

Government response to the Independent Panel on Forestry

Dear All,

Defra has just released the Government's response. The Government agrees with the Independent Panel's recommendations and has gone further in making specific proposals. Full report accessed from this link:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/2013/01/31/pb13871-forestry-policy-statement/>

The report covers a wide range of areas including health, people, biodiversity, wood fuel and bio-energy, timber production, woodland management, forestry skills and climate change. The Government believes *'that the Public Forest Estate should continue to deliver a high level of public benefits. These benefits, such as safe and well-marked public access, rich biodiversity and high quality recreational facilities, are fundamental to the integrity of the Estate and contribute significantly both to the rural economy and to wider Government social and environmental priorities.'*

Key general messages for LAFs

- **Public Forest Estate to remain in public ownership.** Policy of 15% disposal has been rescinded. Sufficient funding in the Spending Review to ensure high levels of public benefit.
- **New body to be created alongside the FC to hold the land in trust.** Greater independence from Government but safeguards for long term benefits. Income generating role. Engagement role (LAFS?). To work independently but report to Parliament through the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Exploring whether scope for group of expert 'Guardians', including representatives of community groups, to advise and support.
- **Aim to work with forest and woodland landowners to improve public access.** Particularly close to towns and cities
- **Public health duty.** Recognition of the importance of health and well-being and the contribution made by green space.
- **Localism agenda.** Potential for Neighbourhood Planning to include woodland through the Localism Act 2011, Local Green Space designation under the National Planning Policy Framework or new woodland through section 106 or the Community Infrastructure Levy.
- **Consultation by the Law Commission, Spring 2013, on conservation covenants.** Binding obligation in perpetuity in woodland conservation - benefits for biodiversity or potentially access.
- **Triennial Review of Natural England and the Environment Agency.** Government seeking to ensure that forestry proposals in line with Review outcomes.

- **Local Nature Partnerships and Local Enterprise Partnerships.** Many woodland aspects could be incorporated including access and recreation.
- **Common Agricultural Policy and Rural Development Programme for England.** Revised schemes under discussion. Regulatory framework and budget may offer potential for woodland funding.

Specific access and recreation messages to achieve social and community benefits:

- **Work with the sector in seeking funding for possible future initiatives aimed at developing local access, individual potential and community cohesion through engagement with trees, woods and forests,**
- **Launch a new initiative to develop further the involvement of local communities with the Public Forest Estate,**
- **Contribute to a pilot project to test further social enterprise activities in woodlands,**
- **Provide guidance to assist Local Authorities in reviewing Rights of Way Improvement Plans, with a particular emphasis on woodland access improvements,**
- **Fund a pilot project to assess and improve the condition, quality, and connectivity of Public Rights of Way for woodland access by foot, cycle and horse,**
- **Continue to provide data for the Woodland Trust's VisitWoods web gateway and work with the Woodland Trust to identify future funding,**
- **Help to support a sector-led Forestry and Planning network encouraging them to demonstrate how trees and woodlands contribute to sustainable development and help enable growth,**
- **Support the Royal Forestry Society to include an Urban Forestry category in their Excellence in Forestry Awards.**
- **The Government will continue to use the Woodland Trust's Woodland Access Standard to measure progress. A new baseline will be available in 2013 for measuring access improvements. This will allow more effective targeting of future access improvement initiatives.**

Regards,

Jonathan.

Jonathan Clark

Strategic Access Advisor

Planning Advisory and Compliance

Buckinghamshire County Council | County Hall |

Walton Street | Aylesbury | HP20 1UY

Tel: 01296 387695

www.buckscc.gov.uk/rights_of_way