

## Forest-wide Vision

4. Introducing the Forest-wide vision

5. Community

6. Landscape

7. Woodlands and forestry

8. Agriculture

9. Biodiversity (wildlife and nature conservation)

10. Archaeology and local history

11. Informal recreation and leisure

12. Countryside sport and outdoor recreation

13. Development

14. Education

15. Arts and culture

16. Employment and economy



## CHAPTER 4 - Introducing the Forest-wide Vision

This part of the Plan describes the vision for the Forest through eleven key topics and suggests, through aims and proposals, how the Forest will be realised as an area for landscape change and new activities for the community. These topics apply across the Forest area and are themselves interrelated and therefore should not be read in isolation. The geographical detail is addressed under part four of the plan: Forest Strategies.

**4.1** The Forest of Avon is a massive undertaking, the like of which has never been seen before in the area. In contrast to much post war forestry confined mainly to poorly populated rural areas, this new Forest will be close to and even penetrate urban areas. Whilst the creation of large-scale woodland in the urban areas is generally impractical, there are spaces where new trees and copses can add to the quality of urban life, bringing wildlife, quiet and natural processes close to many people. The Forest will reach into the city and towns through green corridors, such as the river

Avon, which will also enable urban and town residents to reach out into the countryside. It will not simply be about timber production, but will aim to achieve many objectives. It will not be a Forest of uniform species, density and age, but a rich mosaic of woodlands, small and large, with farmland and open spaces in between, providing a landscape framework in and around settlements. Agriculture will remain the major land use in the non-urban area of the Forest.

**4.2** The Rio Summit and Helsinki agreements give urgency and top-level support for both protecting the environment and improving it in ways which are sustainable for future generations, working from a local community level through to international agreements. Sustainability in the context of forestry is defined as, 'the stewardship of forests and forest lands in such a way, and at a rate that maintains biodiversity, productivity, regeneration, capacity, vitality and their potential to fulfil, now and in the future, relevant ecological, economic and social

*Forest Vision: Today*



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functions at local, national and global levels, and that does not cause damage to other ecosystems'. The Forest will become one of the most important initiatives in the area in meeting these objectives and will be unique in helping to redress the balance of habitat loss and reduction in biodiversity during the twentieth century. The creation of the Forest is sustainable development - improving the local and wider environment and the local economy and providing improved facilities for people, into the long term. The Forest will make an important contribution to four local authorities' Local Agenda 21 processes as part of the Government's Strategy for Sustainable Development.

**4.3** The opportunity is now available to make the most of the changes in agricultural policy, environmental awareness and public enthusiasm to create a landscape for the new millennium for Bristol and its surroundings. This landscape could have something of the feel of the old Forest of Kingswood, but will host a pattern of modern land uses - agriculture,

industry, residential and leisure - contained within a well-wooded framework. To achieve the target of 27% woodland cover of the land available for planting, some 6726 ha of new woods will need to be established.

**4.4** The Forest will be created by working particularly with farmers, landowners (including local authority landowners) and tenants who control and manage much of the potential land and will aim to protect the viability of farm businesses. Their involvement will be entirely voluntary and entered into freely. Grants and opportunities for enhancing farm business incomes will be the main incentives for participation. The level of and mechanisms for grant aid for woodland establishment, land management and public access will be critical and will need to be developed over time.

*Forest Vision: Future*



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- 4.5** Modelling on the best examples in Europe and North America (e.g. the Amsterdam Bos in Holland and Stanley Park, Vancouver), Bristol and its surroundings will be transformed into a more attractive location for industry, businesses, their employees and families whilst respecting and making accessible the heritage of human activity, the landscape and wildlife.
- 4.6** The new and existing woods will create new business and employment opportunities in the forestry, landscaping and timber-processing industries as economies of scale become evident, providing locally grown wood products for home and the workplace on a sustainable basis. Craft-based industries and village-based enterprises will be able to take advantage of the urban population's increasing use of the Forest and through joint marketing within the Forest. Farmers will be able to invest in new ventures involving timber, energy crops, leisure and tourism, adding value to their farm businesses and creating more employment opportunities in rural areas.
- 4.7** New recreational routes and greenways (off road routes closed to motorised traffics and usually catering for multiple users) will be developed in attractive local settings. These greenways will reach from within the city and towns to the surrounding area, connecting open spaces and community woodlands, and providing easy access and commuting routes close to where people live, adding to the existing examples. They will link to public transport nodes and to the public rights of way network and help develop a system of safe routes to schools. The new concept of 'gateway sites' will add to this network of greenways. Gateway sites will act as focal points for public transport, access to greenways and the Forest beyond, information and interpretation, sport, events and recreation, and provide a range of visitor facilities such as cycle hire, toilets and refreshments, as appropriate. They would also provide a variety of walks, from short, well-surfaced, easy grades for the less mobile and those with pushchairs, to more challenging routes for active ramblers.
- 4.8** The Forest will help create opportunities for a more healthy lifestyle, by creating a more relaxing and less stressful environment, through trees helping reduce the effects of airborne dust and pollution. Opportunities will be created for people to improve their fitness and healthiness through a variety of exercise in the Forest 'on their doorstep'. This will involve both the design of trails, paths etc. linked to community centres, health centres etc. and assisting in programmes designed to encourage people to use them.
- 4.9** The underlying theme of the Forest is that it is a 'Forest for the Community' and will engage, enthuse and involve local people from all areas and groups in taking an interest and lending a practical hand in improving their environment. The promotion of equality of access to the Forest will be a key theme. The existing partnership of people is a firm base to work from, with parish and town councils, local groups, voluntary bodies, schools, local government and national bodies all playing their part and working at different levels within the creation of the Forest. Whilst local government and the two national partners work to establish the strategy and framework of the Forest, farmers, local groups and communities have been getting on with practical work on a variety of sites.
- 4.10** The partners will work together to ensure that people from all communities (geographical and social) are included in the planning, design, use and management of the Forest. This will require a range of capacity building and outreach work which will deliberately target groups currently excluded. The Forest will become a place for all people, regardless of circumstance, to enjoy and participate in.
- 4.11** A new partnership will need to grow and change alongside the Forest and bring in people at different stages of its development. Local government and the two national partners will remain key players, but the importance of including the voluntary sector, wider farming interests and the business sector in decision-making, influence and implementation will grow with time. Throughout this Plan the term 'forest partners' refers to this wide range of potential partnerships, which will differ in each area and activity.
- 4.12** The Forest of Avon will take a long time to achieve. There are no extensive areas of publicly owned land readily available for planting. Farmland ownership and tenancy is complex and varied, with fragmentation into small ownership being a particular issue near urban areas. The predominance of dairy farming indicates that, unless incentives or subsidies change, uptake of woodland schemes will be slow. The major proportion of new woodland will have to be established on privately owned farmland and the voluntary nature of the Forest will demand a steady, step-by-step

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approach. These issues were raised by the consultant's report (Countryside Commission 1990) and have been borne out by subsequent research and consultation. Experience of the first five years of implementation of the Plan supports this conclusion. It will take 50 years to achieve the overall targets, but significant progress should be achieved within 30 years and some 70% of new woodland should be established by then. The results of today's planting will be evident and contributing to the landscape, wildlife and recreation benefits within 15 years. An immediate start to large-scale establishment of woods will help to speed the Forest forward and ensure that benefits are evident, even in the short term.

- 4.13** The aims, proposals and targets set out in this Plan have been written from today's perspective. All elements of the plan will need to be reviewed at different times to ensure relevance to prevailing circumstances.
- 4.14** The national aims of the community forest programme have been translated into the local aims that appear in the following chapters, tailoring the Forest to meet local needs and circumstances. They will not all come about in the first year or two. Many will take a long time to start, and longer to achieve. They do, however, show what needs to be addressed in order that a unified new multipurpose landscape will emerge over the coming years.



Millennium Planting, Siston (Photo: Mark Simmons)