3.0 Regional context: the Forest of Dean
3.0 Regional context: the Forest of Dean

3.1 Introduction
The regional context of Cinderford is dominated by the Forest of Dean, described by local author and playwright Dennis Potter in his book The Changing Forest:

“I know of few more fascinating areas, and, entering the Forest of Dean by whichever route you choose, you can soon sense that you are in a self-absorbed community where the interrelation of landscape, work and the different generations demands more than the usual flickering attention.”

The Forest is a unique place with a certain set of traditions and interests that stretches back through the centuries. It is located southwest of Gloucester between two important rivers, the Wye and the Severn. The area is characterised by over 110 square kilometers (42.5 sq mi) of mixed woodland, one of the surviving ancient woodlands in England. Although the name is often used loosely to refer to that part of Gloucestershire between the Severn and Wye, the Forest of Dean has covered a much smaller area since mediaeval times. The Forest was under Crown control from 1066 onwards, reserved as a royal hunting ground. It is now managed by the Forestry Commission.

Historically, the Forest was a resource for timber, iron working and coal mining; local people travelled into the forest for employment. Today, the relationship is turned around with an increasing number of local people travelling out of the forest area for employment, as the economy has changed from manual work to the service sector. The majority of those attracted to the Forest today go for leisure instead of work, whether they are local residents or tourists.

This section of the baseline report covers the following subjects on the Forest scale:

- Regional planning context;
- Forest of Dean natural context;
- Historical development of the Forest;
- Regional transport connections;
- Regional attractors.
3.2 Regional planning context

The Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West 2006–2026 identifies how the South West can support national planning and sustainability goals over a 20 year period. The strategy was submitted to the Regional Assembly in April 2006 and is expected to be adopted in summer 2009.

The Integrate Regional Strategy for the South West (IRS) (2004) identifies a number of key challenges for the South West region which have a bearing on the settlement of Cinderford. These include:

- Accommodating a growing population by addressing housing affordability despite low wages;
- Addressing out-migration of young people and graduates due to poor career prospects;
- Protecting the South West’s exceptional natural environment;
- Making a significant contribution to national climate change targets;
- Reducing waste production per capita;
- Improving poor transport links; and
- Addressing significant pockets of deprivation.

The RSS contains a spatial development strategy which sets out a spatial response to these challenges and which identifies the Forest of Dean as an employment-led regeneration opportunity. Regeneration should address high levels of commuting within the Forest of Dean, and to Herefordshire and Wales, and should help address deprivation. The RSS emphasises that levels of residential development should not exceed employment provision. It sets a net dwelling requirement for the Forest of Dean of 310 homes between 2006 and 2016, and 6,200 homes for the period of the plan.

Regional Planning Guidance for the South West (RPG 10) (2001), remains the spatial strategy for the South West region until it is superseded on adoption of the RSS. RPG 10 prioritises funding and investment towards the Forest of Dean to address disadvantage in accessibility to jobs, services and affordable housing. Contrary to the draft Regional Spatial Strategy, RPG 10 aims to improve transport links between the economically successful and less successful parts of the sub-region.

Gloucestershire Local Transport Plan 2006–2011

The Local Transport Plan 2006-2011 (LTP) has six objectives: Safe travel, maintenance and improvement, economy and integration, accessibility, real choice and awareness and environment.

The vision of the LTP is: ‘To enable people in Gloucestershire to enjoy real choices of ways of travel where there are viable alternatives to the car and be provided with high quality access to services on a safe and efficient transport network.’

The LTP acknowledges a high road fatality rate, in particular amongst the youth in the Forest of Dean. Poor accessibility of the Forest of Dean is a particular issue identified in the LTP. Access to services is a key concern for the local communities in the more rural districts. In line with the Gloucestershire Economic Strategy, the LTP sets out that attention must be given to improving the accessibility of remote areas, either through improved transport links or electronically and that sustainable economic growth can only be achieved through an integrated transport network and the provision of employment sites that are accessible by public transport. The LTP also identifies that travel to work patterns indicate that the Forest of Dean is becoming increasingly popular for commuting purposes to major employment areas, with emphasis on Gloucester.

According to the LTP, transport will have a role to play in regeneration of parts of the Forest of Dean. Improving accessibility in the Forest of Dean to key employment sites and encouraging more local jobs are therefore indicated as local priorities. The LTP sets out that the main mode of transport to work in the Forest of Dean is the car with an increase of 17% from 1991, whilst over the same period public transport became the least popular mode.

Another aim of the LTP is to reduce the impact of freight on communities. In relation to the Forest of Dean, this includes implementing maintenance, safety and traffic management schemes to mitigate the impact of HGVs on communities as well as developing and implementing network improvements on the A4136 to reduce the adverse impact of quarry lorries. The LTP asserts that freight access to the Forest of Dean is generally poor.

Another initiative identified in the LTP that will have an impact on the Forest of Dean is a programme for key locations such as GP surgeries to have their own site-specific accessibility plan, consisting of a development of the travel plan concept, but aimed at identifying issues and promoting accessibility rather than reducing traffic congestion.
3.3 The Forest of Dean - natural context

The Forest of Dean is located between the Wye and Severn Valley. The entire region was once heavily forested, with extensive, uninterrupted woodland. Over the centuries large amounts of the forest have been lost to agriculture and development, but the protection over the Forest of Dean means that it is the only remaining uninterrupted wooded area in the district. The Wye Valley also contains significant wooded areas, albeit scattered along the length of the valley.

More detail on ecology and landscape is provided in chapters 4.10 Landscape and 5.8 Ecology.

Fig 3.3.1 Natural context
3.4 Historical development of the Forest of Dean

Introduction

The Forest has provided a resource for living in the area since ancient times. Traditionally the main sources of work in the area have been forestry, including charcoal production, iron working and coal mining. Evidence shows that the area was extensively mined for coal from about 8000 BC to 1965 AD. The pre-industrial mining in the Forest was possible because the coal and iron seams are very close to the surface; as such, they could be mined without steam-powered machinery. This led to an early, small-scale mining industry, but it never developed to the scale of larger and deeper mines such as in south Wales or the Ruhr Valley in Germany.

The communities of the Forest settled around its boundary, as it was illegal to settle within the Forest. However, these communities sustained themselves with what the Forest had to offer: forestry, farming and the iron and coal industries. The Forest was the source of livelihood in the region. Links for trade and exchange existed early on, as the Wye and Severn Rivers offered transport links by boat to the growing centres of Gloucester and Ross-on-Wye.

During the industrial revolution the Forest experienced rapid change, not only in technology, but also in links to the region. An extensive tram and rail system was built with services running to Gloucester and even Bristol, made possible in 1876 by the construction of a bridge crossing the Severn.

After the decline of the iron and coal industry and the dismantling of the railway, the Forest established itself as a centre for manufacturing and light industries. These were located in the market towns and villages surrounding the Forest boundary and resulted in a fundamental change in the relation between the Forest and its communities: the Forest ceased to be the centre of economic growth and employment. The links to the region increased in their significance for education, employment and health. The Forest continued to exist and to recapture its ecological value and significance as a place of outstanding natural beauty. Even though the wood in the forest is still harvested, the predominant role of the Forest for its community is as a place for recreation and tourism.
3.4 Historical development of the Forest of Dean

Ancient times – 1805

Those ruling Britain over the last two millennia - from the Romans to the post-Norman monarchs - have recognised the importance of the Forest as a resource and for leisure. The procedure of freemining was introduced 800 years ago, as a favour for the men of the region who helped King Edward I in a battle against the Scots. As the mining process became increasingly regulated over the centuries, settlements sprang up in and around the Forest.

- The Forest was occupied by the Romans, who found iron ore there. They established a port at Lyndey, and a major settlement at Gloucester. Prior to the Romans, there is some evidence of Neolithic activity in the area.
- The Forest was used as a hunting ground by the Normans. The Normans also used the iron ore and timber of the Forest. In the 12th century the King granted free mining rights to local miners, a procedure that continues today. These people are known as Freeminers. The King appointed Verderers to supervise the Forest, and again this title still exists today with four Forest of Dean Verderers in office.
- In Tudor times the Forest was used as a hunting ground, providing meat for the Royal Court. Charles II also hunted in the Forest, and had the Speech House built in 1676 as a hunting lodge. The Speech House still stands and is now used as a hotel.
- In 1612 James I opened an ironworks in the Forest, and licenses were granted to local ironmasters. This lead to some of the first small settlements in the Forest, which were illegal cabins on Crown land.
- This process, known as encroachment, continued over the next centuries, with the Crown destroying cabins, and new settlements being established.

- The key connection from Newnham, which had a harbour on the Severn estuary, to Mitcheldean was via Littledean. This route continued through Littledean forming the connection to Coleford.
- Cinderford was a tiny hamlet at this time, and therefore is not shown on the 1805 map.
3.4 Historical development of the Forest of Dean

1805-1868

The region industrialised very quickly during the 19th century, as coal, iron and tin mining became increasingly commercialised. The Crown began to release land for those working in the Forest, and existing settlements around the region grew rapidly; Cinderford is an example of this.

- In the 19th century industrialisation spread across the region.
- Commercial industry included deep coal mining, iron mines, tinplate works and forestry across the area.
- Several commercial ports at the Severn supported the forest industry, namely Bullo, Lydney and Newham.
- There was a huge increase in the population in the region as Crown land was released as freeholds in certain areas around the Forest, to allow those working in and around the Forest to settle nearby. Squatters also settled at the forest fringes on forest ‘waste’. These were areas within the forest boundary but clear of trees. These settlement patterns have led to the distinct ring of development surrounding the forest today.
- A tram network and then a railway line were established in the early 19th century, with the first rail connection in the Forest from Newnham to Ruspidge. Tram and railway lines were built to move the raw materials that were being mined around the region, especially to the port in Lydney.
- Passenger rail lines were built from Gloucester to London and Bristol, allowing easy access for those wanting to visit the region.
- A new road, the present A4151 and main road of Cinderford, was built. The road runs north-south through the town, and then to the east through to Gloucester.
- Cinderford developed very rapidly as a commercial town, built around industry.

Fig. 3.4.6 Forest of Dean, 1868
3.4 Historical development of the Forest of Dean

1868 – 1960

The Forest of Dean region had its heyday in the early 20th century, with commercial mining becoming increasingly successful and providing employment across the region. There was investment in passenger railways and civic services across the region, with schools, churches and shops opening. In the mid to late 20th century employment prospects in the mining industry dwindled as the commercial mines ceased operations, and many local people moved to work in the manufacturing sector.

- Local passenger railways and trams were expanded across the area in early 20th century, opening up the region to outsiders and allowing those within the region relatively quick and easy access to Gloucester, Bristol and London.
- In 1879 the Severn Bridge (rail) was opened for rail only, allowing trains to distribute the coal, iron and tin from the mines across the country by rail instead of canal or sea. In 1960 the bridge was damaged beyond repair by a pair of oil barges.
- Cinderford grew in significance while Littledean remained a village. The route from Littledean to Mitcheldean lost its importance.
- In 1924 the Forestry Commission was given the custodianship of the Forest, a role it continues to hold today.
- A combination of depleted reserves and flooding, often due to earlier workings, led to the coal and iron mining industry becoming increasingly unviable from the 1920s onwards. In 1946 the last commercial iron mine closed and in 1965 the last large colliery closed in the region, leaving only a few small scale mining activities in the Forest. As a result, unemployment rose and many people within the Forest moved to employment in the manufacturing sector.
- In the 1960s some local passenger rail services, which had been declining, closed following the Beeching Report, including the station at Cinderford. This increased reliance on the car and helped isolate the region from the wider country.
- Cinderford declined with the closure of the colliery and its passenger rail station.

Fig. 3.4.7 Forest of Dean, 1900
### 3.4 Historical development of the Forest of Dean

**Present day**

Today the Forest of Dean regional area has only very limited mining industry; instead, local people are likely to be employed in the manufacturing or service industries. The closure of passenger railways has, in some respect, cut the region off from the rest of the country and increased reliance on the private car. A significant proportion of the local population out-commute to surrounding towns and cities. The Forest is now less of a source of livelihood for the region and more a leisure resource for local people and visitors to the region.

- Today the Forest of Dean has a population of around 80,000.
- The railways and most of the early industrial sites in the Forest have been dismantled. Railway and tramlines have been converted to walking and cycling trails.
- One of the main sources of employment in the Forest of Dean area is manufacturing, but the tourism and service industries also employ local people.
- Freemining, quarrying and the production of bricks are the industries that had survived the changes in production and enterprises.
- The Forest is a popular tourist destination. It has spectacular flora and fauna, with fallow deer, wild boar, the peregrine falcon and rare butterflies. Other tourism destinations include a sculpture trail in the Forest, Beechenhurst Lodge, the Speech House Hotel, Cannop Ponds, Clearwell Caves and Mining Museum.
- There are four market towns in the region: Cinderford, Coleford, Lydney, and Newent. Cinderford is the only town within the statutory Forestry Commission boundary.
3.0 Regional context: the Forest of Dean

3.5 Regional transport connections

Vehicular accessibility
Poor access to and from the M5 is a problem identified in the Cinderford Business Plan (2007).

There is a strong reliance on the private car in the Forest, given the few rail stations in the region. Not having a car within a household could severely hamper the prospects of people in the Forest region. The main destinations for car commuters are Gloucester and Bristol.

Car journey times

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Distance</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ross-on-Wye</td>
<td>10.3 miles</td>
<td>20 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucester</td>
<td>14 miles</td>
<td>22 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouth</td>
<td>12.4 miles</td>
<td>24 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chepstow</td>
<td>22.1 miles</td>
<td>32 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheltenham</td>
<td>22.5 miles</td>
<td>34 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tewkesbury</td>
<td>26.5 miles</td>
<td>37 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>39.7 miles</td>
<td>55 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucester Airport</td>
<td>17.0 miles</td>
<td>27 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol Airport</td>
<td>47.8 miles</td>
<td>1:07 hrs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AA Route Planner

Fig. 3.5.1 Regional road network
3.5 Regional transport connections

Rail connections
While there are two rail stations in the region – the local station at Lydney and the larger Gloucester Station - they are poorly linked to the overall network and do not offer quick or frequent services. For example, it takes 1 hour to get to Bristol from Gloucester Rail Station and there is only one train every 2 hours direct to London.

**Lydney Station**
Arriva Wales branch line, unstaffed station with minimal facilities. 12 miles, 21 minute drive.

Direct services
- Gloucester: 0:20 hrs
- Cardiff: 0:52 hrs

**Gloucester Station**
First Great Western main line, key station on network. 14 miles, 22 minute drive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bristol Temple Meads</td>
<td>1:00 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham</td>
<td>1:00 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiff</td>
<td>1:10 hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Paddington</td>
<td>2:00 hrs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 3.5.2 Regional rail, air and sea connectivity
3.6 Regional attractors

Education

There are a number of post-16 colleges throughout the Forest of Dean region, but none in Cinderford. The Royal Forest of Dean College is currently split across two sites at Mitcheldean and Coleford. The main university in the region is the University of Gloucestershire, which is located in Cheltenham. Cardiff and Bristol both have a number of colleges and universities within commuting distance.

The 2001 census found that less than 10% of Cinderford ward’s population held a degree or higher qualification, and over 60% had no qualifications or only Level 1 qualifications (GCSE, NVQ etc).

The ward was in the highest 10% for deprivation in education and skills nationally.

Key to colleges/universities

1 University of Gloucestershire
2 Hartpury College (FE & HE land-based/sport/equine courses)
3 Gloucestershire College (16+ FE & HE courses, including part-time/evening/short courses)
4 Royal Forest of Dean College (16+ FE & HE courses, including part-time/evening/short courses)
5 Stroud College (HE & FE courses)

Note: not all education establishments may have been picked up. Source: www.direct.gov.uk
3.6 Regional attractors

Healthcare

There is good health provision across the region in terms of GP surgeries and hospitals.

The nearest A&E to the Forest is in Gloucester or Chepstow. Minor A&E are in Lydney and in Cinderford. There is one hospital in the Forest, the Dilke Memorial Hospital, which caters for dermatology and podiatry. The absence of a maternity ward in the Forest, or within the area called the ‘Hundred of St. Briavels’ affects freeminers rights as only people born within this area are entitled to become freeminers.

**Key to hospitals**

1. Chepstow Community Hospital  
   24hr minor injuries unit, rehabilitation, physio, general medicine
2. Ross Community Hospital  
   Ongoing medical care, gastroenterology, gynaecology
3. Lydney and District Hospital  
   Minor injuries unit, physio, occupational therapy, general surgery
4. Dilke Memorial Hospital  
   Dermatology, podiatry
5. Winfield Hospital  
   Private, wide range of specialisms
6. Gloucester Royal Hospital  
   A+E, intensive care, general
7. Nuffield Health Cheltenham Hospital  
   Private, general, ENT and other specialisms
8. Delancy Hospital  
   Assessment, rehabilitation, elderly care

Fig. 3.6.2 Regional healthcare attractors

Note: not all GP surgeries may have been picked up.
3.6 Regional attractors

Leisure and culture

There is a good range of museums and historical buildings across the region as a whole. Many of the museums in the area relate to the heritage of the area, for example: the Iron Mine Heritage Attraction Centre at the Clearwell Caves; the Great Western Railway Museum in Coleford; the Hopewell Colliery Museum on Speech House Road; and the Dean Heritage Centre in Cinderford.

Sport is extremely popular in the Gloucestershire and south Wales area. Rugby is very popular with boys and girls, with semi-professional/professional clubs in Cinderford, Lydney, Gloucester and Cheltenham. Cinderford RFC also have a youth coaching programme and both male and female teams.

People from outside the Forest may travel into the Cinderford area for recreation, tourism and leisure purposes.

The sport venues on this map are league clubs only.

Key
- Museum
- Historical building
- Leisure centre
- Football ground (Football League clubs only)
- Cricket ground (County clubs only)
- Rugby ground (Rugby League clubs only)
- Site
- Statutory Forest

Fig. 3.6.3 Regional leisure and culture attractors
3.5 Regional Attractors

The market towns of the Forest

On a regional level, Cinderford is located in the context of towns Mitcheldean, Lydney and Coleford, all within 15-20 minutes driving distance from Cinderford.

Mitcheldean is the nearest, just north of Cinderford, and the town is well located on the A4136 and closer to the A40 than Cinderford. As such, it has a stronger connection to the regional transport network. Mitcheldean is an old market town on the historic cross-roads between the Newham - Ross and the Gloucester – Monmouth routes and was granted a market in 1328. Mitcheldean is much smaller than Cinderford and has a population of 4,238 (including Drybrook), but can offer high levels of flexible employment and office space through the Vantage Point business park. Mitcheldean has a secondary school and the RFD College runs some courses in the business park. Mitcheldean is directly competing with Cinderford on office and employment space, with the advantages of being better located on the regional transport network and having a well managed business park.

Coleford is located to the west of Cinderford and the Forest and is about the same size as Cinderford. Coleford’s connection to the regional and national transport network is less well established compared to Cinderford. The town is connected to Chepstow by the B4228 and from there to the M48 to Bristol and Newport. Historically, Coleford was located on the route between Gloucester and Monmouth and became a market town during the 14th century. Today, Coleford’s industries rely on manufacturing, similarly to Cinderford, but in addition it can offer more higher-skilled employment than Cinderford through the district council offices being located in Coleford. Tourism is also better established in Coleford, as the architecture and urban fabric of the town is more in line with tourists’ expectations of a historic rural market town.

Lydney, to the south of Cinderford and on the Severn estuary, is well connected to the regional transport network as it lies on the A48, is accessible by rail and has a port. The area of Lydney has a far reaching history of human activity, including an Iron Age hill fort and a Roman temple at Lydney Camp. The town became a market town in 1268. Today, Lydney has a lower population than Cinderford (7,115). It has a hospital with a minor injuries A&E unit and performs more strongly than Cinderford in retaining local retail and shoppers (Baseline Review by GVA Grimley, 2009). Good accessibility, access to amenities, the beautiful landscape setting and built heritage put Lydney in a good position for people who want to live in the region, and close to the Forest.

In summary, the towns surrounding Cinderford all have aspects competing with Cinderford in terms of attracting business and providing high quality jobs or amenities. They are attractive places to live and have built successfully on their assets in terms of accessibility, heritage or location. This shows that it is possible for the towns of the Forest to thrive and that Cinderford has the potential for successful regeneration.

Fig. 3.6.4 Market towns of the Forest
The Forest of Dean has a unique culture and management regime stretching back over 1,000 years. The Forest has been the focus of the region in terms of a natural resource for nearly 8,000 years. Commercial mining in the 19th century led to rapid urbanisation, first through encroachment settlements, and then ‘legitimate’ towns, such as Cinderford, developed as a direct result of the Forest and its natural resources.

In the last 40 years, since commercial mining declined in the region, local people have been increasingly commuting out of the Forest area. Travelling out of the Forest is a relatively new phenomenon, after millennia of people travelling into the Forest to exploit natural resources. The challenge for the region is to create professional jobs and attract visitors back into the Forest through new economic activities.

In summary:

**Historic**
- The Forest has provided a resource for living in the area since ancient times. Traditionally the main sources of work in the area have been forestry, including charcoal production, iron working and coal mining. Evidence shows that the area was extensively mined for coal from about 8000 BC to 1965 AD.
- Development within the Forest has been carefully controlled by the Crown since the Normans.
- Industrialisation in the 19th century led to rapid urbanisation across the region, which has since declined in the latter half of 20th century.

**The Forest today**
- The population of the Forest area today is approximately 80,000.
- The region is characterised by over 110 square kilometers (42.5 sq mi) of mixed woodland, one of the surviving ancient woodlands in England.
- There is a good range of leisure and cultural attractors across the region and within the Forest. Sport, especially rugby, is important in the region.
- There is significant out-migration of young people and graduates due to poor career prospects.
- The Forest area is relatively isolated in terms of transport, with few train stations and no direct motorway access.
- Even though the timber in the forest is still harvested, the predominant role of the Forest for its community is as a place for recreation and tourism.