill.

Ringwood Forest contains further localised sites of nature conservation interest. These have been developed by local staff and conservation organisations such as Dorset Wildlife Trust and Herpetological Conservation Trust. They include three small sites designated by DWT as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). These are shown on the Designations map together with rides that will be widened to create heathland links.

5.5 Recreation

An agreement exists between Forest Enterprise and Somerley Estate to allow public access to Ringwood Forest excluding land at Somerley Park east of the Ringwood to Alderholt road.

Outlying residential areas of Verwood lie adjacent to Ringwood Forest at Noon Hill and informal car parking is located at The Chase. Public access is heavy in this area and largely consists of local dog walkers. Elsewhere, informal car parking and access occur along the Verwood road at Ebblake, from the residential development along St Stephens Lane near Wildchurch Bottom and at Drove end at the north eastern tip of the forest. Much of the forest lies beyond normal walking distance for local dog walkers and is therefore usually very quiet. A number of bridleways run through the forest and horse riding is permitted elsewhere in the forest subject to a permit.

5.6 Archaeology *(See Site Designation Map)*

There are eleven scheduled and five unscheduled ancient monuments within the plan area. All are Bronze Age barrows (funerary monuments). All of the Scheduled Ancient Monuments have current management plans approved by English Heritage. The unscheduled ancient monuments will be afforded the same protection as scheduled monuments and will be managed to establish shallow rooted vegetation in an open heathland setting.