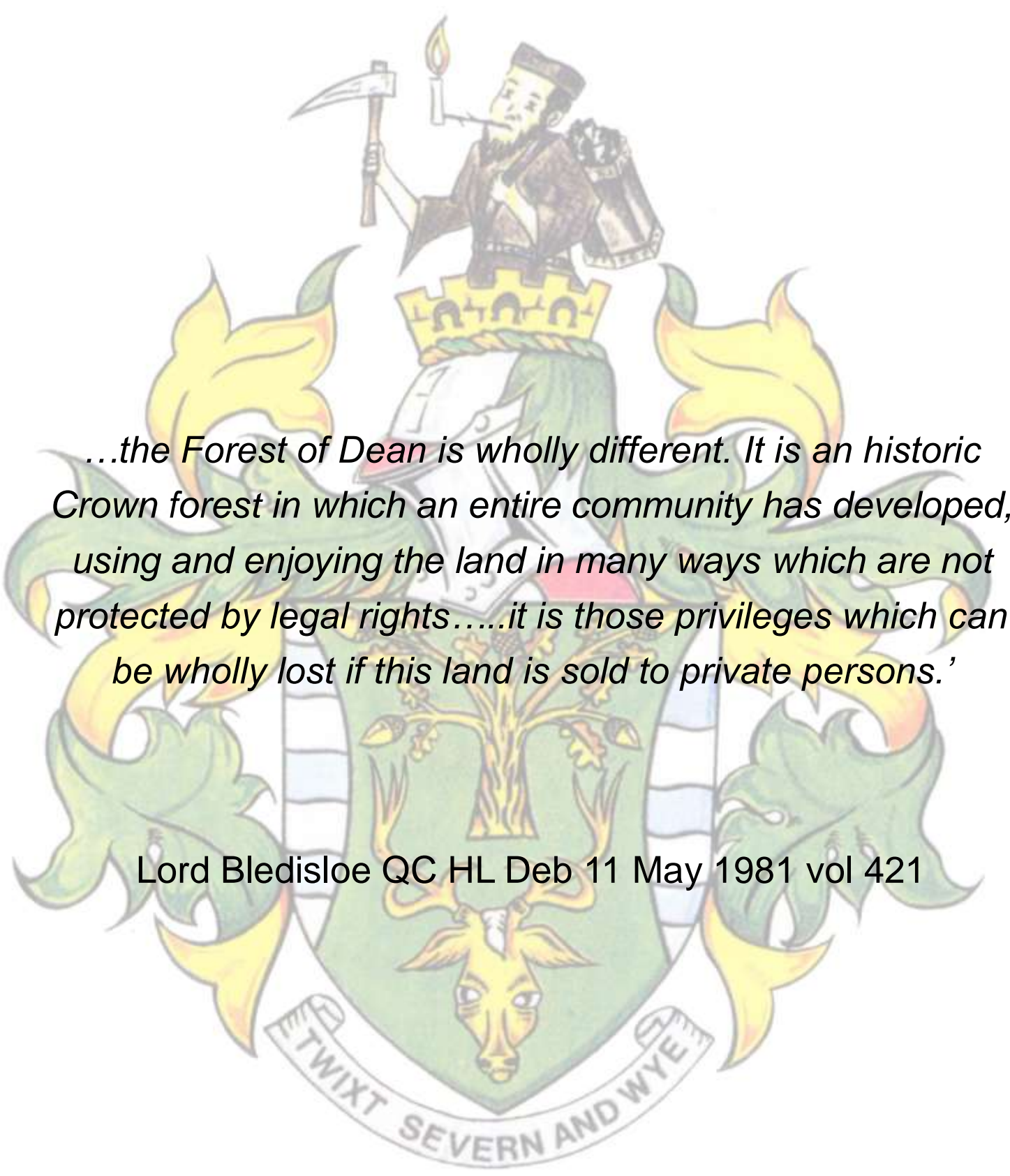


# OUR FOREST..... OUR FUTURE

(A response to the Independent Panel on Forestry  
by the Forest of Dean District Council)




*...the Forest of Dean is wholly different. It is an historic Crown forest in which an entire community has developed, using and enjoying the land in many ways which are not protected by legal rights.....it is those privileges which can be wholly lost if this land is sold to private persons.'*

Lord Bledisloe QC HL Deb 11 May 1981 vol 421

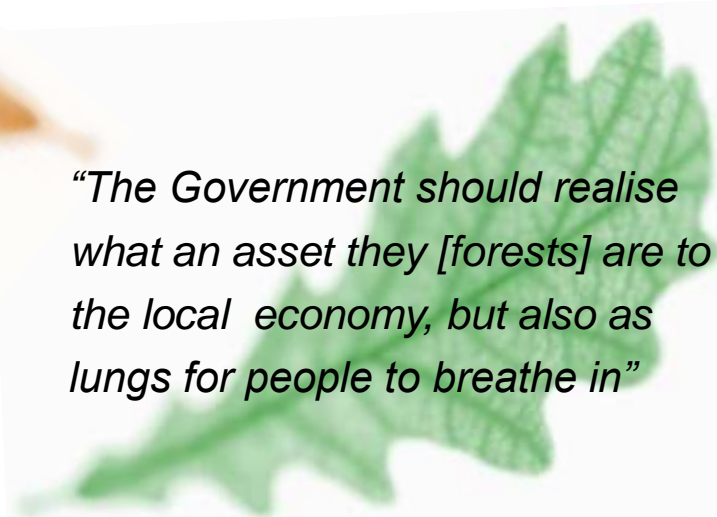
# Our Vision

To create and support an extended Forest of Dean, publicly owned and locally managed, designated as a permanent heritage model for the future of English forestry.

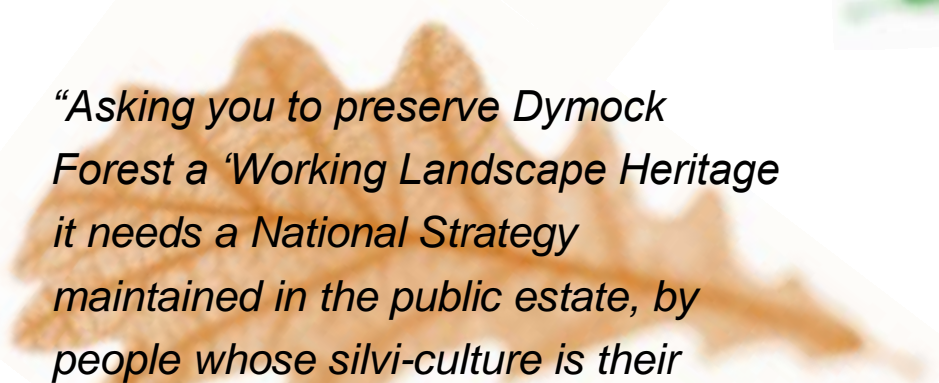
## Comments from Consultation



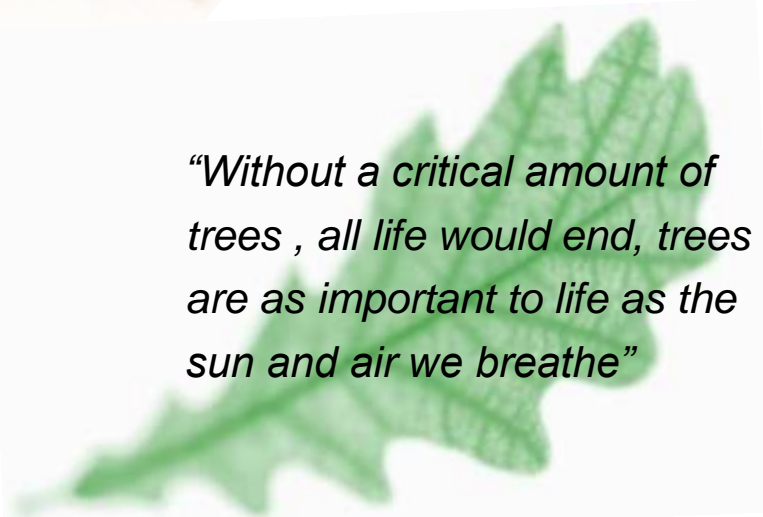
*“To me forests mean nature, animals, room to think, history and a sense of a very long past”*



*“The Government should realise what an asset they [forests] are to the local economy, but also as lungs for people to breathe in”*



*“Asking you to preserve Dymock Forest a ‘Working Landscape Heritage it needs a National Strategy maintained in the public estate, by people whose silvi-culture is their very lifeblood”*



*“Without a critical amount of trees , all life would end, trees are as important to life as the sun and air we breathe”*

**The Forest of Dean District Council acknowledges that the Independent Panel on Forestry would like to hear views on forests and woods in England. However, given the passion and strength of feeling in our community this response to the Panel's 'call for views' relates to how an extended Forest of Dean and its surrounding area could become a model for future forestry estate across England.**

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### **Question 1 – What do the Statutory Forest and surrounding woods mean to you?**

The Forest of Dean is so much more than woods and trees. It is defined nationally, by Natural England, as a single landscape character. It is a place of strong landscape and cultural identity; a place in which the history of the people is inextricably linked with the use of its natural resources. As with all landscapes the Forest of Dean is a product of the interaction of cultures with their environment over hundreds of years. It is thus not a place of pristine wilderness but a place in which the natural environment and the people that it supports have become entwined, each defining the character of the other. It is an outstanding example of a sustainable development in a rural and semi-rural landscape.



The Bishop of Liverpool meets Forest residents at The Pludds

Crucially, it is a landscape in which people work, live and relax; a place of high landscape and biodiversity value; a place from which nature's bounty of coal, stone and timber is still produced as it has been for hundreds of years. Unusually, it is a forest containing a number of sizeable settlements; for many the forest is their home. Exceptionally, the community has few rights in the forest and it is this that makes the Forest of Dean uniquely vulnerable if legislation was implemented to relinquish public control of the nation's woodlands. The privileges and freedoms that Foresters and visitors enjoy are not protected; they rely on the mutual respect and understanding which exists with the local Forestry Commission and by no conveyancing device can successor owners be bound to honour them.

The current access rights, freedom to roam and other traditional privileges mean a great deal to this community, as does the successful integration of timber production and biodiversity management into daily life in a spectacular natural outdoor playground.



## Question 2 – What is your vision for the future of the statutory Forest and surrounding woodlands?

Our vision is that our Forest and surrounding woodlands should stay in public ownership under *local* Forestry Commission management. Further, it is our view that our Forest environment should be seen as a single entity: from Haugh Woods in south Herefordshire through our District and into Monmouthshire (reflecting the boundary of the original National Forest declared in 1938). We see no logic in

separating heritage forest from small commercial woodland. The wooded areas within our District shape its character and culture; they must be managed as a single entity. Fragmentation is an obvious enemy to co-ordination and economy of scale.

Retention in public ownership will help to maintain public cohesion and allow the reconciliation of varied public interests and recognition of local community legitimacy. Apart from those designated routes under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 there is no protection provided under the current privileges and traditions. For example, the Act imposes no obligation on landowners to repair and maintain ways and paths (currently maintained by the Forestry Commission), it does not provide for cycle tracks (presently provided by the Commission), it says nothing of the running of sheep (an essential Forest tradition), it will not safeguard the Forest's flora and fauna and it will not sustain what is an immensely important educational asset.



Thus, the Forest of Dean needs some form of special status, extending the protection afforded by the 1967 Forestry Act and 1981 enactment as amended, to secure the access, privileges and rights that the public enjoy. While the Council supports, in principle, the designation of AONB status (or an expansion of the Wye Valley AONB), provided that it reflects the settlement policies of our core strategy, it acknowledges that there are other ways of providing that protection through planning policy.

In terms of planting it is vital that the Forest canopy and undergrowth carpet are maintained and that forest management mitigates and adapts to the effects of climate change. Heat tolerant, drought and disease resistant species should be planted and optimised to provide maximum carbon sequestration.

As the price of fossil fuels rise demand for timber (both for construction and fuel) will increase. The pressure to make our woodlands more productive will therefore grow, pointing to a greater (rather than reduced) level of co-ordinated management, best achieved through single, public ownership.

### Question 3 – What do you feel to be the benefits of the Statutory Forests and surrounding woods to:

**a) you personally.** In formulating this response the Council consulted with the community through a number of ‘drop-in’ sessions. As a result many attendees have submitted a response direct to the Panel, while some 62 members of the public completed a response and asked the Council to forward it to the Panel (this will be done). The following key words and phrases from those responses capture what

individuals see as important: public ownership / access for the many, not the few / carbon sink / increased timber production / wood as fuel / increased afforestation / AONB or National Park /

single entity / rural tourism / local management / health and wellbeing (physical and mental) / climate change / local use of timber / education / fun / permanence.

Some 44 members of the Forest of Dean Youth Forum have provided individual responses that will also be forwarded separately. Many of the sentiments expressed are similar to those provided by adults but the following key words and phrases capture what our young people see as important:

Our generation has to live with the mistakes made today / social capital / freedom to roam / do not sell / the Forest belongs to us / calm / danger of decisions being made by non-local people / biking / adventure / wildlife / oxygen / clean up litter / inspiration.

**b) society as a whole.** Our forest provides public goods and assets far beyond that of timber sales. It is an historic Crown

forest in which an entire community has developed, using and enjoying the land in many ways which are not protected by legal rights. It is also an area in which visitors come from all over the world to picnic and camp. It is a working forest, a living community, a wildlife haven and a tourist destination - all of which contribute to the definition of our landscape character.

**c) the natural environment.** Our forest *is* our natural environment. It provides highly valuable eco-system services to local communities and the nation as a whole. The forest provides flood storage for very responsive flood catchments, which require sensitive management. The high diversity of species found here provides the potential to regenerate the biodiversity of other areas through re-colonisation or migration as a result of climate change. The scale and diversity of the forest landscape provides valuable carbon storage that mitigates the impact of climate change.

**d) the economy.** The totality of the forest, woodlands and orchards in our District is key – not just the heritage woodland. Clearly, timber production is an important activity. But the Forest, and all that goes with it, is the centrepiece of our attraction to visitors; tourism amounts to some 7% of our employment (nearly twice the national average) and generated £110M in 2009. There is a need to increase that income while protecting the character of our landscape.



**Question 4 – We would like to hear about your suggestions of practical solutions and good practice which can be replicated more widely.**

We believe that the way in which the *locally* based forestry commission staff manage business, ecology and recreation at present is an example of best practice and one that should be continued; it is a model of how to look at a landscape and an example of precisely what the Government is expecting from woodland habitat plans.

Retention under a single land manager has given strong continuity, provided economies of scale, sustained local traditions and markets, and built a relationship of trust with local communities. Public ownership and management are highly beneficial when considering landscape-scale working where overcoming the problem of fragmented ownership and potentially disparate objectives can prevent effective delivery.

Private sector investment should be directed to farming communities in the forest hinterland in which the re-creation of orchards and sustainable tourism (such as log cabins) could be encouraged. This could enable the creation of nature corridors that would not only link up existing woodlands and extend the canopy but also offer greater opportunities for visitors who wish to enjoy and experience a unique land between two rivers. Further, the re-introduction of fruit (or nut) bearing trees will help to re-localise the economy and reduce dependence on imported goods.

**Question 5 – What do you see as the priorities and challenges for policy about an extended Forest of Dean and surrounding woodlands?**


The liabilities that go with managing our Forest are significant. For example, maintaining the bridges which take the Wye Valley Walk across the river are on-going and significant responsibilities. For many the deer, sheep and wild boar are an attraction. For others they are a distraction at the least, a nuisance at worst and, for some, a dangerous risk that needs to be managed. A highway network throughout the woodland environment creates yet further risk. Any potential policy change would need to address such liabilities and wildlife management issues very carefully; a one-size forestry management policy will not fit all.

The Forest has never stood still and will not in the future; it will continue to be impacted by the vagaries of modern day living and thus cannot be preserved in aspic. There will need to be limited, sensitive and sustainable long term development. While tourism opportunities need to be promoted the effects need to be carefully managed. The challenge is to find the right balance.


Above all, though, is the need to mitigate and adapt to the effects of disease in certain species of trees and climate change by adopting a planting policy that will ensure timber production can increase, while the canopy can be maintained and the character of our landscape can be preserved.




## Comments from Consultation




*“A use of teaching people about nature and the pure beauty of the earth, watching what real wildlife is like”*




*“The forest has an important place in my heart. Not only is it an inspiration in my extracurricular activities, the woodland is an excellent place to exercise and just listen to the wildlife”*




*“I feel they allow a form of freedom for young children to be brought up in a clean, healthy and safe environment”*



*“Imagine a world without the Forest of Dean, stories like Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter have parts of their stories inspired by our Forest”*



*[Personal Benefits]  
“Motivation and connection to history. An open area to be enjoyed and home to much nature”*



*[Vision] “That they [forests and woods] are protected and can continue in their timeless inspiration of young minds”*



# Extended Royal Forest of Dean Community & Heritage Woodlands

Meeting the challenges of Climate Change with improved biodiversity programmes

Happy is the eye betwixt Severn & Wye

Thomas Fuller - 17th Cent

- What is Character and a sense of place ?
- What do future generations want ?
- How do we combat disease and stress ?
- Planting for climate change - choice of species ?
- Should we be planting the species that have the capacity to sequester the most carbon ?
- Are we looking to plant species that will/can adapt to hotter and drier conditions ?
- How important is our family of woodlands and the economy of scale ?

**Legend**

- H Heritage Woodlands
- SC Small Commercial Woodlands
- Blue line Definitive Footpaths
- Green line Forest Statutory Boundary
- Black line District Boundary

- Heritage Woodlands**  
**Small Commercial Woodlands**
1. Lancelot Wood - H & R/S/R - H
  2. Titenham Shorn Cliff & Caswell Wood - H - SSSI
  3. Tidenham Chase & Priors Allotment - SC & SSSI
  4. Clans - SC
  5. Bearse Common & Slade Bottom - SC
  6. Clearewell - H
  7. Wye Valley - Hudnalls - H
  8. Old Park & Bargains Wood - H
  9. Kidnalls - H
  10. FOREST OF DEAN - Statutory Boundary - H
  11. Highmeadow, Malshol, Staunton, Reddings & Lady Park Wood - H - SSSI (Wye Valley Walk crosses the Basinge bridge from Little Wye & Little Wood (Herefordshire))
  12. Lords Wood - Herefordshire - H - Wye Valley Walk
  13. Little Doward - Herefordshire - H - Wye Valley Walk
  14. Chestnuts Wood - H
  15. Welshbury Wood - H
  16. Frazley Woods - H
  17. Mugglewort Wood - H
  18. Hope Wood - H
  19. Blaxton & Ley Park Wood - H
  20. Bishopwood - H - Leasehold
  21. Welsh Bicknor (Courtfield) - Herefordshire - H - Leasehold (Old Stonehale Railway Bridge takes the Wye Valley Walk over the River Wye to TNA and onto Ross-on-Wye)
  22. Huntsham Hill - H - (part leasehold)
  23. Wigpool Common - H
  24. Dancing Green - H - Herefordshire
  25. Chase Wood & Penyard Park - SC
  26. Newent Woods - H
  27. Highnam Woods - H - Nature Reserve
  28. Dymock Woods - H
  29. Oxenhill Woods - H
  30. Queens Wood & Linton - H
  31. Collingpark Wood - H - SSSI
  32. Haugh Wood - H - Herefordshire
  33. Woodhope Cocksfoot - H - Herefordshire
  34. Pen - y - pers - (South Wales)
  35. Angidy Woods - (South Wales)
  36. Llandrigo and The North - (South Wales)
  37. Barrow & Radmarley Woods - H

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