

NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION

Threestoneburn Forest was bought by Lilburn Estates from the Forestry Commission. It is the estates intention to fell the forest and convert the area to managed moorland, with native broadleaf riparian planting. This Non Technical Summary summarises the findings of the Environmental Impact Assessment.

2. FELLING APPROVAL CONTEXT

This application refers to a deforestation project with associated new road building and quarrying proposals on 712 hectares at Threestoneburn Forest, situated on Lilburn Estates near Wooler, in Northumberland. The Site is currently predominantly planted with Sitka spruce, although there are also significant areas of unplanted ground on the higher slopes of Hedgehope and Dunmoor hills.

The applicant is the landowner, Lilburn Estates, who bought the forest from the Forestry Commission (FC) in January 2007.

After the site was purchased by the current owners discussions were entered into with the FC regarding the owners preferred deforestation objective for the property. The FC determined that it would be a requirement to prepare an Environmental Statement (ES) to assess the environmental impacts of the proposals and to help determine the Felling Licence process. An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was carried out between May 2007 and August 2008.

Once the FC confirms that the ES covers all of the relevant issues it will be advertised in the local press and copies will be distributed to statutory consultees and copies will also be made available for public viewing at published venues. After the consultation period the FC will make one of the following decisions:

1. Grant consent subject to standard conditions
2. Grant consent subject to standard conditions plus other conditions
3. Refuse consent

By a process of consultation with the FC and discussion with statutory consultees and those present at the scoping meeting the issues detailed below were identified as being important in assessing the impact of the proposals on the environment.

3. SITE DESCRIPTION

3.1. Site Location

The site is situated on the eastern flank of the Cheviot Hills in North Northumberland approximately 10km to the South-west of Wooler. The site is accessed via minor county roads leading onto a private access track which leads to the forest. The forest lies wholly within the Northumberland National Park. The forest is surrounded by heather moorland and upland pasture and public access is restricted to a single bridle-way and footpath running through part of the property.

The current habitats found on the site can be summarised as follows;

Blanket Bog	- 64 ha
Conifer Plantation	- 568 ha
Grassland	- 18 ha
Heathland	- 60 ha
Native broadleaves	- 2 ha

After the proposed deforestation and habitat restoration the areas would be altered as follows;

Blanket Bog	- 296 ha
Conifer plantation	- 0 ha
Grassland	- 57 ha
Heathland	- 292 ha
Native broadleaves	- 67 ha

4. Geology, Hydrology, Soils & Drainage

By the adoption of good design and adherence to industry best practice it has been evaluated that the proposed new road construction, upgrading the existing network and the associated quarrying will have minimal effects on the environment.

The deforestation will affect the hydrological regime, but expert analysis has revealed that adherence to guidelines and best practice will mitigate any adverse effects, such as flooding. In the longer term the deforestation will allow the water table to rise with significant environmental and hydrological benefits.

5. Ecology & Nature Conservation

The habitat will be improved for a wide range of species, for as the trees are removed the vegetation will recover and valuable habitats, such as blanket bog are restored. Watercourse will be protected by buffer zones to ensure they are not damaged and localised engineering (silt traps) put in place to mitigate against silt run-off. In the longer term native broadleaf woodland will be established around these watercourses.

Otters are known to frequent the site and measures will be taken to limit disturbance during the operational phase.

During the various surveys the areas with the highest bio-diversity were found to be the riparian zones and these will be given the highest priority in terms of protection.

6. Birds

A breeding bird survey was undertaken in May/June 2007. This survey identified a wide range of common species using the site as well as a number of scheduled and red/amber list species. Two scheduled species, goshawk and crossbill were identified in the survey will be displaced by the proposals. But both are highly mobile species with suitable unoccupied habitat in the vicinity. The proposals will however benefit other scheduled species identified in the survey or known to breed in the locality such as peregrine, merlin, hen harrier and barn owl as well as red list species such as black grouse, grey partridge, skylark and upland waders.

7. Red Squirrels

Surveys have revealed the presence of red squirrels within the forest. They will be adversely affected by the proposals without the possibility of full mitigation. However expert analysis has revealed that due to the limited tree species range and age of the trees within the forest that the squirrel population would naturally crash in 10-15 years time as the habitat becomes unsuitable to sustain the population. The outlook for red squirrels in the locality is also coming under threat from the colonisation of neighbouring woodlands with grey squirrels.

8. Social & Economic Issues

The proposals will have an immediate beneficial impact on employment as up to 20 people, including locals will be engaged on the project. In the longer term additional estate staff is likely to be employed managing the sheep and grouse moors.

The amounts of timber being moved over the proposed time frame of 3-4 years will have a ripple effect on local timber markets but analysis has shown that there is enough capacity within a 100 mile radius for this timber to be absorbed without significant disruption to `normal` supply patterns.

Access to the forest will be maintained for users during the operations, although some temporary diversions may be required for health and safety obligations. Post deforestation the whole area will become `Access Land`.

9. Landscape

The landscape appraisal shows how the removal of the conifers will not have adverse effects in terms of landscape appearance, but will give an improvement. The removal of the vegetation scar on Hedgehope Hill and the planting of riparian native broadleaves will give tangible benefits.

10. Cultural Heritage

The effects of the proposals on archaeology can be fully mitigated by the safe guarding of the sites during the operational phase as most are within existing areas of open space already. Where required they will be demarcated and taped off. Expert advice will be required as necessary.

11. Traffic & Transport

Three possible routes were assessed and the preferred transport route is the one via Reaveley and Brandon. This route has already been improved to service the traffic from the former sand and gravel quarry at Reaveley Greens. Mitigation measures such as passing places, additional signage, speed limits and a short by-pass can be adopted to reduce disruption to residents and visitors.

12. Carbon

The proposed felling of 568 ha of conifer will release ca. 150000tCO₂ and the proposed riparian planting will only replace 6% of this. Mitigation and enhancement can be achieved by the restoration of the 232 ha of blanket bog, where the raising of the water table will prevent further loss of CO₂ from the drying peat. In addition it is proposed to plant additional woodlands to `fix` CO₂ elsewhere.