

Q&As

What is the Independent Panel on Forestry?

The Independent Forestry Panel was established on 17 March 2011 by the Secretary of State, Caroline Spelman, to advise government on the future direction of forestry and woodland policy in England.

The Panel is chaired by the Right Reverend James Jones, Bishop of Liverpool, and members have wide experience, knowledge and interests in the economic, social and environmental aspects of forestry and woodlands. The Panel will make its final report in spring 2012.

Stephanie Hilborne OBE, Chief Executive of The Wildlife Trusts, sits on the Panel in a personal capacity.

What is The Wildlife Trusts' involvement with woodland management?

The Wildlife Trusts manage more than 16,000 hectares of woodland in England and work in partnership with the Forestry Commission (FC) throughout the country.

It is important to be in dialogue with the Government about issues that could have a profound impact on the achievement of our charitable objectives and our vision of A Living Landscape. Open and frank dialogue does not mean that we are always in agreement with what it suggests.

We believe decisions about wooded land need to be taken as a part of a coherent strategy for the country's natural environment. Our forests are an important element of what needs to become a resilient ecological network across England. This is true whether forests are in public, private or voluntary sector ownership. Land in public ownership offers the Government a key opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to securing nature's recovery. As the 2010 Lawton Review said:

'Public bodies owning land which includes components of England's current or future ecological network should do more to realise its potential, in line with their biodiversity duty. Further, before disposal of any public land, the impact on the ecological network should be fully evaluated. Where such land is identified as having high wildlife value (existing or potential) it should not be disposed of unless its wildlife value is secured for the future.'

There is great potential for the Public Forest Estate to contribute to the large-scale habitat restoration sought in the Natural Environment White Paper. Currently an estimated 60,000 hectares of the Public Forest Estate in England consists of habitats such as ancient woodlands or heathlands that have been damaged by inappropriate coniferous plantations. The Wildlife Trusts believe these habitats need to be restored sensitively to improve their value to wildlife. Wildlife Trusts throughout England are working in close partnership with the FC to restore such habitats as well as to develop the value of other woodlands for people and wildlife. Trusts are also working with FC to restore existing native woodland by introducing appropriate, sustainable management and create new native woodlands to buffer existing fragmented woodland sites and

improve landscape connectivity – in all cases a ‘right tree in the right place’ mentality should be adopted.

What is The Wildlife Trusts’ involvement with the Independent Panel on Forestry?

The Wildlife Trusts will do everything we can to ensure that the Panel’s discussion and recommendations reflect our vision for *A Living Landscape* and enshrine the thinking about nature’s recovery in the Lawton Review and Natural Environment White Paper. The Wildlife Trusts submitted a response to the Panel’s call for views, which can be downloaded at <http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/node/4406>

The land under consideration by the Panel – including that which is heathland and other open habitat - has the potential to make a substantial contribution to nature’s recovery and, with, this to the quality of people’s lives throughout England.

Have The Wildlife Trusts taken on Forestry Commission land in the past?

The sale of FC land is not new. It has been selling land for some years now and Trusts have worked extremely hard to ensure that such sales did not lead to wildlife damage. On occasion Trusts have raised funds to purchase the land themselves if they felt that these areas would otherwise be at risk. We continue to work in partnership with the Forestry Commission across the country to secure improved management of sites and, on occasion.

The Forestry Commission owns a substantial amount of land which is of high value for wildlife – a tremendous national asset. Transfer of such land should not take place before a clear policy has been established, which should ensure areas of high wildlife value – including Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Local Wildlife Sites – are secured in the long term.

The Wildlife Trusts work in close partnership with local authorities and other organisations such as the Woodland Trust. The major landowning NGOs including The Wildlife Trusts issued a joint statement of [principles](#) about Government land disposals.

What is The Wildlife Trusts’ view on the future of the Forestry Commission?

The Wildlife Trusts have good working relations with the Forestry Commission throughout England and recognise that good practice on nature conservation has become more prevalent.

We note, however, that this approach to nature conservation is not, as yet, fully enshrined in the FC’s statutory purpose. It retains the same primary purpose that it had when its practices were very damaging to wildlife. The FC’s remit needs to be brought into line to reflect its own practice in wildlife conservation and access provision. The FC also needs to be more proactive in restoring open habitats, where plantation forest has in the past been established on high wildlife value sites such as heathland and in ancient woodland, through securing appropriate policies and finances. We are also working with the FC to create new native woodland.