

National Context

1. 'Forests for the community'



CHAPTER 1 - Forests for the Community

- 1.1 To many people the word "forest" conjures up an image of dense, closely grown trees stretching as far as the eye can see. Eight-hundred years ago, in mediaeval times, it meant something quite different. Then, the great forests of England were not only trees, but a magnificent mix of woods, heaths, farmland, wetlands, ponds and streams. Here also were settlements - hamlets, villages and small towns - where people lived and worked. Today, the concept of Community Forests is breathing new life into this ancient meaning of the word. This echo from our past is now set to become a signpost to a better future.
- 1.2 Community Forests cover large areas around the edges of towns and cities. They are not continuous plantings of trees but a rich mosaic of wooded landscapes and land uses including farmland, villages, leisure enterprises, nature areas and public open space. The aim is to create well-wooded landscapes for wildlife, work and education, with new opportunities for recreation, all on the doorstep of half of England's population.
- 1.3 The Forests for the Community programme which consists of 12 Community Forests in England is now over five years into implementation. Established by the Countryside Agency (then the Countryside Commission) and the Forestry Commission in partnership with a wide range of local partners, much has been achieved in the first few years. In total over 6,000 hectares of new woodland planting has been created, along with numerous benefits to the landscape and to local people. Importantly, Community Forests have become a mainstay of environmentally-led regeneration and sustainability.

The 12 Community Forests are:

Forest of Avon around Bristol
Forest of Marston Vale to the south of Bedford
Forest of Mercia in southern Staffordshire
Great North Forest in south Tyne and Wear and north-east Durham
Great Western Community Forest around Swindon
Greenwood Community Forest north of Nottingham
Mersey Forest on Merseyside
Red Rose Forest in Greater Manchester
South Yorkshire Forest near Sheffield
The Tees Forest around Cleveland
Thames Chase to the east of London
Watling Chase in south Hertfordshire/north London

Each Community Forest has a non-statutory plan, approved by Government, which describes the proposals for developing that forest over the next 30 years and guides its implementation.

- 1.4 In each forest the Countryside Agency, the Forestry Commission and 58 local authorities have appointed dedicated project teams to oversee implementation. Many other national and local organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors have become involved and are now supporting the partnerships. All are valued partners, critical to the success of the forests.

Aim and Objectives

- 1.5 The aim of the national programme of Community Forests is to achieve major environmental improvements around towns and cities, creating beautiful areas rich in wildlife, with associated provision for access, leisure and education, thereby making them more attractive places in which to live, do business and enjoy leisure time.
- 1.6 The corporate objectives agreed by the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which each Community Forest has adopted are:
 - To regenerate the environment of the Green Belt and equivalent areas, where it is public policy to keep it open, and help to ensure that it is permanently green and open.
 - To improve the landscape of the area, including reclamation of derelict land, to create a visually exciting and functionally diverse environment.
 - To increase opportunities for sport and recreation, including artistic and cultural events, and access.
 - To protect areas of high quality landscape or historical or archaeological interest.
 - To protect sites of nature conservation value and create new opportunities for nature conservation.
 - To provide new opportunities for educational use of the area, and ensure the mosaic of habitats in the forest can be used for the full range of environmental education needs of the surrounding schools. Also to ensure that urban schools are not disadvantaged in meeting the needs of the National Curriculum.

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- To protect the best agricultural land and increase opportunities for farm diversification elsewhere in accordance with Government agricultural and local planning policies.
- To establish a supply of timber and other woodland products.
- To achieve a high level of local community commitment to the concept and involvement in its implementation.
- To give public and private sector confidence in the long-term prospects for the area and to provide a proper base for investment.
- To improve the environment near housing and local industry and to increase the value of properties and businesses.
- To seek private sector support to implement the forest and to invest in leisure and other relevant service sectors.
- To create jobs in the new woodland industries, both management of woodland and use of the raw materials.
- To create jobs in the leisure industry developed in and around the Community Forest.
- To sustain other local jobs by providing an outstanding environment as a comparative economic advantage over competitor areas.
- To complement the Government's priorities for inner cities, by providing for associated leisure and open space needs at the physically closest locations.
- To remain flexible in the light of changes, such as in the leisure market.

1.7 In 1998 the DETR carried out an evaluation of the first five years of the Forests for the Community programme. The conclusions were positive and confirmed the success of the first five years of implementation. It also confirmed that the objectives remain valid.

1.8 Existing tree cover within the 12 forests at the start of the programme averaged 6.9%, with an average of 170 hectares of woodland planted each year. The aim is to increase tree cover to about 30% over about 30 years. This implies a significant increase in tree planting. In the first five years,

6,000 hectares were planted throughout the 12 forests.

Current policy framework

1.9 As the Community Forests develop, so too does the policy framework which embraces them. Community Forests have pioneered an approach to regeneration through community-based partnerships that give them life well into the 21st century. They are well placed to respond to future policy changes across a broad spectrum of interests, including environmental, economic and social.

1.10 Internationally, the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 acknowledged the essential nature of forestry for the well-being of the planet and marked the first ever global agreement on forest principles. The need to make future development sustainable was clearly recognised. Community Forests embrace the government's four objectives for sustainable development:

- social progress which recognises the needs of everyone;
- effective protection of the environment;
- prudent use of natural resources; and
- maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

1.11 Nationally, the Government has begun a programme of devolution in Scotland and Wales, and regionalisation in the creation of regional development agencies in England. There has also been an increasing emphasis on 'sustainability' as a fundamental attribute of government-funded regeneration and development programmes. The Community Forests offer the regional development agencies a tried and tested model that combines a strategic mechanism for delivering environmental improvement alongside sustainable economic regeneration.

1.12 Community Forests operate in a climate of Common Agricultural Policy reform through Agenda 2000 which is designed to pave the way for European Union enlargement and, in relation to agriculture, to address international trade concerns by bringing EU farm prices nearer to world market prices. This simplification of the Common Agricultural Policy is a further step towards



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decoupling farm support from production, and pave the way for a new "second pillar of the CAP" designed to promote environmental action, forestry and rural development.

- 1.13** The introduction of the new Rural Development Regulation provides the framework for making rural development a "second pillar" of the CAP as more resources are diverted from mainstream CAP support. The Regulation is a small step in the transition towards fully integrating agricultural policy with rural policy to meet the environmental, social and economic needs of rural areas. The Regulation brings together nine separate measures into a single framework which provides the foundation on which to build a long term, integrated, rural policy, linking agriculture, forestry and support for the wider rural economy.

Countryside Agency

- 1.14** On 1 April 1999 the Countryside Commission became the Countryside Agency, merging with elements of the Rural Development Commission. The Countryside Agency is the new statutory body working:

- to conserve and enhance the countryside;
- to promote social equity and economic opportunity for the people who live there; and
- to help everyone, wherever they live, to enjoy this national asset.

- 1.15** The Countryside Commission's publication *England's Trees and Woods* (1993) expresses the Agency's overall policy and remains valid as a context for increasing tree cover in England, especially through the principles of multi-purpose forestry embraced by the Community Forests. A new policy context for the regeneration of the countryside in and around towns, *Linking Towns and Country*, was published in March 1999, in which the multi-purpose, strategic, community-based partnerships pioneered by Community Forests are flagships.

- 1.16** The Countryside Agency's objectives cover the full breadth of sustainable development - social, economic and environmental - and the Agency intends to use Community Forests to test innovative approaches. The urban and rural white papers published in 2000 are very important in setting the context for this work. The broad

framework of the Countryside Agency will allow it to make full use of the Community Forests as test-beds for a wide range of policies.

Forestry Commission

- 1.17** The Government decided following devolution that the Forestry Commission would continue to be the department with responsibility for forestry throughout Great Britain. The Forestry Commission is now organised to meet the requirements of devolution with structures in place to serve the needs of England, Scotland and Wales, while drawing upon central resources where needed. These arrangements allow the Forestry Commission to develop policies tailored to the particular needs and circumstances of each country. In England this will involve building on the England Forestry Strategy, launched in December 1998.

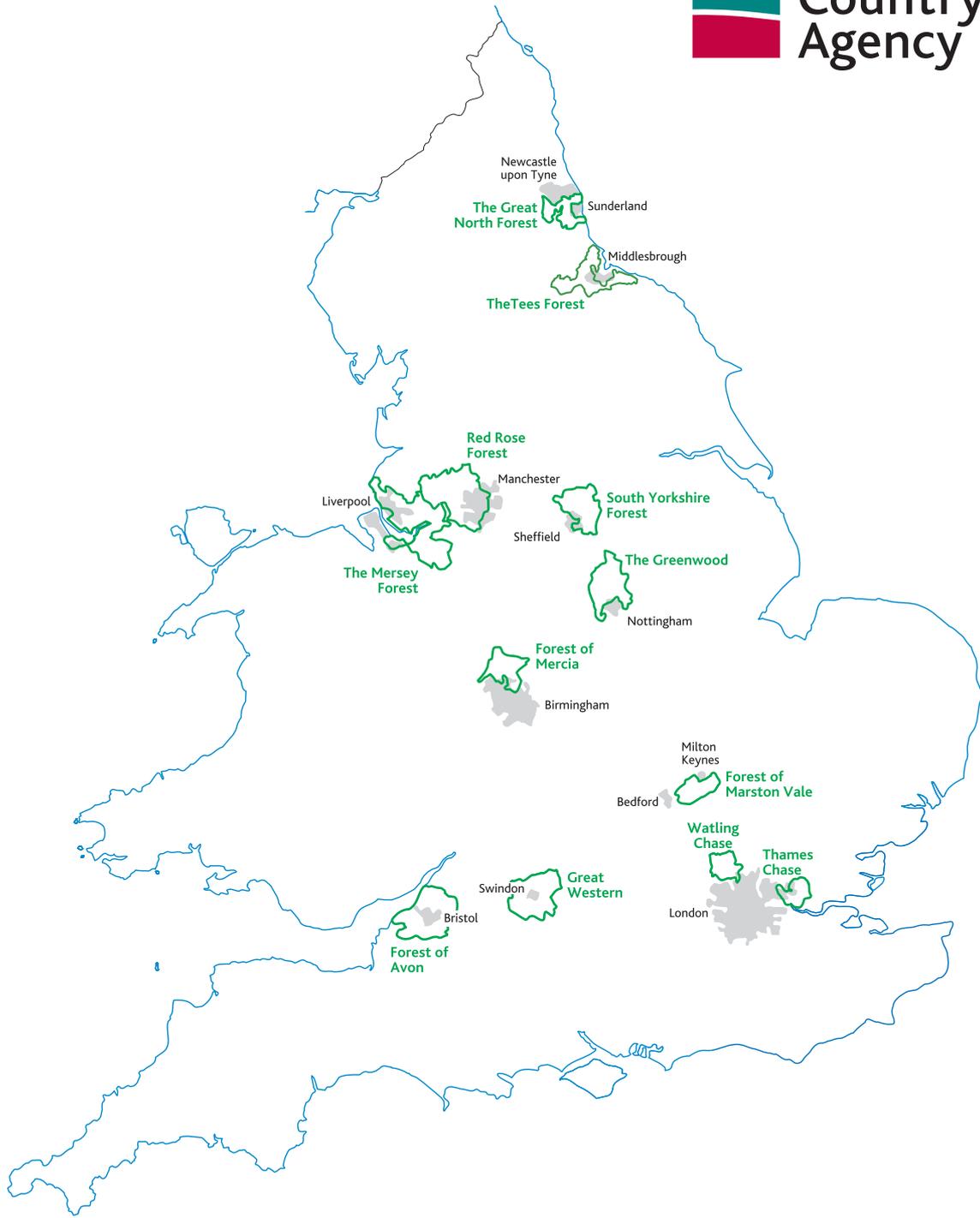
- 1.18** The England Forestry Strategy sets out the Government's strategic priorities and programmes over the next five to ten years. It demonstrates the strengthened commitment to social forestry in England as well as focusing on areas of greatest opportunity and need. The strategy has four key programmes: Forestry for Rural Development; Forestry for Economic Regeneration; Forestry for Recreation, Access and Tourism and Forestry for the Environment and Conservation. The delivery of these programmes can be greatly assisted through the Community Forest programme and the Forests will remain major partners with the Forestry Commission in achieving these goals. The Community Forests are therefore seen as a major delivery mechanism to achieve large scale, multi-purpose, sustainable forestry where it is most required.

- 1.19** Forest Enterprise, together with the Forestry Commission, have set up the Land Regeneration Unit, with the aim of greater involvement in restoring derelict land, targeting, where possible, within the Community Forest areas. This innovative approach is opening up a significant number of opportunities where substantial areas of new woodlands are already planned or under way.

- 1.20** The Countryside Agency and the Forestry Commission remain committed to the Forests for Community programme. They will continue to be national lead partners. Their roles as national lead partners are undiminished.

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England's Community Forests



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Funding Regimes

- 1.21** Creating Community Forests is not dependent upon large-scale changes in land ownership. The main approach is to encourage farmers, landowners and businesses to consider the opportunities which the forests might present, while at the same time recognising the essential role that productive and profitable farming will continue to have for the landscape, wildlife and recreation within the community forest areas.
- 1.22** Finance for the development of Community Forests comes from a number of sources. Grants from the Forestry Commission, the Countryside Agency, MAFF, the DETR and other bodies help with planting, management, restoration of derelict land and provision of facilities for sport and recreation. Further money comes from local government and industry. Private investment will be attracted from companies who see a market potential such as those for wood products or in the leisure sector. Resources from the voluntary sector have an equally valuable role. Sound business partnerships are the key for those responsible for planning, developing and managing a Community Forest.
- 1.23** Since the establishment of the programme, Community Forests have drawn in substantial funds from other sources such as the National Lottery, Europe, landfill tax, business sponsorship, developers' contributions for projects on the ground, and donations from charitable trusts for land acquisitions and tree planting. The gearing ratio, for example, of the Countryside Agency's expenditure on Community Forest teams and project work is excellent. The forests are well placed to make the most of new funding opportunities, offering strategic vision, local, regional and national partnerships and a proven record of delivery.

Conclusion

- 1.24** Community Forests will take 30 years to mature, perhaps 30 years to develop, but the improvements are already tangible. We will not reap all the advantages in one lifetime, but significant benefits will flow from the early years. Community Forests will be a legacy for the future, to be used, cherished and enjoyed by our children and our children's children.

