

CHAPTER 22 - Statement of Understanding

Farmers, Landowners and Community Forests:

The Countryside Commission's and Forestry Commission's programme of Community Forests in England will create new opportunities for farmers and landowners to provide an attractive long-term use of some agricultural land. Vital elements in the Community Forest concept will be the retention of agricultural landscapes and the creation of productive forests.

To ensure that Community Forests provide the best possible opportunities for landowners and farmers whilst safeguarding their interests:

- a. participation by farmers and landowners in Community Forests is, and will remain, entirely voluntary.
- b. There will be no compulsory purchase of land for Community Forest purposes.
- c. There will be no support for the planting of trees on tenanted land without the willing agreement of both landlord and tenant.
- d. The creation of a Community Forest does not alter the present legal position with regard to access. There will be no obligation on farmers, or landowners, to provide additional access and the public will not have any right of entry on to private land which does not already exist or is not willingly entered into by the farmer and landlord.

The Community Forest programme will be guided nationally by the Countryside Commission and the Forestry Commission, with advice from the Department of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Farmer's and landowner's representatives will be invited to sit on the Officer's Steering Group, or its equivalent, for each Community Forest and on other working parties which are relevant to their interests.

Community Forest project teams will keep in contact with the local farming community. Farmers and landowners within each area will be involved and consulted at the appropriate stages as each community forest proposal is developed.

Community Forest project teams will facilitate the provision of advice to farmers and landowners who are interested in the increased opportunities for farm diversification. Project teams will also promote the preparation of whole farm plans to maximise landscape, wildlife and other benefits for those farmers who are keen to play an important role in these Community Forest areas. The teams will help owners manage existing access (including public rights of way), taking account of the effects of access on farming and advise on any proposal owners may have for providing new access. The statutory rights of landowners and occupiers will be respected and Community Forest teams will adopt appropriate measures to ensure that the general public are made aware of these rights. The teams will also be seeking to avoid undesirable interactions between new woodlands and adjoining agricultural land.

In addition to grants for tree planting and woodland management from the Forestry Commission under the Woodland Grant Scheme and annual payments from MAFF under its Farm Woodland Premium Scheme, Countryside Commission grants for landscape conservation, informal access and recreation and access will be targeted towards Community Forest areas. Special consideration will also be given to assessing the need for, and level of, further financial incentives from the Countryside Commission. Grant systems will encourage multi-purpose woodland planting and management schemes.

The Country Landowners Association, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, the National Farmers' Union of England and Wales, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, Countryside Commission, Forestry Commission, and Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food have jointly endorsed this statement and will maintain regular contact at national level. The Countryside Commission, Forestry Commission and MAFF will continue to work with these and other organisations to help farmers and landowners to benefit from Community Forests.