

JLAF Response to The Future of the Public Forest Estate in England

From: Chris Hogg
Sent: 08 March 2011 19:46
To: publicconsultation@forestry.gsi.gov.uk
Cc: Chris Hogg
Subject: JLAF Response to The Future of the Public Forest Estate in England

Dear Minister,

Attached is a hard copy of the Joint Local Access Forum (JLAF) response to the consultation about the future ownership and management of the public forest estate. The Joint Local Access Forum for Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol City and South Gloucestershire is a statutory body set up to advise Defra, the Forestry Commission and others on matters relating to access to the outdoors. We are composed of representatives from user interests, landed interests and others who wish to promote access to the outdoors.

Our response was drafted by the three Officers of the JLAF BEFORE the consultation was withdrawn and agreed unanimously at the full JLAF meeting on the 4th of March 2011. In view of the fact that the work was completed before the consultation website was withdrawn, we ask that our response be considered alongside the responses which were submitted by electronic means.

We would welcome an acknowledgement that the JLAF response will be considered alongside those submitted by electronic means.

Yours faithfully,

R Newbiggin, Chairman

cc. Robin Winfield, Vice Chairman
Ron Phelps, Deputy Chairman

Chris Hogg
Outdoors Access Improvement Officer
Secretary to the Joint Local Access Forum for Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol City and South Gloucestershire

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Joint Local Access Forum: www.jlaf.org.uk

Rights of Way Improvement Plan: www.rowip.org.uk

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The JLAF is a statutory body established by the three councils shown below, to provide advice as to the improvement of public access to land in the area of Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol City and South Gloucestershire for the purposes of open-air recreation and enjoyment of the area. Its views do not necessarily represent those of the three councils.

**Bath & North East
Somerset Council**

The logo for South Gloucestershire Council, featuring a green stylized landscape with a tree and the text 'South Gloucestershire Council' below it.

**South Gloucestershire
Council**



Joint Local Access Forum (JLAF)

for Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol City and South Gloucestershire

Blank form for JLAF response to forestry proposals – this first page is (almost) blank.

Highlight the chosen response using this button in word (the little down triangle changes colour):



eg:

...to contribute to a network of wildlife corridors across England.

Agree Disagree

Question 1a

Do you agree or disagree with each of these key principles which Government proposes to abide by when making decisions on new owners for the public forest estate?

Protect and enhance biodiversity to contribute to a network of wildlife corridors across England.

Agree Disagree

Maintain public access for recreation and leisure.

Agree Disagree

Ensure the continuing role of the woodland in climate change mitigation and adaptation

Agree Disagree

Protect nationally important landscapes.

Agree Disagree

Question 1b

What changes would you recommend making to this list of principles?

The main issue in 3.1 is the proposed change of ownership. We do not necessarily agree that this is the best way ahead to protect and enhance ACCESS.

But, should sales be made we agree with the four questions in 1a.

Question 2a

Do you agree or disagree that:

New or existing charitable organisations should be offered the opportunity to take on ownership or management of heritage forests?

Agree Disagree

Opportunities should be created for community and civil society groups to buy or lease forests that they wish to own or manage?

Agree Disagree

Commercial operators should be found to take on long-term leases for the large scale commercially valuable forests?

Agree Disagree Blank

Question 2b

Are there other models of ownership or management that could achieve the Government's ambition to reduce state ownership without undermining its key principles?

We do not disagree in principle with the aim of extending the ownership model, subject to a rigorous examination of each organisation's ability to effectively manage the estate in the long run.

Question 3a

How likely are the proposed models to result in efficiency gains?

- very likely
- likely
- don't know
- unlikely
- highly unlikely

Questions 3b

Do you have any evidence or reasons to support your view on the impact on efficiency, and any thoughts on how any barriers to efficiency could be addressed?

These models will require extra regulation and monitoring which will reduce efficiency gains.

Private ownership will be subject to market forces which may be detrimental to ACCESS and efficiency in the long term.

Question 4a

Do you agree or disagree with this characterisation of the public forest estate?

Agree Disagree

Question 4b

What other factors might the Government consider when characterising the public forest estate?

The potential for future public use, taking into account local populations.

Potential for increased variety of use in forests where public facilities are under developed.

Question 5a

Do you agree or disagree that the following criteria are right for deciding whether a particular area of the public forest estate is suitable for transfer to a charity?

Forests of national historical, biodiversity or cultural significance.

Agree Disagree

Question 5b

What other criteria might the Government use?

Where people live.

Charities must be well enough resourced to take on these three categories in 5a.

Question 6a

Do you agree or disagree that the following principles are the right ones to guide the design of a transfer of the public forest estate to a charity?

A recipient charity would be expected to manage the forests to maintain and enhance a variety of public benefits.

Agree Disagree

The charity would have to comply with a set of agreed rules.

Agree Disagree

The charity would meet existing legal commitments, for example tenancies and timber supply contracts, and partnership agreements.

Agree Disagree

The forest would be transferred to the charity at no charge for the new owner.

Agree Disagree

The charity is likely to continue to require continuing funding from Government in return for the public benefits.

Agree Disagree

The charity would be expected to become less reliant on Government grant over time.

Agree Disagree

Question 6b

What other principles should we consider?

Continued support may be necessary to forests with insufficient commercial potential.

Each charity must have adequate professional skills and finance, for example The National Trust and The Woodland Trust.

Question 7a

Do you agree or disagree that these are the right objectives for any charity which manages one of these forests?

High quality access.

Agree Disagree

Certification of woodland management.

Agree Disagree

Safeguarding and enhancing biodiversity benefits.

Agree Disagree

Balancing interests of timber production with those of conservation and recreation.

Agree Disagree

Question 7b

What other objectives should the charity have to make sure that public benefits are protected?

Seek opportunities to extend ACCESS.

An agreed and reliable business plan and comprehensive annual reporting.

Question 8a

Do you agree or disagree that all forest sales, apart from land which is transferred to a charity, and those sales which form part of the 2010/11 – 2014/15 programme, should be offered for sale to community or civil society organisations first?

Agree Disagree

Question 8b

What other approach might the Government adopt?

All the relevant parts of the Forestry Commission estate should be offered to charities and community groups at the same time.

Question 9a

Do you agree or disagree that the following principles are the right ones to guide the design of the sale of the public forest estate to community or civil society groups?

Extra time to prepare to bid for the forest. Groups can also approach the Forestry Commission to discuss buying land which is currently not on the market.

Agree Disagree

The Forestry Commission will provide a valuation and timetable for decision by the organisation.

Agree Disagree

The forest would be sold or leased at the market rate.

Agree Disagree

The groups could apply for forestry grants.

Agree Disagree

Should the groups be wound up, the land would be returned to the ownership of the Secretary of State.

Agree Disagree

Any community or civil society group would be free to manage the forest in accordance with their own objectives (subject to any lease conditions imposed by the Government to protect public benefits).

Agree Disagree

If community or civil society groups chose not to purchase or lease the forest, then the land could be leased on the open market.

Agree Disagree

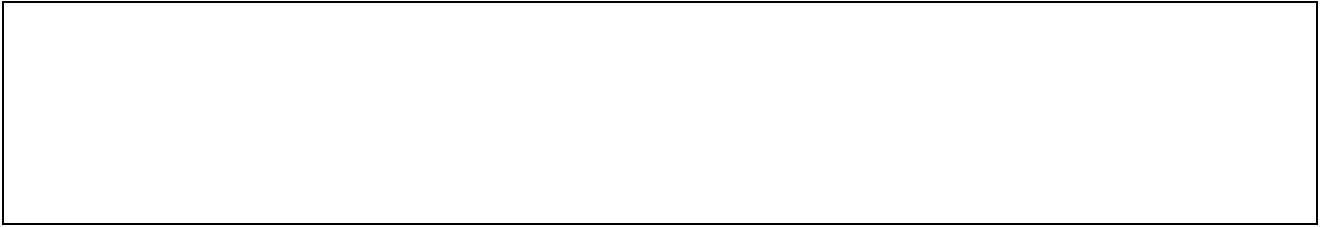
Question 9b

What other principles should we consider?

Why should charities get land free and community groups pay the market rate?

Community groups will need help, money and advice during the purchase process.

Community groups should seek opportunities to extend ACCESS for walkers, cyclists and equestrians.



Question 10a

Is the approach proposed for sales or leases to community or civil society groups sufficient for the protection of public benefits?

Agree **Disagree**

Question 10b

What else could be required of local community groups?

There should be an obligation on community groups to seek to extend ACCESS whether the transfer is by sale or by lease.

Question 11a

Do you agree or disagree that these are the right criteria for deciding whether a particular area of the public forest estate is suitable for leasing to the private sector?

Where the primary purpose and benefit delivered by the woodland is timber production and other commercial opportunities.

Agree Disagree

Scope for using lease conditions to safeguard public benefits.

Agree Disagree

Question 11b

What other criteria might the Government use?

Timber production should be the only criterion for leases.

Question 12a

Do you agree or disagree that these are the right principles to guide the leasing of productive forests?

Lessees would be identified through a competitive dialogue process.

Agree Disagree

Leases would last for 150 years and impose conditions where needed to safeguard public benefits.

Agree Disagree

Where practical, smaller parcels of land which have particular public value would be considered for separate sale.

Agree Disagree

Consideration will be given to the potential impact on the supply of timber into the wood-processing industry, in particular during any transition period.

Agree Disagree

Question 12b

What other principles should we consider?

Question 13

Are there other safeguards that the Government could consider outside the scope of the provisions of an individual lease (when offering leasehold of commercial forests)?

Extend ACCESS for walkers, cyclists and equestrians in all leases.

Question 14a

Do you agree that the proposed approach is the right approach for managing the residual estate?

Agree Disagree

Question 14 b

What other approach might the Government adopt?

Agreed, but subject to rigorous oversight.

Question 15a

Do you agree or disagree that Forestry Commission England should focus on the delivery of forestry policy through:

protecting the woodland resource and increasing its resilience to pests, diseases and the impact of climate change;

Agree Disagree

improving the woodland resource to enhance delivery of public benefits;

Agree Disagree

expanding the woodland resource by promoting and creating incentives for planting and naturally regenerating trees, woods and forests of the right type in the right place;

Agree Disagree

empowering and enabling people to determine and deliver the public benefits which they want from woodland; and

Agree Disagree

promoting a competitive, thriving and resilient forestry sector.

Agree Disagree

Question 15b

What other priorities should Forestry Commission England focus on?

Additional comments

Please use this box to add any other comments you may have on the consultation.



Joint Local Access Forum (JLAF) for Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol City and South Gloucestershire

This document was drafted by the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Joint Local Access Forum (JLAF) for Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol City and South Gloucestershire and agreed unanimously by the full JLAF meeting on the 4th of March 2011.

Our area includes the Forestry Commission owned Overscourt Wood; nearby Leigh Woods is very important to residents in Bristol. However, our ~ 1 million population use Forestry Commission woods close at hand at Mendip, the Forest of Dean and the Wye Valley as well as travelling further afield for walking, cycling and horse riding in Forestry Commission Woods.