

MINISTER'S MANDATE FOR THE NEW FOREST 1999 - 2008

Foreword

In July 1998, I launched a review of the Minister's Mandate to the Forestry Commission for managing the New Forest, following a recommendation from the Forestry Commissioners that the principal management objective in the New Forest should be the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the Crown lands.

The Minister's Mandate, first introduced in 1971, is the Forestry Commission's 'licence to operate' in the Crown lands – half the New Forest Heritage area. The last Mandate was confirmed in 1992, and should have been reviewed after 10 years, but the pace of change in the New Forest brought this forward.

The international importance of the New Forest, as a candidate World Heritage site and EU Special Area of Conservation, gains proper recognition in this new Mandate. Nature conservation and cultural heritage are strongly woven together in the New Forest. Commoning is a heritage that should be sustained here, because it plays a vital part in ensuring that the landscape is conserved in a very special way.

The New Forest is not only of international and national importance. Local people are passionate about the area and the local community wants to be involved in decisions made regarding its future. This is reflected in the high level of interest shown by those consulted, and by the public in general. Their views have been taken into account in the Mandate.

The Mandate places a high priority on maintaining the Forest's traditional character. This is why it is such a popular place to visit. The Government are committed to sustainable management and we recognise the importance of the New Forest as a place for appropriate public recreation. The Mandate aims to ensure that a proper balance will be achieved between conservation, recreation and a working forest environment. The New Forest is a National asset and one we must conserve for future generations.

Elliot Morley MP
Forestry Minister
28 July 1999

Introduction

This Mandate takes account of Britain's international commitments on the environment. It fully reflects the Commission's principal objective in managing the Crown lands, ie the conservation of their natural and cultural heritage, and it places a high priority on maintaining the Forest's traditional character. It also underlines the Government's commitment to sustainable forestry and it recognises the importance of the New Forest as a place for appropriate public recreation.

The Forestry Commission will manage the Crown lands in the New Forest in accordance with the following principles:

Natural Heritage

The Forestry Commission will work to enhance the nature conservation importance of the New Forest, in line with its status as a candidate Special Area of Conservation, through:

- continuing to manage New Forest habitats of national and international importance to maintain or enhance their nature conservation interest;
- undertaking a programme of conversion and restoration to increase the area and/or quality of important New Forest habitats, including pasture woodlands, heathlands and valley mires, grasslands and wetlands, rivers and streams;
- implementing the UK Forestry Standard and any relevant commitments arising from the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and Forest Enterprise's and English Nature's Statement of Intent.

Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage in the New Forest finds expression in a wealth of archaeological sites, in a landscape which has been determined by cultural influences, in rare agricultural and forestry traditions and practices, and in unique social interactions derived over centuries.

The practice of commoning is of great cultural heritage value, both in its own right and for maintaining the traditional character and nature conservation interest of the New Forest. The Forestry Commission will support a sustainable commoning tradition, principally through actively maintaining open forest grazing capacity in a scientifically sound way.

Scheduled and unscheduled archaeological sites are found all over the Forest. The Forestry Commission will prepare specific plans for scheduled Ancient Monument Sites to ensure their protection and enhancement. The Commission will take account of the need to protect other known archaeological sites when determining any management operations in their vicinity.

The New Forest has a nationally valued cultural landscape. The Forestry Commission will consider landscape issues in preparing its Forest Design Plans.

The New Forest has had a continuous history of management interventions for more than a millennium. The Forestry Commission will identify and maintain examples of this heritage, particularly where they contribute to the positive management of important habitats and do not adversely impact upon the overall nature conservation interest.

Public Enjoyment

The Forestry Commission will plan and manage the provision for access and recreation for local people and visitors to the New Forest in ways consistent and compatible with conservation of nature and heritage.

Rural Development

The Forestry Commission will contribute towards the maintenance of a viable rural economy in the New Forest through the provision of work and business opportunities arising from the management of the Crown lands, including woodland management for timber production.

The Commission will co-operate with interested parties in maintaining business and employment opportunities dependent on the Forest, particularly tourism. The Commission will carry out rural development activities in ways that are consistent and compatible with conservation of nature and heritage.

Working Together

In planning its work the Forestry Commission will continue to maintain extensive local consultations. The principal fora will be the Verderers Court, the Consultative Panel and the New Forest Committee.

Management Plan for the Crown Lands

The Forestry Commission will prepare a Management Plan for the Crown lands of the New Forest, which will incorporate the above principles.

The Plan will contain the following management objectives, which are listed in priority order, and the format and content of the Plan will be as described below.

Management Objectives

The Forestry Commission's objectives for the management of the Crown lands will be:

- (i) conservation of the natural and cultural heritage as the principal objective of management;
- (ii) community engagement through greater public participation in decision making, promotion of rural development opportunities, provision of access and recreation opportunities and increasing public awareness and understanding;
- (iii) insofar as is consistent and compatible with the first and second objectives, efficient management of the Forestry Commission's operations and appropriate generation of income from timber production and other uses of the Crown lands.

Format and Content

The new Management Plan for the Crown lands of the New Forest will become operative before the end of 2001. It will include component plans for the management of the Inclosures, the Ancient and Ornamental Woodlands, the Open Forest, and, over the whole area, management plans for access and recreation, and for four species of deer. The Management Plan will be consistent with the needs of the Special Area of Conservation Management Plan and the Strategy for the New Forest prepared by the New Forest Committee. In drawing up its plans the Forestry Commission will consult with local communities who may have an interest.

Plan for the Inclosures

- (i) A significant proportion of woodlands in the Inclosures will be modified to restore pasture woodlands, heathlands, valley mires and Ancient and Semi-Natural native woodland where these are appropriate. A consequence of the modification will be that the present overall balance between broadleaves and conifers will be changed in favour of broadleaves. The pace of this modification will depend on markets, availability of resources and a desire to avoid unnecessary premature felling of existing growing trees, the removal of which will be necessary for restoration of habitats.
- (ii) No broadleaved woodland will be regenerated with conifers.
- (iii) The regeneration of broadleaved areas will be managed with an emphasis on conservation of nature and amenity. For oaks, beech and Sweet chestnut, stand rotations will be at least 200 years with cleared patches for regeneration thereafter not exceeding one acre.

Plan for Ancient and Ornamental Woodlands

These woodlands will be conserved, as at present, without regard to timber production, felling being kept to the minimum necessary to remove unwanted exotic species or promote effective regeneration, and limited to single trees or clumps of trees; consultation with English Nature and other interested bodies will precede a programme of regenerative measures.

Plan for Open Forest

- (i) The Open Forest will continue to be managed actively for the benefit of common grazing.
- (ii) A wide diversity of age, structure and distribution of vegetation will be sought and maintained for the protection of populations of nationally scarce wildlife in consultation with English Nature and other interested bodies.

Review

This Mandate will be reviewed and renewed in 2008.

Rt Hon Nick Brown MP
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
5 July 1999