



Peak District Local Access Forum
c/o Peak District National Park Authority
Aldern House
Bakewell
Baslow Road
Derbyshire DE45 1AE

26 March 2011

DRAFT LETTER

To : Defra

Dear

The Future of the Public Forest Estate in England

We welcome the fact that the Government halted the consultation on Forestry Commission land sales proposals following strong concerns, particularly over likely loss of access to national assets.

We share those concerns as you will see from the attached paper approved by the Forum today. The Forum asked me to write to advise of these concerns and ask that they be forwarded to the Working Party which is being established for consideration please.

The Forum also asked for information about the terms of reference being proposed for the Working Party and to be consulted about that please. We would also like to know who will be appointed to serve on the Working Party and what interests they will represent.

We were also concerned as to who would be able to monitor and enforce any sales conditions imposed on sales in future with reduced resources. We would welcome information to reassure us on that score.

I look forward to your early response and additional information please.

Yours sincerely,

Edwina Edwards
Chair

Peak District Local Access Forum
The Future of the Public Forest Estate in England

Draft Paper

1. This is our response to the consultation launched by the Government on 27 January (see Briefing Note by the Forestry Commission attached as Annex A), about the future of the Public Forest Estate in England.
2. The Peak District Local Access Forum is the statutory body appointed jointly by the Peak District National Park Authority and Derbyshire County Council and covers the National Park area and the countryside of north-west Derbyshire around Buxton, New Mills and Glossop. It advises the National Park Authority and County Council on the improvement of public access for the purpose of open-air recreation and enjoyment of the area, with due regard to the needs of land management and of conserving the natural beauty of the area. Recreation and conservation are not mutually inclusive.
3. The Forests are national assets and form major resources for landscape, wildlife and recreation interest and enjoyment with much having been achieved working in partnership with other owners and interests. There is scope for much more to be done as forests mature and revised planting and management regimes can be introduced which will be important for enriching biodiversity and recreation opportunities. Our forests and woodlands need to continue to provide inspiration, refreshment and recreation for the public, as well being a vital component of the landscape and habitat for wildlife. This will be a huge challenge to realise if Forest lands are sold or disposed of on long leases.
4. In a "concordat" between the British Driving Society (the horse carriage driving society) and the Forestry Commission in 2007 reference is made to the fact Defra is the Government Dept "responsible for protecting, expanding & promoting the sustainable management of woodland & increasing their value to society & the environment." This is just the kind of collaboration that is possible now with the Forestry Commission that will be difficult to guarantee under a privatisation of a woodland.
5. Nationally, there is understandably vociferous concern being expressed for our recreation opportunities in places like Black Rocks, Matlock Hills, Wharnccliffe, Dalby, Whinlatter, Sherwood and Keilder - particularly, as enjoyment of those areas is by concession not statute.
6. In the National Parks of England, the extent of Forestry Commission holdings varies. It is particularly significant in the New Forest and Northumberland.
7. Clearly the issue is not as important here in the Peak District, but the issues raised lead us to express concerns for what might happen regarding the recreation arrangements and opportunities in the Commission's Hope Woodlands forests (Alport, Ladyclough, Westend, Derwent) which are categorised in the consultation as heritage forests, and the Goyt (multitpurpose). In both areas, Area Management Partnerships between the National Park Authority and Water Companies with the Forestry Commission and National Trust (Derwent) have resulted in an integrated approach and huge benefits for conservation and recreation.

8. The approach for the future is enshrined in the excellent Recreation Strategy and Action Plan for the Peak District National Park 2010 – 2020 – “Active in the Outdoors” which followed widespread consultation and agreement.
9. The vision for recreation in the National Park in 2020 is that: “The Peak District will be a welcoming place, providing good access for all and quality facilities. Everyone will have the opportunity to enjoy and benefit from healthy outdoor experiences, contribute to the local economy and become more aware of the special qualities of the National Park. There will be a network of public transport routes linked to popular sites and any conflicts between recreation, residents and the management of the environment will be addressed. More people will have better information, a greater choice of activities, and more sustainable ways of enjoying them. The National Park will thrive because more people will both enjoy and care for it.”
10. Clearly outcomes in the Strategy envisage sustaining existing recreation opportunities and facilities and further improvements to increase participation and enjoyment for the benefit of this and future generations.
11. The Government has backed off from sale of National Nature Reserves. It would be sensible to halt anymore Forestry Commission sales until after the consultation and review of suggestions. A rushed decision will cause problems and risk future recreation and access opportunities and appropriate safeguards.
12. Time is needed to enable existing and potential future arrangements to be clearly identified for walking, cycling, mountain biking, horse riding, orienteering in terms of open access and routes. Clearly future opportunities can be identified and agreed more readily if working with the Forestry Commission than new owners. It is about both protection and enhancement of opportunities.
13. Before any Forestry Commission land is sold, it is suggested that any prospective purchaser must sign an agreement, legally-binding in perpetuity, to:
 1. retain and manage the land as woodland with consultation arrangements for replanting regimes,
 2. where there are legal rights of access, maintain and increase these, adding rights for riders and cyclists and horse riders wherever appropriate,
 3. where there are no legal rights of access, dedicate the land under s.16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CroW) Act,2000 so that there are permanent rights of access throughout the wood or forest for walkers, riders and cyclists and in some cases climbers.
 4. welcome informal access at all times as permissive access is not protected by the above deication.
 5. secure arrangements for visitor information, car parking and other facilities
14. The Government seems to have placed and over reliance on outside organisations, bodies and volunteers to step in and take over service delivery when there is no guarantee that those bodies have the capacity, resources or inclination to take this on in a significant way. That should be reviewed in the light of consultation replies.

15. The National Park Authority has had an approach to small important (sometimes run down) woodlands of acquisition/improvement/disposal which may provide a model for the future by or with partners in the Peak.
16. Perhaps land should be offered first to a charity or community group, together with the guarantee of sufficient funds for that organisation and its successors to manage it in perpetuity, for its access, biodiversity and landscape qualities.
17. If a forest / woodland is sold on how will any conditions applied to the original sale be guaranteed, and who will monitor / enforce?
18. One solution cannot fit all sizes of forest. Pragmatically the land management and revenue resource implications vary hugely.
19. The Government is urged to assess responses to this emotive issue and allow for further consultation to ensure that these nationally owned assets continue to provide access and recreation opportunities which are protected and enhanced for future generations.

John Thompson
11 February 2011.

You may be aware of speculation on the future role of the Forestry Commission and more particularly, the Public Forest Estate in England. We are now in a position to give some more detail on the next steps of the Government's proposals.

On Thursday 27 January 2011, the Government launched a twelve-week public consultation on proposals for a new approach to ownership and management of the Public Forest Estate in England.

The Government remains committed to shifting the balance of power from 'Big Government' to 'Big Society' and for forestry this means securing greater public involvement in the ownership and/or stewardship of England's public forests. The proposals set out in the consultation would do this and create a far greater role for civil society, businesses and individuals.

The Government recognises that there is not a 'one size fits all solution' and therefore the proposals are for a "mixed model" approach to the future ownership and management of the Public Forest Estate to secure their public benefits for the long-term which could include:

- Inviting new or existing charitable organisations, to take on ownership or management of the heritage forests (like the New Forest and the Forest of Dean);
- Creating opportunities for community and civil society groups to buy or lease forests that they wish to own or manage;
- Finding commercial operators to take on long-term leases for the large-scale commercially valuable forests. By leasing rather than selling, it will be possible to ensure that these forests continue to deliver public benefits through lease conditions.

The Government wants England's woodlands, forests and trees to expand and be sustainably managed by:

- focusing the Government's role on policy, research, regulation and advice and developing new approaches to the ownership and management of the public forest estate in England;
- ensuring England's woodlands, forests and trees (and the open habitats within them) are managed and expanded to enhance the environment and biodiversity, combat climate change and support economic growth, both during and after the transfer to the 'Big Society';

- encouraging more tree planting, increased woodland area and more sustainable woodland management driven by the private sector and civil society;
- supporting and developing a competitive, thriving and resilient forestry sector, integrated with other land based businesses and the wider rural economy in England;
- seeking to enable more public benefits to flow from England's woodlands at reduced cost to the taxpayer;
- securing the best return for the taxpayer from any capital receipts or lease arrangements generated over this Spending Review period and beyond.

The consultation paper recognises that the process of transferring ownership and management of the estate in the ways outlined in the consultation is likely to take a number of years. It also seeks views on the future role of Forestry Commission England in delivering forestry policy through its statutory regulatory functions, managing grant schemes and providing expert advice (both nationally and locally).

We would like to encourage as many people as possible to take part in this consultation process. The consultation is easily accessible and people can respond [online or download the consultation document and questions](#) and post completed responses they have printed. In addition, there will be a series of workshops taking place across England. To register your interest and make your voice heard by attending one of these events, please [contact your local office](#).

The Government expects to publish its response to this consultation later in the summer of 2011.

Meanwhile, the Forestry Commission is increasing its estate rationalisation programme in England through open market sales (and lease reversion). In December 2010, Ministers announced that a further 40,000 hectares would be sold over the four years from 2011/12 to 2014/15. The selection criteria for these sales have now been announced and are on our [website](#).