

South Downs II Forest Design Plan

2013 – 2043

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



The mark of
responsible forestry

Forestry Commission
woodlands have
been certified in
accordance with the
rules of the Forest
Stewardship Council.



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 new plan meets all the relevant standards and statutes. If it does, full approval is given for the management operations in the first ten years (2013 - 2023) and outline approval for the medium term vision (2023 - 2043). The plan will be reviewed after the first five years (2018) 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 southern 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 Lyndhurst or at Bucks Horn Oak, near Farnham in Surrey, or contact a member of the Forestry Commission directly.

3. Introduction

This Forest Design Plan (FDP) covers the central group of Forestry Commission woodlands in the South Downs, incorporating Marden Block (Inholmes Wood, 66 ha, Wildham Wood, 102 ha, Stoughton Forest, 191 ha and Walderton Down, 33 ha), Charlton Forest, 997 ha (including Drovers Wood), Selhurst Park, 211 ha, Eartham Wood 273 ha, and Houghton Forest 233 ha - a total area of 2,106 ha. The plans for the woods around Queen Elizabeth and West Harting were updated in 2008. Friston Forest near Eastbourne completes the suite but is now managed by the East England Forest District.

This FDP sets out our management proposals for the next thirty years. The Marden blocks and Houghton Forest will be new planned areas - the remainder are updating older plans prepared in 1999.

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

3.1 The National Strategy for Woodland

The Government's current priorities for England's trees, woods and forests, and its approach to achieving them, are found in the 2013 Ministerial Mandate; Government Forestry and Woodlands Policy (Cabinet Office, 2013).

Government policy on woodlands and forestry was confirmed in January 2013. Alongside fully recognising the vital importance and high value of England's trees, woods and forests the Government affirmed its commitment to securing the maximum economic, social and environmental benefits from both public and private woodlands.

Forestry policy is based on resilience, by which the Government means a forestry sector and woodland resource that is growing, provides multiple benefits, is financially sustainable and affordable and well equipped to respond to existing and future threats.

To achieve this aim the policy emphasises the need to direct activity and focus effort on the following key objectives, in priority order:

- **Protecting** the nation's trees, woodlands and forests from increasing threats such as pests, diseases and climate change.
- **Improving** their resilience to these threats and their contribution to economic growth, peoples' lives and nature.
- **Expanding** them to increase further their economic, social and environmental value.

3.2 Forest District Strategic Priorities for the South Downs woods

The main priorities listed below are taken from South East England Forest District's Strategic Plan written in 2000 and partly revised in 2010 - this plan will be revised in due course to reflect the new area covered by South England FD. The South Downs lie within the Downland strategic zone, whose priorities are:

- 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.

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 and to maintain and enhance condition thereafter.

3.3 The South Downs National Park

The whole of this FDP area falls within the new South Downs National Park, formed in the main from the East Hants AONB and the Sussex Downs AONB. The Park came into effect under an Interim Authority on 1st April 2009. Whilst the new Authority is developing a new Management Plan, there is a policy vacuum, but below are the agreed " ... Special Qualities which will form the cornerstone of the National Park Authority's work going forward ..." (SDNP, 2011)

1. Diverse, inspirational landscapes and breathtaking views;
2. A rich variety of wildlife and habitats including rare and internationally important species;
3. Tranquil and unspoilt places;
4. An environment shaped by centuries of farming and embracing new enterprise;

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5. Great opportunities for recreational activities and learning experiences;
6. Well-conserved historical features and a rich cultural heritage;
7. Distinctive towns and villages, and communities with real pride in their area.

These special qualities will frame the priorities of the FC for these woodlands.

The new Government strategy for Forests and Woodlands 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 earlier 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.



Charlton Forest viewed from the south,
near Goodwood (FC picture)

4. Design Brief

The **Marden Block** is a complex of four freehold woodlands 5 miles north west of Chichester; Inholmes Wood, Wildham wood, Stoughton Forest and Walderton Down amount to 396 hectares (ha). All four woodlands are predominantly beech plantations dating from 1940 to 1965. Stoughton also contains some areas of conifer such as Corsican pine and Douglas Fir. Both Stoughton and Walderton contain significant areas of Yew woodland.

There are a number of key features in this block. Inholmes and Wildhams are on the Ancient Woodland (AW) inventory. There are 6 Scheduled Monuments in Stoughton Forest. The Yew areas in Walderton and Stoughton have been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Stoughton also neighbours the Kingley Vale National Nature Reserve (NNR) which is also a SSSI.

All of the woods are significant skyline features when viewed from the villages of Walderton and Stoughton.

Charlton Forest & Drovers is a large leasehold woodland of 997 hectares approximately 8 miles north of Chichester. Charlton is almost entirely Beech plantation planted between 1940 and 1960, with a few small areas of conifer plantation. Drovers is a mixed woodland of conifers and beech.

The majority of the woodland is on the AW inventory. Charlton contains 5 Scheduled Monuments, some of which spread onto neighbouring land. The South Downs Way long distance footpath runs along the northern boundary of some of the wood. Under the terms of the lease, public access in Charlton Forest is limited to public rights of way. There is an oil well within the western end of Charlton Forest.

Selhurst Park is a leasehold woodland of 211ha approximately 7 miles north east of Chichester. The majority of Selhurst is beech planted between 1950 and 1960 with a few conifer plantations dating from around 1990. 80 hectares are on the AW inventory. It provides spectacular views south across the coastal plain. Selhurst contains one Scheduled Monument.

Eartham Wood is a leasehold woodland of 273 ha approximately 8 miles north east of Chichester. The majority of Eartham is beech planted between 1940 and 1955 with a few conifer plantations dating from around 1990. 259 hectares of the woodland are on the AW inventory. It contains 4 Scheduled Monuments including Stane Street, a Roman road.

Houghton Forest is a freehold woodland of 233 ha approximately 4 miles north west of Arundel. It is a mixed woodland with oak, ash, beech, Corsican pine and Norway spruce as well as other minor species - 9.5 hectares are AW. The South Downs Way long distance footpath passes close to the northern boundary of the wood. There is a popular car park and picnic area adjacent to the wood.

Land and Natural Environment

- Areas of this woodland complex are Ancient Woodland. The plans should maintain and where appropriate enhance the remnant features of interest, with the most shade casting conifers targeted for early management to safeguard native plant species.
- There is one SSSI in this FDP area. Plans should take account of its management requirements.
- There are 16 Scheduled Monuments in this FDP area. Plans should take account of their management requirements.
- Open rides and road habitats need to be maintained and where possible expanded to provide a variety of habitats. There are opportunities to target support for the Duke of Burgundy butterfly, a priority species in this area.
- The limited age range within these woods has a tendency to limit the variety of habitat present. Management should seek to continue to widen the age range found in these blocks to benefit flora and fauna.
- The South Downs is now a National Park and noted for its high landscape value. The plan should be sensitive to landscape impact and change.

Communities and Places

- The woodlands are close to Chichester and Arundel as well as several local villages. The woodlands should provide an attractive backdrop to the lives of local people.
- Recreational use of the woodlands varies but is predominantly by local people, horse riders, cyclists and walkers passing along the South Downs Way. Design should maintain and where possible improve the attractiveness of the woodlands for visitors.

Working Woodlands

- Design and management of the woods, which are in places exposed and on thin calcareous soil overlying chalk, should aim to minimise the risk of wind-blow.
- The dominance of beech in most of these woods make them more vulnerable to the impacts of new diseases and climate change. Design and management should seek to diversify the variety of species present.
- 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.

nance 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 South 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.



Larch in Eartham Wood
(FC picture)

5. Consultation

Thirty four letters were sent to statutory consultees, Non-Governmental Organisations, user groups, neighbours and known interested parties in October 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.

Sixteen responses were received and all received a reply. Comments covered immediate management issues but some took a longer term view of the woods. Views were received in particular on conversion of beech woodland to downland, more coppicing and woodland management, more access for horses, conservation of butterflies and bats and the importance of landscape.

A further round of consultation will take place once a draft set of proposals have been prepared. Following any further amendments, the plan will be signed off by the Forestry Commission's regulatory officer.



Walkers on Kingley Vale (FC picture)