

CHAPTER 13 - Development

Aims:

- Ensure that the Community Forest partners support and work within established planning policies.
- Encourage new development in the Forest area, when permitted within planning policies, to play its part in achieving the Forest's targets.
- Protect and enhance the Forest landscape, in particular areas of existing development where tree cover is poor or non-existent.
- Resist development that will affect areas of woodland and sites of archaeological, historic and nature conservation interest.

13.1 The Community Forest area is covered by a range of statutory planning policies and designations, including a high proportion of Green Belt. These policies are contained within the councils' development plans and with other material considerations govern how development proposals which relate directly or indirectly to the Forest will be determined. Since most development proposals within the Green Belt will be resisted by planning policies backed by central government guidance, it is likely that opportunities to link the Community Forest targets to development within the Green Belt will be limited. The establishment of the Forest should not and will not override planning policies but will work with them in a positive way.

13.2 Large areas of land have been used for roads, residential and industrial development often with tree planting and 'landscaping' restricted to small areas rather than relating or contributing to the wider landscape setting. The Community Forest provides an ideal framework for local authorities to encourage and negotiate with developers to ensure that where appropriate, development which requires planning permission contribute positively to the landscape by both on- and off-site planting, creation of wildlife areas and improved access provision and recreational facilities. These all need to be backed up by appropriate management schemes. The key to achieving these objectives is that they be considered at the earliest possible opportunity when proposals are put forward. This work is often impractical or impossible as an afterthought. The quality of the design and build of development itself will also make a contribution to the integrity of the Forest.

13.3 As the South West Region and the Bristol/ Bath area accommodates more economic growth, the quality of life for employees and their families, including the workplace its setting and contribution to the environment, will take on increased importance. New housing figures and the concentration of potential future development in and around Bristol as a more sustainable long term objective will increase the need to ensure that the quality of the environment and people's access to it, keeps pace. The concept of woodland planting (rather than simply tree planting) can provide a mechanism for creating this new environment. Grant aid schemes can provide finance for planting and early maintenance. Long-term ownership and management of woods created in this way will need to be addressed, as commitment and care are needed to ensure survival and vitality. The Woodland Trust and in certain circumstances Forest Enterprise are well placed to assist in ownership and management of these woods. Local community involvement will be perhaps the best way forward with these sites.



New development, Avon Valley (Photo: Forest of Avon)

13.4 Development, e.g. sports and leisure facilities and Forest-related enterprises, will have to be considered against policies and criteria set out in development plans and may offer scope for significant woodland establishment and the creation of new access.

13.5 Road and rail schemes will be expected to make major contributions to the Forest landscape on a woodland area basis as well as in protecting and improving access, both for leisure and commuting, into open spaces, greenways and the countryside. This will include new crossings and practical footpath, cycleway and bridleway diversions with an aim of improving the convenience of the network that exists. Several new housing developments are now effectively hemmed in by motorways or railways, restricting people's access to the countryside which beckons just a few yards away.

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- 13.6** Changing trends in farming patterns indicate that agricultural land is in over supply. The community forest concept aims to assist in retaining land in open use. Minerals sites, landfills, derelict land or other operations, once suitably restored, could provide community woodland as a favoured end use, with permissive routes and new rights of way where possible, linking to the existing network.
- 13.7** Agricultural change will also lead to an increase in schemes proposing diversification into a range of new business activities. Some have already happened, including farm shops, stables, workshops, holiday accommodation and recreation facilities. The Forest will, over time, increase the number of people using the countryside and therefore business opportunities for farmers and landowners. Planning permission will still be required and planning authorities are willing and able to give clear guidance and advice as to what is acceptable.

Improvements to recreational access and crossings will also be sought, particularly in relation to key routes;

- work with landowners and managers to improve the visual aspects of existing developed areas through tree planting and to promote better access through new and / or improved routes.

Proposals

- 13.8** The Forest partners, particularly the local authorities, will aim to:
- write specific policies relating to the achievement of the Forest in Structure, Local, Minerals and Waste, and Transport Plans;
 - treat the Forest Plan as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications;
 - ensure that all development proposals within the Forest area comply with current planning policies;
 - have due regard to the Forest Plan in assessing landscaping, planting and access proposals. The local planning authorities should encourage woodland planting where appropriate and the provision of public access, link routes and open space on both new and existing sites;
 - produce Supplementary Planning Guidance for developers and planners relating to how development can contribute to the Forest, incorporating good practice and indicative formulae for scale and area of woodland and forest infrastructure;
 - achieve substantial new woodland planting in association with road and rail schemes and in relation to derelict land, former mineral workings and landfill sites.

