

Speech House Walk & Ruardean Walk Forest Plan 2025 - 2035

West England Forest District

Forest Blocks covered:

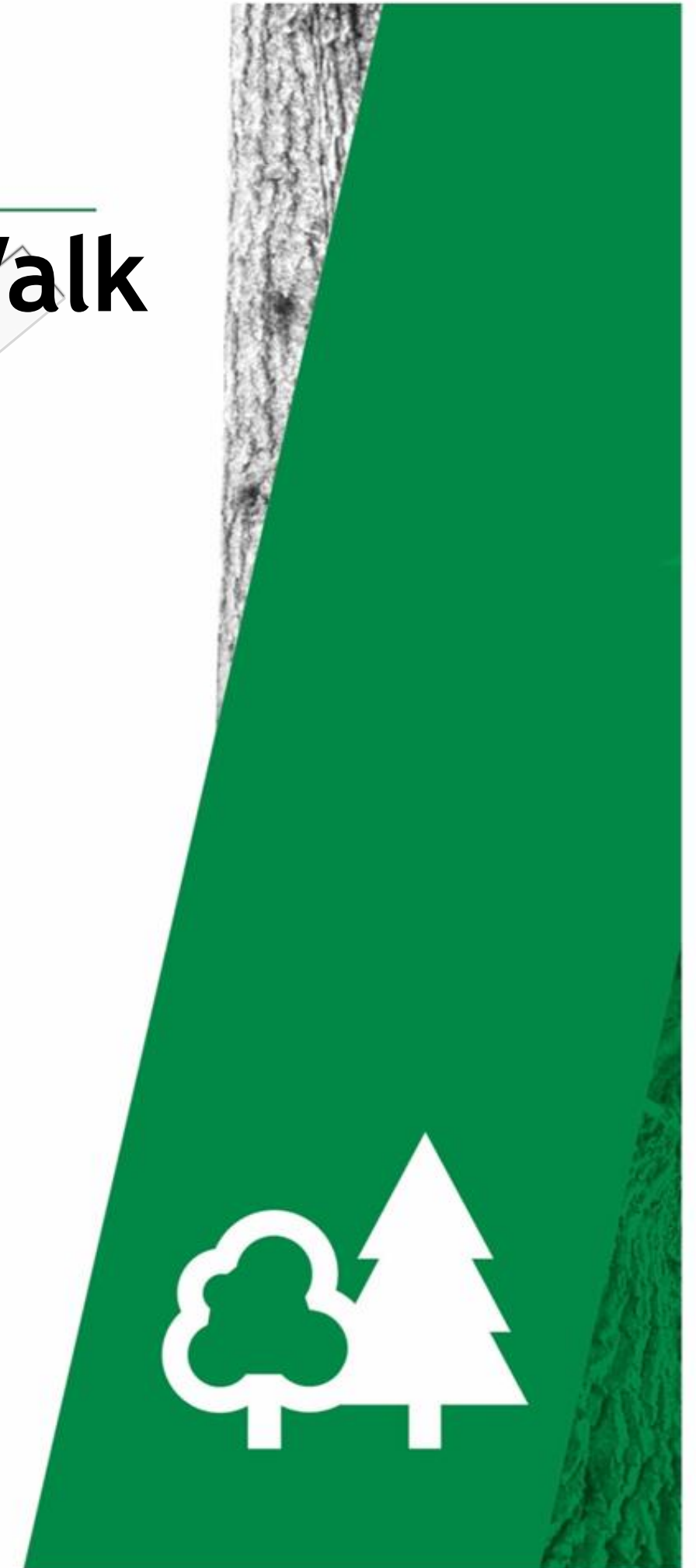
Astonbridge (42),
Serridge(43),
Crabtree Hill (43)

Francis Raymond-Barker

Forestry England and new FS File Ref: OP10/42 43
Old FS File Refs: FoD/2/74 and FoD/2/80
GL/1/5/2.51



Forestry England
forests and woodlands
have been certified in
accordance with the UK
Woodland Assurance
Standard (UKWAS)





West England Forest District

Application for Forest Plan Approval

Speech House Walk and Ruardean Walk Forest Plan

Forest District:	West England FD	
Woodland or property name	Beechenhurst, Kensley, Crabtree Hill, Crump Meadow, Serridge, Northern United, Trafalgar, Speculation, Ruardean Hill, Ruardean Woodside, Great Bourts, Astonbridge	
Nearest town, village or locality:	Lydbrook, Brierley, Ruardean Woodside, Drybrook, Cinderford, Ruspidge	
OS Grid references:- Hangerberry, Great Bourts, Horsley Flat, Smethers Tump, Barnedge Hill, Astonbridge Hill, Ware Slade, Newnham Bottom, Ruardean Hill Plantation, Hawkwell Inclosure	Astonbridge Hill	From west: SO 5984 1473 To northeast: SO 6434 1642
	Serridge	From west: SO 6117 1377 To northeast: SO 6453 1518
	Kensley and Crabtree Hill	From west: SO 6089 1216 To northeast: SO 6495 1355
The Delves, Little & Great God Meadow, Speculation, Serridge Green, Serridge Inclosure, Birch Wood, Northern United		
Crump Meadow, Lennets Hill, Crabtree Hill, Sammies Wood, Kensley, Woorgreen, Beechenhurst		
Local Authority District/Unitary Authority:	Forest of Dean District Council Gloucestershire County Council	

Signed
Forest Management Director

Date

Signed
Area Director

Date of approval

Date approval ends

Plan Area:	1671 Hectares
Conifer Felling:	81 Hectares
Broadleaved Felling:	18 Hectares

- I apply for Forest Plan approval for the property described above and in the enclosed Forest Plan.
- I confirm that the scoping, carried out and documented in the Consultation Record attached, incorporated those stakeholders that the FC agreed must be included. Where it has not been possible to resolve specific issues associated with the plan to the satisfaction of consultees, this is highlighted in the Consultation Record.
- I confirm that the proposals contained in this plan comply with the UK Forestry Standard.
- I undertake to obtain any permissions necessary for the implementation of the approved Plan.



The mark of responsible forestry

Forestry England forests and woodlands have been certified in accordance with the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS)



Promoting Sustainable Forest Management
www.pefc.org

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How Our Shared Forest relates to the Forest Plan process

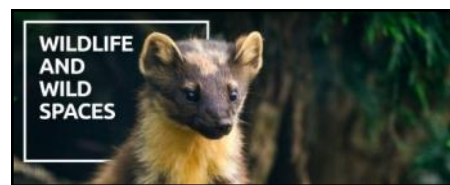
OUR SHARED FOREST

“To Nurture a shared Forest unlike any other”

The Speech House Walk and Ruardean Walk Forest Plan is the fourth of six Forest Plans that cover the main block of the Forest of Dean. These six Forest Plans tailor the management for the Forest of Dean through the lens of eight “principles of management”, outlined in the Our Shared Forest (OSF) land management plan. Published in 2019, these principles closely align with the UK Forest Standard (UKFS).

The Our Shared Forest looks to a future where the Forest of Dean main block :

“Has a scale, diversity and a continuity of management over time that supports a depth and breadth of habitats and species that is on a par with, or better than, many celebrated national nature reserves and protected landscapes.”



A Forest Plan’s core purpose is to ensure Forestry England is able to functionally implement the management of its woodlands and forests in line with the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS). This is achieved through the prescriptions identified within the Forest Plan, and having the Forest Plan approved by The Forestry Commission (previously referred to as Forest Services). It is this approval that attains the Plans operational status.

So how does the Forest Plan link and relate to reflect OSF ?

The Forest Plan integrates the OSF during the Analysis and Concept stage of the Forest Plan process. Structuring and focusing these stages around the eight “principles of management” within OSF allows recognition of topics in need of further investigation and development. Resolution is achieved through thorough field work, data-set analysis and consultation, covering the salient points documented in the Forest Plan Analysis. It is this process of identification and consideration that then helps inform the Concept and decisions made within the core of the Forest Plan.

This approach ensures that the local distinctiveness and uniqueness of the Forest is captured and maintained. At the same time it will ensure due process and regulatory context required by Forest Services for Forest Plan approval is met by Forest Planning process.

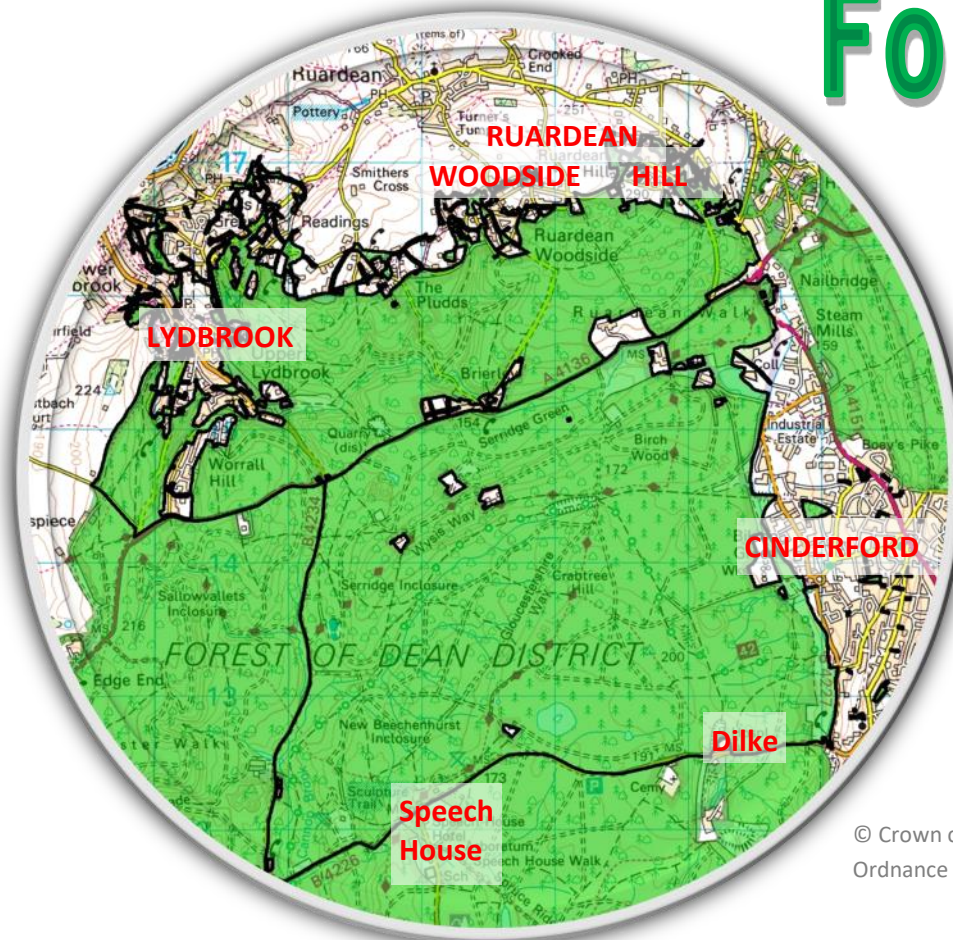
Our Shared Forest VISION

**TO NURTURE
A SHARED FOREST
UNLIKE ANY OTHER**

**By allowing the decisions we take
to be guided by the Natural potential of the land
as well as the varied influences
of our ever-changing world,
we will create a diverse and inclusive forest that
is a global example of what can be achieved
through forward-thinking forestry.**

Photo Above: Planted in the 1970s between Mireystock Cross Roads and Speculation, on western edge of the plan area; this Beech tree shows features suitable for bats, probably having been damaged by lightning in the past.

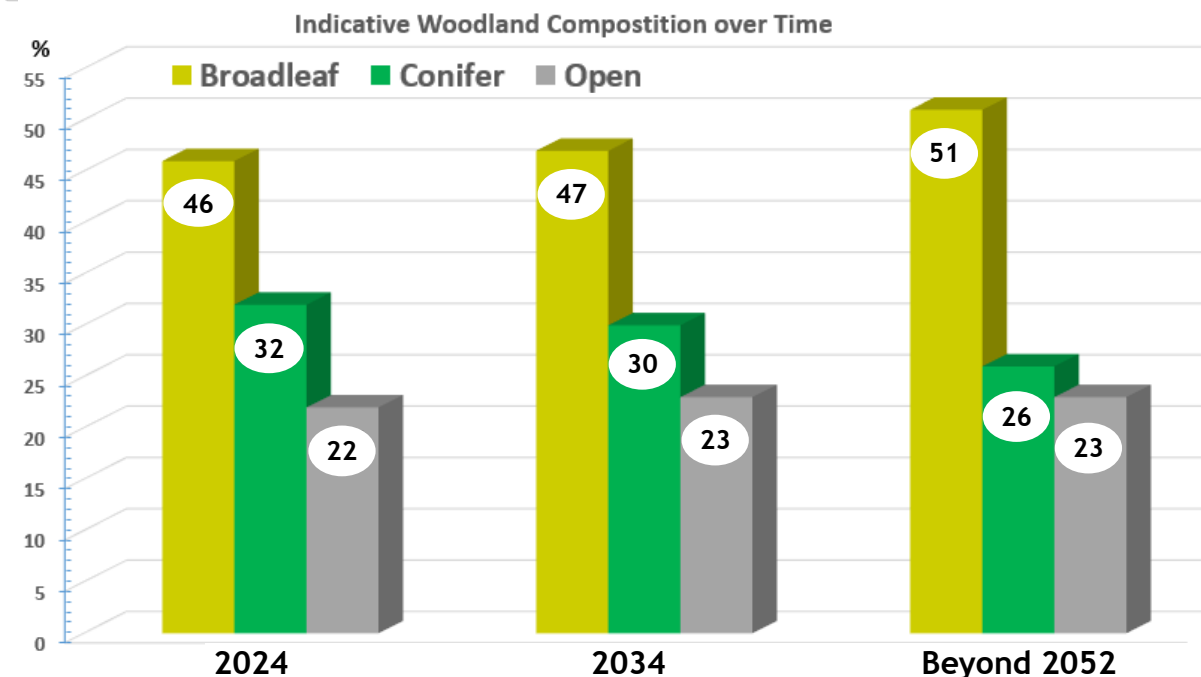
Forest Plan SUMMARY



Forest name	Area	% of plan area
Crabtree Hill and Kensley	706 Ha	42
Serridge	391 Ha	23
Astonbridge	574 Ha	35
	1671 Ha	100 %

(Area given to the nearest Ha and percent to nearest %)

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Ordnance Survey [100021242]



About

The Plan lies within the Statutory Boundary of the Forest of Dean, The Hundred of St. Briavels and the county of Gloucestershire. The plan covers 6.5 square miles, or around 1700 hectares, with mixed coniferous and broadleaved woodland. Numerous villages nestled along the peripheral edges of the forest are integral to the feel of the woodland, and Sense of Place that makes the Forest unique.

Commanding a prominent location, external views into the block remain oblique, seen by driving along the A4136 from Lydbrook to Steam Mills. Minor roads give an indication as to the varied nature of topography that lies within, especially from Brierley to The Pludds. The A4136 and New Road at Speculation both evoke ruminations of the past industrialisation of the Forest¹ that have lent to the diverse Sense of Place.

At Woorgreens², statutory removal of diseased Larch in 2021 expanded existing heathland by 12 hectares, exposing the "Rig and furrow". This is a technique originally used to enhance tree establishment, following reinstatement of the coal opencast that closed in 1983. As a result, Woorgreen now encompasses greater variety and diversity of habitat, featuring a selection of ponds and scrapes that enhance the ecological and landscape value of the site. It is designated a Key Wildlife Site and benefits a wide breadth of bird, Invertebrate, amphibian, reptile, flora and fungi species. Unfortunately, *Phytophthora ramorum* continues to threaten woodlands within this plan, but offers Forestry England opportunity to further diversify tree species composition, improving connectivity of habitats e.g. the recent forest operations at The Delves.

The mixed woodland and open space provide a rich mosaic of habitat for a wide range of wildlife and flora. These include a stable population of Goshawk, Fallow deer and Wild Boar, with recent reintroduction of Pine Marten and Beaver. It is hoped Pine Marten will have a positive effect on reducing Grey Squirrel numbers, while Beavers at Greathough Brook help control water flow and further improve the woodland's ecology. The plan also features several watercourses³ that are punctuated with ponds and lakes⁴ and feed into both the River Severn and River Wye.

The Forest of Dean remains one of England's prime Ancient Woodland forests that contain remnant Napoleonic Oak and Sweet Chestnut, yet is also able to produce quality hard and softwood timber.

People are also able to enjoy the woodlands in this plan area through a good network of trails. This includes the Colliers Trail (was the Family Cycle Trail), with Beechenhurst being home to the start of the celebrated and cherished Sculpture Trail and for the more adventurous a tree-top adventure provided by Go-Ape.

¹for stone, coal and iron as well as the timber.

²Woorgreens was open cast between 1979 and 1983 producing some 402,753 tonnes of coal

³Cannop Brook, Brierley Brook, Greathough Brook, Littlehough Brook and Cinderford Brook

⁴Woorgreens, Mireystock, Meadow Cliff and Steam Mills.

Aims and Objectives

The Forest Plan aims are to protect and enhance existing habitats, through sustainable management that is in context with the surrounding landscape and character, whilst providing a sustainable flow of timber to market throughout the plan duration. Not in any particular order, the plans objectives are:

- ◇ The diversification of woodland species and structure for greater ecological and economic resilience.
- ◇ Protect and enhance woodland, open habitats and their associated species.
- ◇ Deliver well-designed forests that both protect and enhance the internal and external landscape, in keeping with the local landscape character.
- ◇ To protect and enhance areas of Ancient & Semi-Natural Woodland with reference to increasing native diversity, structure, resilience and natural capital.
- ◇ The protection and enhancement of veteran trees (VT)/trees of special interest (TSI) and recruitment of future generations of both.
- ◇ The continued production of sustainable and marketable woodland products.
- ◇ To conserve, maintain and enhance cultural and heritage assets.
- ◇ The restoration and management of Sites of Special Scientific Interest / Scheduled Monuments / Key Wildlife Species.
- ◇ The provision and maintenance of recreation facilities.

What we will do

The Forest Plan outlines management proposals, including felling and restocking, permanent open habitat and creation of transient open habitat, with felling licence approval for operations until 2035. Summary of planned areas for the next ten years are (in hectares):

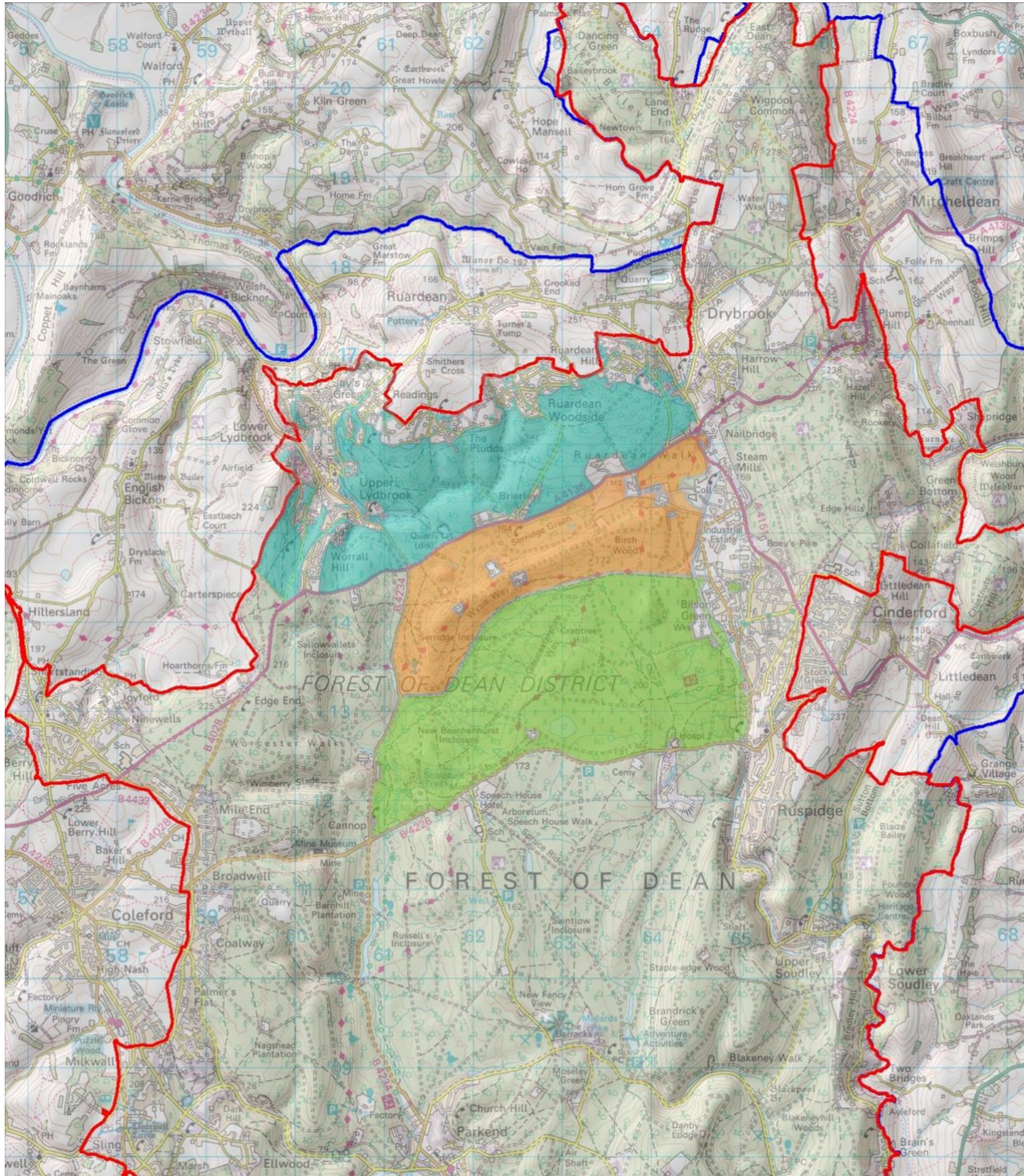
- * Clearfelling, Restocking/regeneration of broadleaves: 18Ha
- * Clearfelling, Restocking/regeneration of conifer: 81Ha
- * Open space and open habitats: <10Ha

Crops will be managed for a mixture of objectives, including timber production. Low Impact Silvicultural Systems will be favoured, seeing a reduction of approximately 60% in clearfelling for the next 10 years until 2034, although diseased areas will still require statutory felling.

Priority watercourses will see integration of a varying degree of open habitat with removal of non-native conifer species and some Beech and Oak. Native broadleaf content will increase through planting, coppice, or natural regeneration, including species like Alder, Aspen, Willow.

Wet woodland and open habitat will be expanded, consolidating, connecting and protecting priority habitats. Adders and other priority species such as Lepidoptera will benefit from this work. This will include beginning to regenerate areas of stored coppice. Delivery of this work will improve, increase and enhance woodland permeability, diversity of habitat, and quality of internal landscaping.

Routine thinning of both conifer and broadleaf will occur at five and ten-year intervals.



Location and Description

The Forest Plan for Speech House Walk and Ruardean Walk lies on the plateau of the Forest of Dean main block. It is adjacent to the northern boundary of the Parkend Walk & Blakeney Hill Walk Forest Plan. It follows the B4226 from Cannop cross roads to Cinderford Bridge; extending from the upper reaches of the Cannop Valley to the west with Cinderford town to the east. Integral to the character of the plan area are the villages of Lydbrook, Worrall Hill, The Pludds, Ruardean Hill, Ruardean Woodside and Drybrook, nestled along the peripheral northern edges. From Worrall Hill in the west, the A4136 runs eastward through the plan area to Steam Mills with the town of Coleford lying to the west.

The plan sits wholly within the county of Gloucestershire, The Statutory Forest (outlined in red on map) and The Hundred of St. Briavels (outlined in blue on map), encompassing three blocks of woodland previously split over three plans.




Tree species composition, along with varied terrain, often contribute to the Sense of Place that is so invariably and uniquely distinctive in different parts of the plan area. The area comprises of mixed conifer and broadleaf woodland totalling 1671 hectares, covering 6.5 square miles:- Kensley and Crabtree Hill form the southern most parts of the plan and sit on a plateau, divided from Serridge to the north, by The Wysis Way, a long distance footpath. Within Serridge there is a prominent ridge orientated east to west. The ridge drops away to the north giving way to flatter ground. North of the A4136 lies Astonbridge Hill that slopes north-west forming an incised valley, along the bottom of which runs Greathough Brook. Flowing westward, it makes its way through Lydbrook and on down to the River Wye, while Cannop Brook runs along the western peripheral boundary, following the B4234 from Mireystock crossroads, southward to Cannop crossroads, before continuing southwards out of the plan area to Cannop Ponds.

There are limited views over the wider forest and adjoining countryside from the higher ground, with the exception of places like Pan Tod, on the northern peripheral edge of the plan just west of Drybrook, that enjoys extensive views to the northwest deep into the Welsh hills.

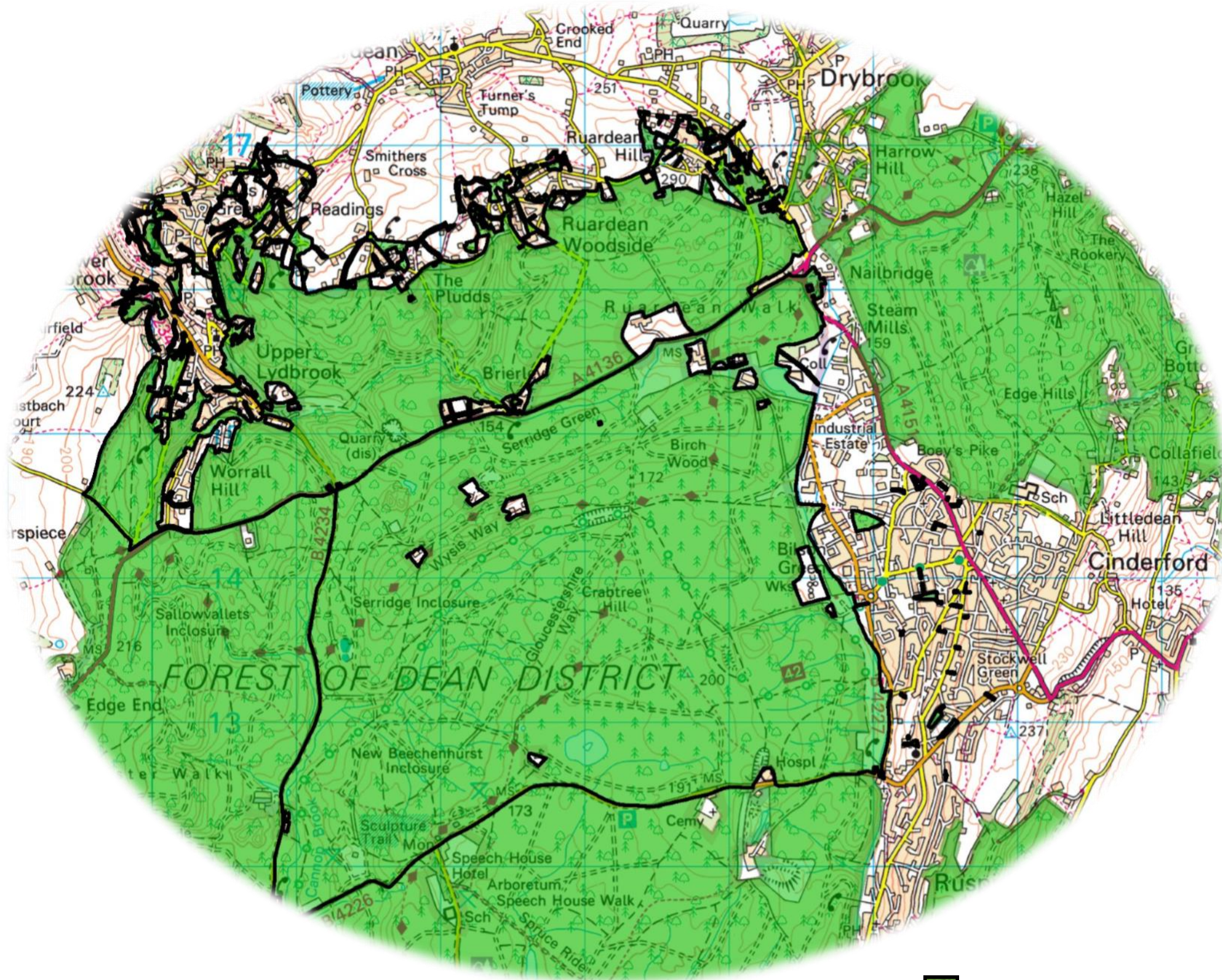
The remnants of historic mining for stone, coal and iron, greatly influence the topography of the plan area, especially at Northern United, the last deep gale in the Forest. Reaching a depth of 696ft & producing 450 tons of coal a week, it closed on Christmas day in 1965. Old tips from mines like these were often planted with conifer, specifically Scots or Corsican Pine.

Whilst the ridge in Serridge tops out at 200m above sea level (asl), it is by no means the highest point, which is in Ruardean Inclosure at 280m. With the lowest point being 90m asl in Lydbrook. These ridges also give rise to woodlands with varying topology, whose aspect and slope mainly face east or west. These slopes have elevations ranging from 35-75m asl along the eastern boundary of the plan and elsewhere 75-175m asl.

The area benefits from around 900mm of rainfall a year, and the fertile soils (brown earths and rich gleys) derived from Carboniferous Limestone and Devonian Old Red Sandstone, mean the woodlands are capable of achieving good growth rates. For conifers, these rates are in the range of Yield Class (YC) 10 to YC 24, and for broadleaves, one may expect a YC of between 4 and 8.

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 Crabtree Hill and Kensley	706 Ha	42
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(Area given to the nearest Ha and percent to nearest %)



Tenure & Management Agreements

The whole 1671Ha of this plan area is freehold, all of which is dedicated under Countryside Rights of Way Act.

There are numerous management agreements in place for a variety of purposes, from grazing to radio masts (Joys Green) and from hospitality/recreation (Beechenhurst) to planning mitigation (Northern Quarter bat roosts) and sport provision (Cinderford Bridge)

- Speech House Walk and Blakeney Hill Walk plan area
- Acquisition Freehold (A/FH)

Management Objectives

WEST ENGLAND FOREST DISTRICT

HELPING TACKLE SOME OF SOCIETY'S BIGGEST CHALLENGES WITH THRIVING TREES, WOODS AND FORESTS¹

SECURING AND GROWING THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND NATURAL CAPITAL OF THE NATIONS FORESTS IS AT THE HEART OF EVERYTHING WE DO

The objectives of this Plan will reflect and help deliver the West England Forest District Strategic Plan and the National Strategic Plan for the Nations Forests in England: Growing Our Future 2021-2026.

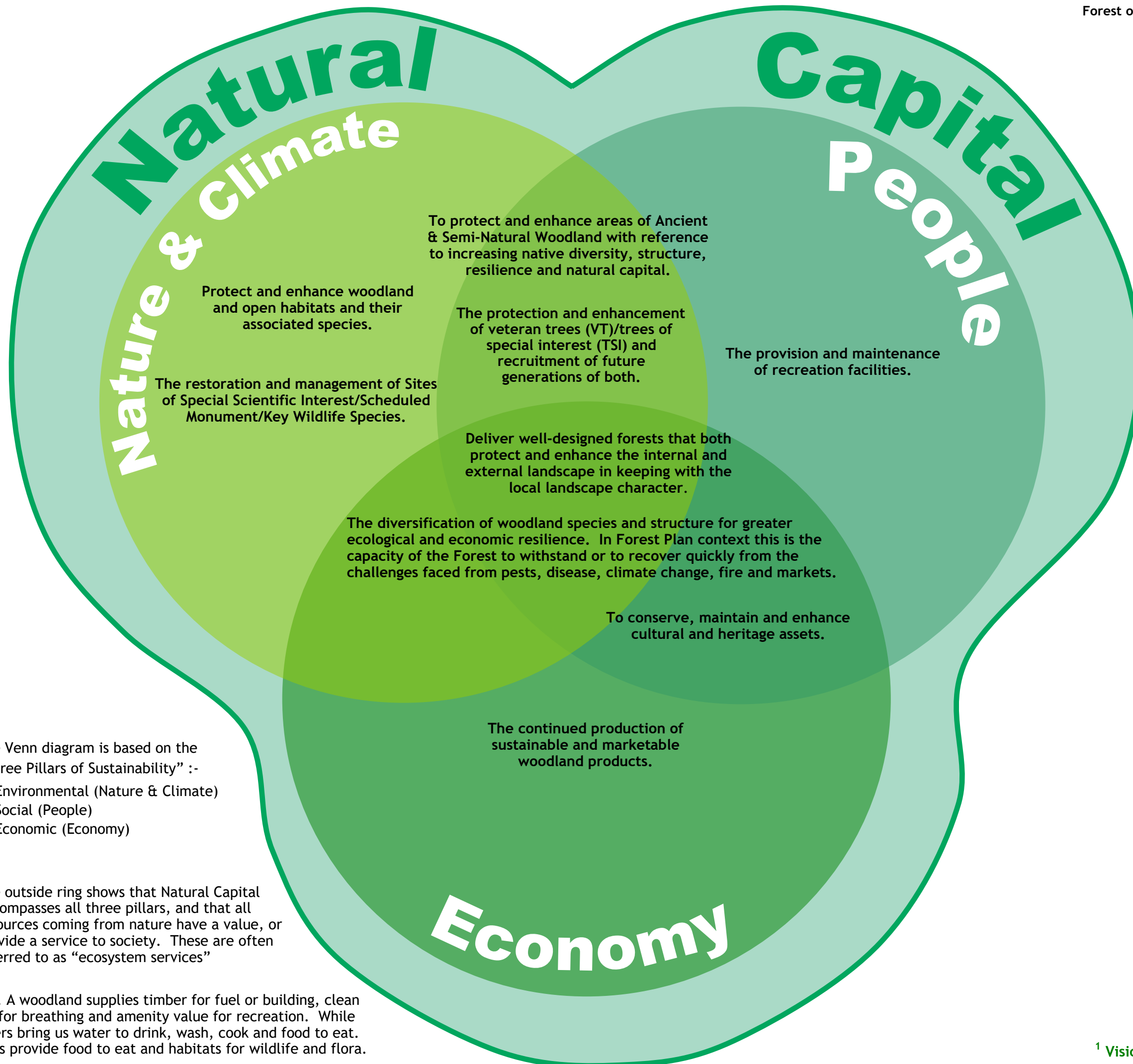
WE MAKE PLANS TODAY FOR A BETTER TOMORROW

All of our forests and woodlands in this Forest District are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC).

All Forestry England forests and woods are independently certified as sustainably managed, to continue to benefit future generations.

TOGETHER WE ARE GROWING THE FUTURE FOR WILDLIFE, FOR PEOPLE AND FOR THE CLIMATE

The meeting and monitoring of the Forest Plan objectives shown opposite is outlined on the following page.



The Venn diagram is based on the "Three Pillars of Sustainability" :-

- Environmental (Nature & Climate)
- Social (People)
- Economic (Economy)

The outside ring shows that Natural Capital encompasses all three pillars, and that all resources coming from nature have a value, or provide a service to society. These are often referred to as "ecosystem services"

E.g. A woodland supplies timber for fuel or building, clean air for breathing and amenity value for recreation. While rivers bring us water to drink, wash, cook and food to eat. Soils provide food to eat and habitats for wildlife and flora.

¹ Vision from the Forestry Commission Strategy 2023-28

Meeting Objectives

(Objectives are not listed in any priority order)



National Vision and Overall Goal: To secure and grow the economic, social and natural capital value of the Nations Forest. Delivering Superb Forests and increasing Natural Capital

District Strategy

Forest Plan Objective

Meeting Objective

Monitoring

Nature

Increase our Natural Capital, Superb Forests and Telling our story
Increase diversity of tree species and stand structure, incorporating changes to silvicultural practices to maximise diversity resilience and carbon storage.
Give space and time for nature to protect and enhance biodiversity, recognising and responding to needs of wildlife using natural processes.
Ensure that natural and cultural heritage values of our forests are understood and widely shared.

People

Increase our Natural Capital and Telling our story
We will maintain and enhance working relationships & partnerships with conservation organisations such as Wildlife Trusts / Butterfly Conservation.
Support / encourage healthy lifestyles focussing on powerful benefits of nature improving mental / physical wellbeing.
Raise awareness & understanding of sustainable forestry and increase engagement with and understanding of Forest Plans.

Economy

Superb Forests and Increase our Natural Capital
Maximise diversity in tree species and stand structure and increase long-term resilience, incorporating changes to silvicultural practices all of which will be delivered in accordance with the UK Woodland Assurance Standard.

The diversification of woodland species and structure for greater ecological and economic resilience. In Forest Plan context this is the capacity of the Forest to withstand or to recover quickly from the challenges faced from pests, disease, climate change, fire and markets.

Clearfell used where appropriate, gives opportunity to enhance ecological and/or economic value of sites and add species diversity, highlighted in the Forest Plan and Operational Site Planning (OSP) process. The plan also sees a gradual increase in the use of Low Impact Silviculture (LIS) methods (60% previously clearfell) as well as an increase in broadleaf tree cover.

Monitoring will be achieved through the OSP process & Forest Plan review process, including Sub-Compartment Database (SCDB) analysis.

To protect and enhance areas of Ancient & Semi-Natural Woodland with reference to increasing native diversity, structure, resilience and natural capital.

Restoration will be a gradual process, targeting removal of conifer crops & non-native regeneration through clearfelling & thinning, to aid establishment of native species through regeneration & planting. Conifer crops will be planted where appropriate following survey prior to restocking.

Analysis and comparison of naturalness scores derived from the SCDB and field observation through the FP review process.

Deliver well-designed forests that both protect and enhance the internal and external landscape in keeping with the local landscape character.

Through a mixture of thinning & clearfelling, the approach will be dependant partly on steepness & awkwardness of terrain and prominence within the landscape, along with coupe design that will aim to minimise risk of adverse impact on the landscape and adjacent SSSIs. OSP will help integrate the Forest Plan intentions.

Fixed point photography to be used during the FP review process, helping in analysis of how the implementation of the plan is effecting external landscape and character. OSP will help identify opportunity for enhancement to landscape character and identify safeguards for SSSI.

The protection and enhancement of veteran trees (VT)/trees of special interest (TSI) and recruitment of future generations of both.

These woodlands contain TSI & VT of varying description. OSP should record TSI and VT; updating GIS layer files for future reference. At the same time the process should promote the retention of both standing and fallen deadwood.

The Forest Plan review process at years 5 and 10 should check data held on GIS. Site visits and operational site plans will help in verifying appropriate TSI and VT management.

Protect and enhance woodland, open habitats and their associated species.

Through a mix of clearfell, thin and coppice the provision for open habitats and associated species will be enhanced. Opportunities should be highlighted in the OSP process where conservation benefits can be delivered. Appropriate reinstatement works will be carried out once operations have been concluded.

Monitored through Forest Plan review process, looking at local records for updated sightings.
Analysis and comparison of SCDB open space through the Forest Plan review process.

To conserve, maintain and enhance cultural and heritage assets.

The identifying and recording of any unscheduled features is an on-going process, aimed at improving the quality of existing data sets that subsequently feed into the OSP of harvesting and restocking sites, identifying features of interest and outlining appropriate measures to avoid and minimise damage.

Monitoring will be achieved through the OSP, contract supervision and the Forest Plan review process.

The continued production of sustainable/ marketable woodland products.

Plan delivery achieved through thinning and clearfelling will continue to produce a mixture of wood products, both conifer and broadleaf, that will be in keeping with and help progress and or enhance other management objectives.

Comparison of plan production forecast with actual production at the Forest Plan five and ten-year review. Plan Forecast = 129,000m3 (56k Thin & 73k Felling)
OSP and contract supervision.
Pre- thinning survey and or post thinning control.

The restoration/management of Sites of Special Scientific Interest / Scheduled Monuments / Key Wildlife Species.

These features will be managed by following their respective management plans and utilising OSP to implement the required works.

Monitoring will be achieved through OSP, and the Forest Plan review process.

The provision and maintenance of recreation facilities.

Maintained by Recreation department. Certain sites may require capital investment. Waymarked trails in process of being revised.

Forest Plan review and the Our Shared Forest review processes.