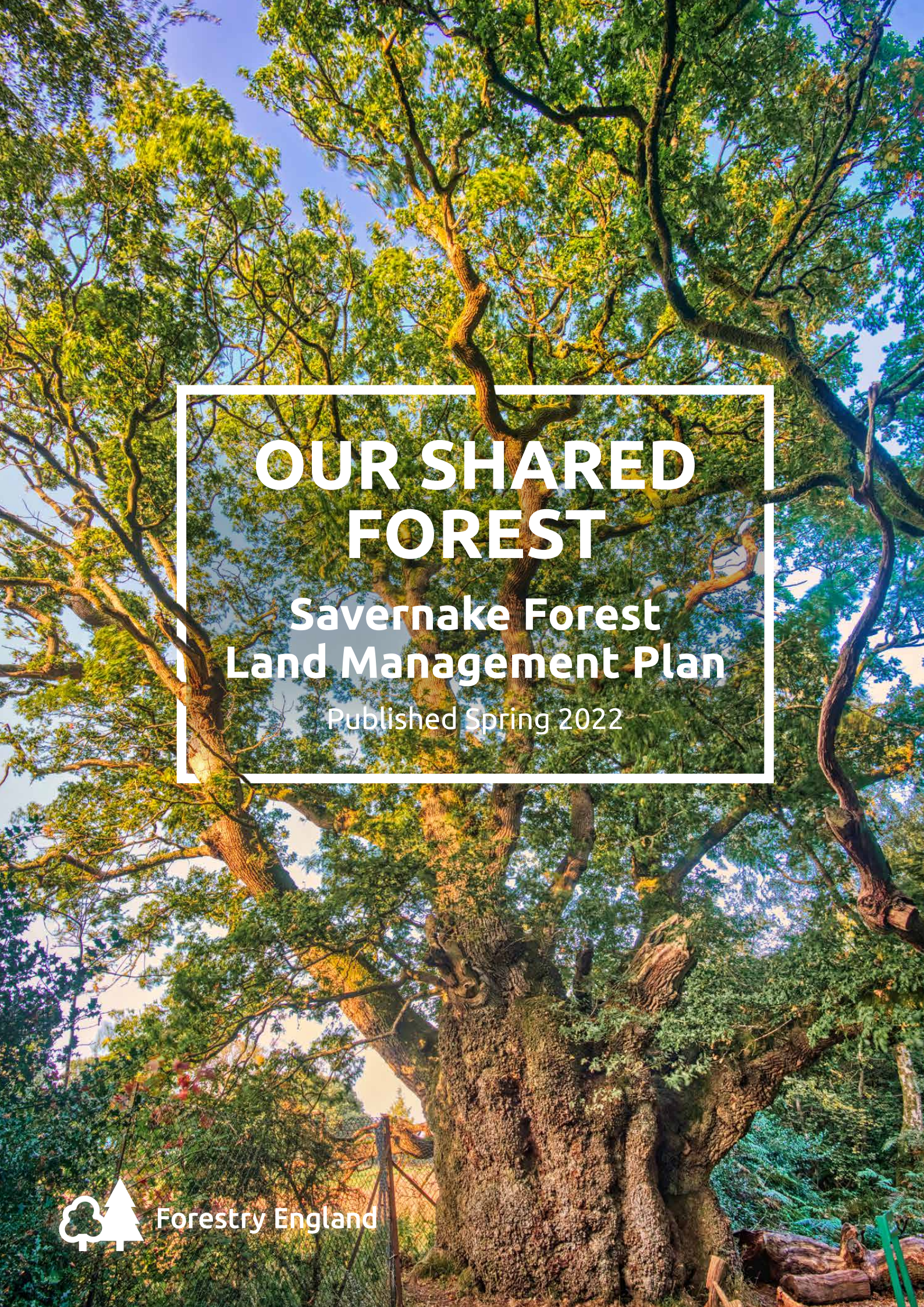


OUR SHARED FOREST

Savernake Forest Land Management Plan

Published Spring 2022

Forestry England

CONTENTS

PAGE


OUR
VISION

TO NURTURE A SHARED FOREST UNLIKE ANY OTHER

By shaping our decisions around the natural potential of the land, and the varied influences of our ever-changing world, we will create a diverse and inclusive forest that is a global example of what can be achieved through forward-thinking forestry.

INTRODUCTION

OUR PAST AND PRESENT

Savernake Forest is a national treasure of ancient trees and wood pasture. Its historic, cultural, and ecological significance is rivalled by few other wooded landscapes anywhere in the country.

Savernake's notable trees, stands, and history are what make it a place of international importance. But the Forest's future as a unique and ancient site is dependent on more than just preservation. The survival of our ancient Forest requires a balance between sensitive conservation and vital adaptation to face more frequent and intense forest disturbances – including extreme climate events – and increased susceptibility to pathogens, pests, and disease.

Savernake comprises one of the most important remnants of wood pasture in Great Britain. Its high density of veteran trees dating from before 1750AD is comparable with only a handful of other sites across the country. The unique plant and invertebrate assemblages associated with these trees are equally interesting and important. The over-arching purpose of this plan is to recognise the historical, landscape, and biological diversity of Savernake and to enhance these values where possible.

Layers of historic influence and management define Savernake's character and unique qualities. The Forest's role in history is also significant; with records of its existence beginning in the Saxon period. By medieval times, the whole landscape was managed and maintained for hunting, and providing venison and revenues for the king. The Forest then passed into private ownership. It was heavily managed, emparked in the 16th Century, and designed to complement the large estate and buildings; particularly Tottenham House, which was first constructed in the late 16th century. In 1939, Forestry England leased Savernake Forest from the Savernake Estate on a 999-year agreement. Significant areas of the "the Old Forest" were planted with beech and oak. Much of the eastern side of the Forest was established with exotic conifers, in line with the Forestry Commission's early purpose to create a strategic reserve of timber.

This lease still stands today, and Forestry England continues to manage the trees and forestry within Savernake. The sporting (shooting) rights are let to a third party by the Savernake Estate and there are several private access agreements for residential properties within the Forest. There are also a number of restrictive clauses and covenants within the lease agreement that relate to Forestry England's responsibilities for certain other features within the property.

Today, Savernake Forest is cherished by local residents and specialists alike. But it is not widely recognised for its significance or value. The Forest is a haven for quiet and informal recreation access, with numerous tracks and paths through the Forest. The scenic, designed, and natural beauty of the Forest is extraordinary but often overlooked. The Forest's exceptional natural capital is unquestionable and growing.

THE FUTURE

In 100 years, the trees and woodlands of Savernake Forest will be ancient, alive, and vibrant. They will be accessible to people and thriving in a society where biodiversity, the historic environment, and access to the outdoors for fresh air and exercise is highly valued by society. The woodland landscape and its associated ecology will have evolved successfully with our changing climate.

The management and future of Savernake is complex and multifaceted. It is also fundamental to the cultural and ecological integrity of the surrounding landscape. For these reasons, our plans and management interventions must be dynamic and ambitious.

Our Shared Forest is a project to reshape and redirect our land management. It will set a new direction for Savernake Forest.

The world, the climate, and society are changing. They always have. But the pace of change is speeding up, and the impacts on the Forest over the next generation of trees and people will be profound.

This land management plan sets out an agreed, understood, and supported direction to guide what the Forest will look like, feel like, and be like in 100 years' time. From this, Forestry England will create more detailed forest plans that will direct operational activity in the decades ahead.

At the heart of the plan there is an agreed vision:

TO NURTURE A SHARED FOREST UNLIKE ANY OTHER.

By shaping our decisions around the natural potential of the land, and the varied influences of our ever-changing world, we will create a diverse and inclusive forest that is a global example of what can be achieved through forward-thinking forestry.

This vision is supported by six principles of land management:

- **Trees and woodlands**
- **Wildlife and wild spaces**
- **Geology and soils**
- **Water**
- **Cultural and built heritage**
- **Community and recreation**

Each of these principles of land management sets out the important characteristics of 'where we are now', identifies the key targets for the future as 'where we want to get to', then sets out key commitments for 'what we are going to do'.

There are a number of key national principles and strategies which have helped set the context:

- Principles of the European Landscape Convention regarding local culture, quality of life, social wellbeing and transformation of landscapes.
- Sir John Lawton's 'Making Space for Nature' report recommending 'bigger, better and more joined up'.
- The DEFRA 25 Year Plan which sets an ambition to 'leave our environment in a better state than when we found it'.
- Forestry England's strategy in 'growing the future'.
- Concerns identified in the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan around climate change, and reduction and management of ancient woodlands.
- North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment.

YOUR VIEWS

In developing this land management plan, we have sought views from a wide cross section of individuals and organisations.

Consultation process:

Phase 1 (January 2021)

279 people completed a survey that explored their interests in, understanding of, and vision for Savernake Forest.

Phase 2 (March 2021)

Survey responses were analysed. The vision and land management commitments were drafted in response to survey findings.

Phase 3 (October 2021)

More than a dozen expert stakeholder organisations and groups took part in a workshop to provide detailed feedback on the draft vision and land management commitments.

Phase 4 (Spring 2022)

The amended vision and land management commitments were published for final feedback via survey.

Together we have developed an ambitious, long-term vision for the future and set out new approaches to forestry and land management in Savernake Forest.

TREES AND WOODLANDS

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Savernake Forest is a truly ancient forest. It is better described as a wooded pasture, made up of open grown ancient trees infilled with younger trees. The Forest's age and centuries of management mean that it offers one of the oldest, richest, and most diverse tree landscapes in the country.

The numerous veteran trees provide habitat for a diverse range of plants and animals, including an outstanding assemblage of lichens and fungi, many of which are deadwood specialists. These trees also provide summer roosts for a number of bat species. When Savernake's veteran and ancient trees were surveyed between 2014-2018, over 4,000 trees of significance were surveyed, scored, and mapped. This work indicated that large numbers of the oak, beech, and sweet chestnut were associated with rides and plantation dating from the 18th Century.

The traditional land use over much of Savernake would have been extensive grazing in wood pasture. Individual trees would have been pollarded. This form of management would almost certainly have been practised from the early Saxon period until modern history. Throughout the medieval period, areas of woodland and coppice would have been periodically enclosed to establish trees and provide timber, firewood, and shelter for deer. Other areas were emparked to provide habitat for deer. This long history of management through recurrent pollarding and grazing has given rise to Savernake's particular diversity.

The survey found that scattered older oak trees were much more prevalent to the west of the Grand Avenue. These had often been pollarded, indicating a long history of wood pasture. None of the pollards indicated any recent artificial pollarding. To the east of the Grand Avenue, pollards were much less frequent. Birch Copse, in particular, had few old pollards but high numbers of hazel. This may indicate its longer history as an ungrazed area of ancient woodland rather than a wooded common.

The decline of open woodland, park, and clearings – generally associated with the plantations of the mid-20th Century and their subsequent growth – has had an impact on the Forest's associated flora and fauna. The maturing plantations have reduced the amount of light and air circulation for the lichen communities. The increased shade from the closing canopy has also lowered the average air temperature in the Forest; reducing periods of warm soil and air temperature for fungi and invertebrates. The decline of open woodland bird species has been well documented. For example, the Redstart was recorded as holding 41 territories in 1939; only 8 territories in 1991; and is believed to be extinct today.

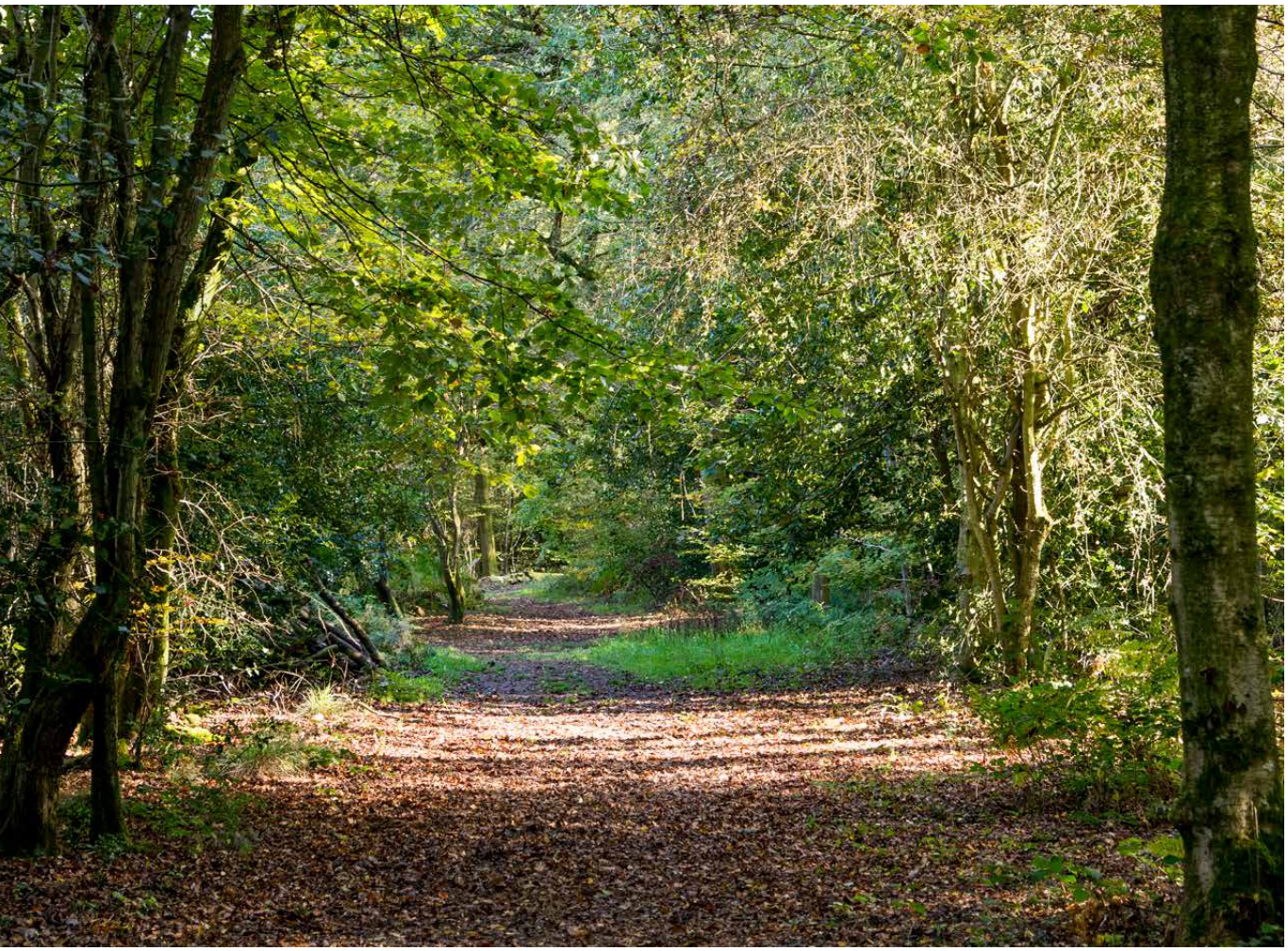
WHERE DO WE WANT TO GET TO?

In 100 years, the trees and woodlands of Savernake Forest will be vibrant, healthy, vigorous, and thriving.

To achieve and maintain a more open forest structure with woodland glades, further areas of Savernake will be thinned from high density closed canopy plantation to more open woodland. Structural diversity and space for future open crowned veteran trees will be promoted.

These open woodland areas and associated grassland and heathland clearings will be maintained either by mowing or grazing livestock, depending on access and other constraints.

The trees, soils, and woodland ecosystem will be valued as a major carbon store, which can be managed and maximised in balance with the Forest's other special qualities. The above and below ground carbon stores will be protected and enhanced through care of the soils, root protection areas, dead and decaying wood, and standing living trees.




Cathedral Oak

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

Our commitments:

1 **Protect our ancient trees and identify and support the future veteran trees that are their successors.**

2 **Secure the longevity of the Forest by increasing the range, structure, and genetic diversity of our trees and forest, to maximise resilience to pests, disease, and climate change.**

3 **Make site-by-site decisions to develop and care for our woodlands.**

4 **Reduce the impact of pests and diseases on our existing and new trees.**

5 **Tell the story of sustainable forestry.**

1 Protect our ancient trees and identify and support the future veteran trees that are their successors.

The density of open crowned ancient trees in Savernake is rarely seen in Britain today. But ancient trees are increasingly vulnerable and require careful management. We will continue to monitor and halo thin around tree crowns and protect roots by implementing exclusion zones for machinery. We will explore and apply new learning around veteran tree management. We will continue to bolster the number of ancient trees with a programme to identify, nurture, and 'veteranise' the next generation of trees. We will continue to restore woodland pasture habitats by reducing the density of trees, so that trees are more widely spaced.

2 Secure the longevity of the Forest by increasing the range, structure, and genetic diversity of our trees and forest, to maximise resilience to pests, disease, and climate change.

Identifying and establishing the right tree in the right place for the right reason encourages a wider palette of tree species that are better prepared for environmental changes. While we recognise and support the importance of local 'native' species, the climate pressures on Savernake Forest mean that reliance on native species and the current genetic resource alone will be a high-risk strategy. We will continue to introduce a greater variety of tree species and genetic diversity through carefully planned and evidence-based planting. However, we also plan to increase the Forest's native character and structural diversity over time. Our blended approach will harness natural regeneration

of site-suitable genotypes, supplemented by considered planting of climate resilient species of suitable origin and provenance. We will move away from clearfelling blocks of trees and towards lower impact silvicultural systems, to establish a continuously covered forest. The success of this approach is reliant on sufficient deer and rabbit control, and fencing. We will consider how we protect and enhance minor tree species and understory species, including scrub in the open habitats/wood pasture areas, to ensure they contribute to a fully functioning ecosystem. All these resilience building measures will create an added line of defence for our ancient and veteran native species and specimens.

3 Make site-by-site decisions to develop and care for our woodlands.

The Forest will continue to support a rich mosaic of open grassland, woodland pasture, undisturbed undergrowth and old growth, and deadwood habitats. It will comprise a diverse range of woodland types that respond to and reflect the changing soils and topography.

A blanket approach to forest planning and management is no longer viable if we are to maintain and improve the UK's wooded areas. Savernake has the potential to support a diverse range of woodland habitats. We can secure a richer, healthier forest for future generations by diversifying stand structure, understanding that a forest is not just about the trees, and taking a site-by-site and tree-by-tree approach. This flexible management considers the role and value of individual trees, habitat, and historic relevance. This includes enriching areas suitable for wilding, areas designed to support saproxylic (deadwood) ecosystems, areas for grazing, coppice woodlands, wetlands, and areas more meticulously managed to provide the space for certain specimens to flourish.

4 Reduce the impact of pests and diseases on our existing and new trees.

We must take steps to reduce the impact of growing threats to the health of our internationally important ancient and veteran tree population. We will improve our active management and the effectiveness of our actions to address the impact of pathogens, pests, and diseases on standing trees and regeneration success. This will include better controls on grey squirrel and insect pests. We will ensure that the way we plant helps avoid or slow the spread of threats. We will work with partners and neighbours to deal with pests and diseases at a landscape scale, through effective mammal monitoring and management.

5 Tell the story of sustainable forestry.

The role of sustainable forestry in maintaining a rich and healthy environment is poorly understood by many. We will commit to being open and improving our communication around forestry at Savernake. We will better advise woodland users, neighbours, and other stakeholders when we plan and implement forestry works, so that our work is understood and appreciated. We will explain the purpose of forestry operations and their role in delivering our commitments. We will be ready to adapt and modify plans in response to new site knowledge.

These are our principles of land management to safeguard and enhance the trees and woodlands of Savernake Forest.

WILDLIFE AND WILD SPACES

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Savernake Forest is nationally and internationally important for wildlife. The Forest's geology and cultural heritage have created a stronghold – and even a last refuge – for individual species and the range of species supported by the diverse blend of habitats.

The landscape of Savernake Forest is the result of its long history of continuous management. The continuity of this management was disrupted in the mid-late 20th Century, and the effects of this are still felt today. The reintroduction of grazing regimes and sympathetic management of the veteran trees began many years ago. However, the pace of forestry working with nature is necessarily slow. The process of restoring favourable conditions is still being realised and will be for decades to come.

The remnant ancient wood pasture and mature broadleaved plantations within Savernake Forest are nationally important for biodiversity. The mosaic of habitats supports an outstanding assemblage of wildlife, including many species with nationally restricted distributions.

The Forest's exceptional assembly of ancient and veteran trees, floristically rich grasslands, and standing and fallen deadwood support numerous specialist species. These include over 100 species of lichen and over 1,000[1] species of fungi. The high density of deadwood is particularly important for the numerous recorded invertebrate species, many with nationally restricted distributions.

The variety of habitats, flora, and invertebrates within Savernake Forest in turn supports a diverse assemblage of bird, amphibian, and mammal species.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO GET TO?

In the future, Savernake Forest will be a resilient and diverse landscape, supporting a rich and dynamic mosaic of habitats and species.

The habitats within Savernake Forest will be perpetuated through natural process-driven management, creating a productive and robust landscape. The positive management practices that have shaped Savernake Forest will have been re-established, to promote a dynamic and cyclical mixture of habitats that will provide niches for a broad range of specialist species. This will include continuity in ancient and veteran trees, with successor trees carefully managed to become the future keystones of Savernake Forest as our current ancient trees gracefully decline.

Our understanding of the species present within Savernake Forest will be highly detailed, guided by expert and dedicated survey work. This will guide our management practices, ensuring that rare and declining species will thrive.

[1] Knowles, C., October 2021, A review of the fungi of Savernake Forest: A study for Buglife – Back from the Brink. 9 Pilrig Heights, Edinburgh, EH7 4PP

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

Our commitments:

1 **Identify habitats of current and potential conservation importance to ensure they are made bigger, better, and more joined up.**

2 **Improve monitoring and reporting of resident and visiting species.**

3 **Utilise open spaces and wood pasture habitats for nature conservation.**

4 **Continue to engage experts on species sensitive felling.**

1 Identify habitats of current and potential conservation importance to ensure they are made bigger, better, and more joined up.

To retain and regain the breadth of key species from bird and mammal, to lichen, fungi, and insects, Savernake requires a varied approach and considered management. Contrary to popular belief, improving opportunities for wildlife and wild spaces is not a case of leaving nature to take its course. Savernake's current rich biodiversity is the result of historic layers of active management that have produced the Forest as it is today. It is unrealistic to view Savernake as a completely wild landscape, or to aspire to this. But we may significantly enhance its ecological significance.

Savernake's current and historic bird assemblage is noteworthy, with species such as Spotted Flycatcher, Wood Warbler, and Nightingale. But the diversity and abundance has been in decline for some years. However, this trend can be reversed. The Forest has the potential to support a diverse range of ecosystems, attractive to an even wider range of woodland and woodland edge breeding birds. The same conditions can support a wide range of small mammals, insects, and lichens.

We are increasing our focus on supporting veteran trees, wood pasture restoration, and standing deadwood. We will continue to 'veteranise' younger trees to encourage more cavity-nesting species, like the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and the Barbastelle bat. We are also re-establishing the rich forest fauna of deadwood and wetland insects by reintroducing more saproxylic (decaying wood) ecosystems and maintaining existing ponds. These habitats are an essential lifeline to numerous species of particular importance, including the rarest cranefly (*Ctenophora flaveolata*); rare and uncommon lichen flora; at least 25 butterfly types, including the purple emperor; bats; and an exceptionally diverse collection of fungi. We will also continue to re-establish the wood pasture, hawthorn scrub, and grassland ecosystems that play such an important part in retaining and reintroducing many other important species.

In collaboration with the public and interested parties, it is within our power to reverse the decline in the UK's woodland species. Our next steps contribute towards a future built upon a mosaic of healthy habitats.

2 Improve monitoring and reporting of resident and visiting species.

We already know that Savernake has become a stronghold for several rare and uncommon species. We will enrich our knowledge, and the data we are able to share, by creating opportunities for greater visibility of species recording. Mapping the ecological make-up of the Forest requires communication between all interested parties. We are keen to understand what monitoring is undertaken, what data is collected, what it tells us, and how we can supplement this with further monitoring and targeted research. We aspire to create a network and study group to formalise links with organisations and individuals who survey Savernake. Through this network, we can share data that can help determine how we manage the Forest for the benefit of wildlife and wild spaces.

3 Utilise open spaces and wood pasture habitats for nature conservation.

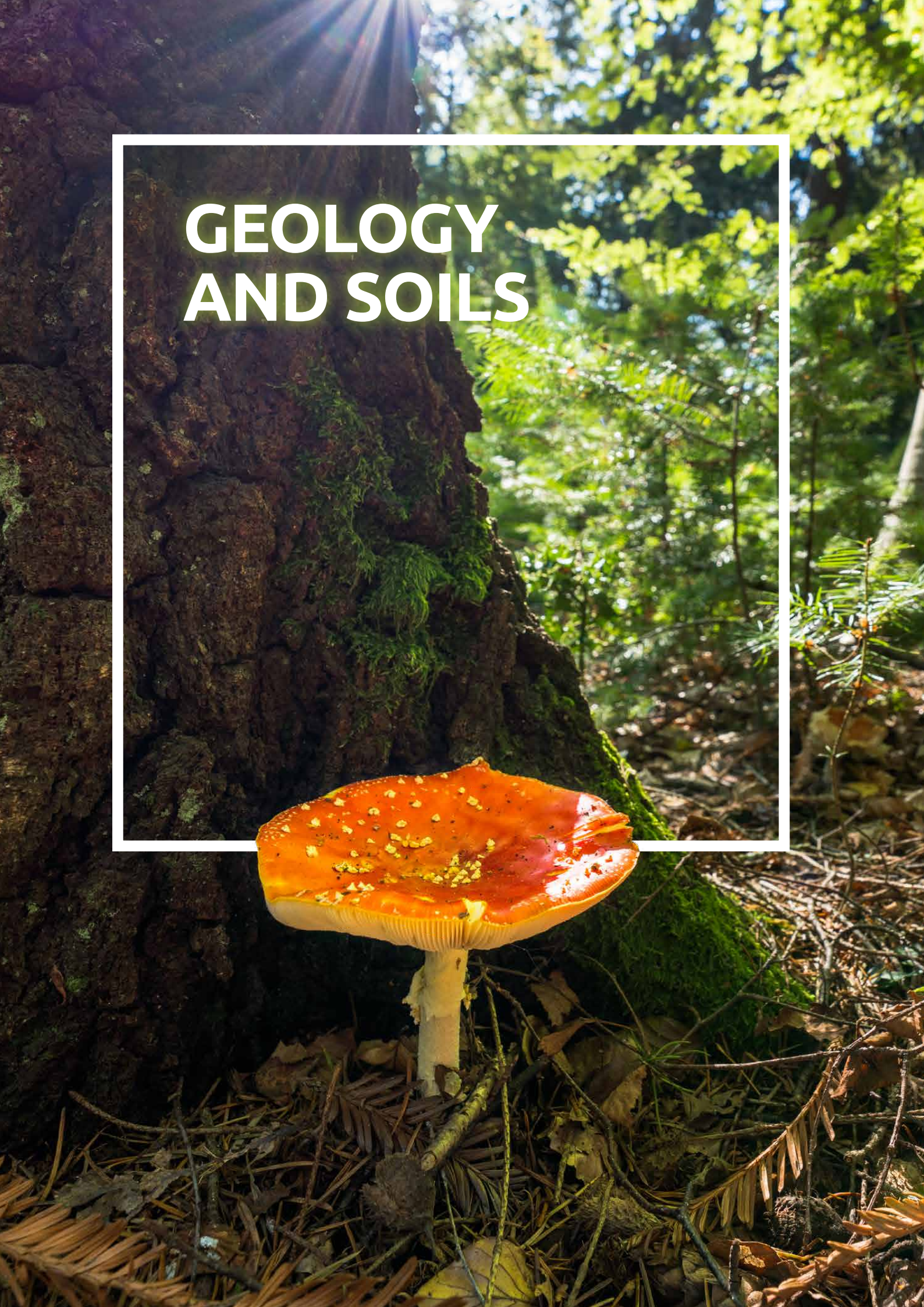
Historically, Savernake had long encouraged grazing amongst the open spaces and widely spaced trees. We are proud to have reintroduced wood pasture (silvopasture) systems within the Forest. The wood pasture system has many benefits for biodiversity under dense tree cover for species such as flora, fungi, and lichens, and in more open areas for species such as invertebrates. It also has potential to slow the transmission of diseases between trees and encourage wildflowers, bees, and insects – which in turn encourages birds – back to the area. Currently, fencing is the only viable solution to restoring how the Forest was historically managed. But we intend to encourage unfenced solutions for Savernake as they become increasingly viable. We plan to gradually reduce standing volume within existing grazing units, and explore extending the grazed pasture and open forest to help restore the ecosystem and landscape.

4 Continue to engage experts on species-sensitive felling.

We will always take a considerate approach to felling. We never wilfully disrupt nesting animals, such as the Goshawk or dormice. Each stand is reviewed by our ecologists before any activity takes place. If advised that a species of importance will be unnecessarily disrupted, we will delay felling in that area until a more appropriate time. We can only continue to work the Forest sensitively with the support and co-operation of experts. We will integrate site-specific species information from third parties into our ongoing management decisions. We will learn lessons to better manage forestry operations when working in proximity to ancient and veteran trees.

These are our principles of land management to celebrate and safeguard our wildlife and wild spaces.

GEOLOGY AND SOILS



WHERE ARE WE NOW?

The distinctive landscape of Savernake Forest is inextricably linked to the rocks that lie beneath the surface and the processes that formed them. In turn, the Forest's soils are closely related to the rocks from which they are derived.

Savernake sits on a plateau in the North Wessex Downs. The landform is gently undulating and falls away to the north towards the town of Marlborough. The majority of the plateau comprises chalk geology overlain with clay and flints, which has formed the mildly undulant landscape. Further to the east, there are clays, sands, and gravels of London Clay, the Reading Beds, Bagshot Beds, and Plateau Gravel associated with the Tertiary period.

Soil formation can be incredibly complex. It is directly linked to the underlying geology, because soil derives from rock, as well as deposited organic matter. As rock breaks down through weathering and erosion, the resulting particles form the basis for soil. Soil evolves as a result of physical and chemical processes, and biological activity. It can vary from a very thin cover, or none, to deep soils and peat. The underlying geology is important in determining the chemical and physical nature of the developing soil and the habitats and vegetation types it supports. In turn, the nature of the vegetation, cycles of vegetation decay, and activity of earthworms and fungi enrich and improve soil fertility and structure.

The Upper Chalk, which is overlain across much of the area by Cretaceous deposits of Clay-with-Flint, gives rise to a heavy calcareous soil containing high levels of flints. Drainage is variable but generally better on the chalk soils. Along the southern Forest edge is a ridge of more sandy soils associated with the Bagshot Beds. These soils give rise to more heath-like vegetation and were probably more open than much of the rest of the Forest.

Through the natural processes of tree growth, carbon is taken from the atmosphere and fixed. Over very long timescales, much of the 'forest carbon' store accumulates in the soil, with centuries of leaf litter being mixed as organic matter into the mineral earth. In this way, Savernake's soil represents a significantly larger carbon store than the trees growing within it. The process of restoring wood pasture has to progress carefully to avoid disturbing soils rich in organic matter, which would risk releasing stored carbon into the atmosphere.

The soils host a multitude of significant fungi and flora species associated with the neutral soil conditions. There are roughly 15,000 types of wild fungi in the UK. Savernake has an exceptional diversity of examples, with over 1,000 recorded species. Many are also a result of the historic management and landscape which defines the Forest. As machines get bigger and forestry operation working windows become more constrained, the potential risk to soil and the life it supports increases.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO GET TO?

In 100 years, we want to have retained or enhanced the distinctive diversity of habitats and species that are thriving within the Forest. We will have realised the ecological potential of Savernake and its carbon storing capacity throughout the woodland ecosystem.

Through the retention of large accumulations of deadwood, soils will be holding more organic matter so that the forest ecosystem is functioning more fully. As a result, numerous flora and fungi species, as well as microscopic mycorrhizal organisms partnering with the root systems of trees and livestock dung, will be creating more fungal networks below the ground.

We need to understand better the complex structures and interconnectivity of the mycorrhizal layer and fungi interactions in the Forest, so that we make better decisions.

We will work with and learn from experts how we can nurture the soils and their associated properties to support a thriving forest in the future.

We will have reduced soil damage from compaction, erosion, or pollution to an absolute minimum through good site management and greater use of permanent extraction / access routes (which themselves will inevitably be more degraded as a result).

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

Our commitments:

1 **Preserve the forest floor with a programme of protocols to reduce the impact of management on sensitive sites.**

2 **Move away from felling blocks of trees to reduce the impact on soil qualities.**

3 **Develop what we know about our fungi species and how that should affect our operations.**

1 Preserve the forest floor with a programme of protocols to reduce the impact of management on sensitive sites.

We are committed to developing our understanding and a more sensitive approach to forestry operations, and public recreation and access. We are aware of the potential damage associated with soil compaction and cutting through the matrix of the mycelial soil horizon. Ideally, we would not harvest or thin during the wetter winter months. But, due to nesting birds throughout spring and summer, this is often unavoidable. Where there are dangers associated with extracting dead or brittle diseased trees, there will still be a need for heavy machinery, but use of machinery can be better managed. We can limit damage by scheduling extraction for drier periods, identifying and protecting specific extraction routes, and exploring alternatives to heavy machinery in wetter periods. We will look to minimise, and eliminate where possible, the use of pesticides in managing vegetation.

2 Move away from felling blocks of trees to reduce the impact on soil qualities.

We will continue to evolve our approach away from the plantation system of clearfell/restock towards continuous cover systems. Retaining woodland cover will have multiple benefits for landscape, conservation, climate change, historic environment, soils, fungi, and lichen by reducing disturbance and maintaining forest microclimates. It will also reduce the negative impact of large-scale clearances on ecosystem functioning and soil processes, such as soil moisture regimes and micro-organisms, and the potential need for the use of pesticides. Our management will create a forest that is diverse in species and structure, and which will better intercept water. We will move towards alternatives to clearfelling and more continuous cover and selective forest systems.

3 Develop what we know about our fungi species and how that should affect our management.

The success of Savernake's fungi can generally be attributed to the continuity of the beech woodland, the presence of unimproved grassland areas, and the abundance of decaying wood. The fungi's symbiosis with these ecosystems highlights that we must consider how we handle certain sites with sensitive operations and monitoring. The reintroduction of livestock grazing has helped return one of the missing ecosystem functioning links to benefit invertebrate and fungi assemblage, abundance, and functioning. We will work with experts to better monitor and understand the role Savernake plays for fungi.

These are our principles of land management to safeguard our geological heritage and soils.


WATER

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Savernake's undulating landform and free draining geology create quite a dry forest. Even the smallest waterbody or wetland habitat is a haven and oasis for species that love these environments.

Savernake is a 'dry forest', meaning there are no perennial watercourses within the bounds of the Forest. However, there are a number of scattered historic ponds with associated wetland and wet woodland habitats. Historically, these would have been important sources of water for grazing animals, such as cattle and horses. Over recent decades, many have occluded and dried out during later phases of woodland development.

In the early 21st Century, several of these ponds were brought back into management through tree removal and dredging. As the Forest has no watercourses, the restoration and maintenance of these ponds provides essential riparian habitats with great wildlife value. These sites are now positively contributing to the overall ecological quality of the Forest.

The removal of trees from many hollows and valley bottoms over recent decades has initiated the resurgence of wetland and wetter grassland habitats in these areas, and benefitted numerous invertebrate and bat species.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO GET TO?

In 100 years, Savernake will host a thriving array of water and wetland habitats, which only require the most minor interventions for natural processes to function and for a healthy water environment to prevail.

Savernake will hold more water in the drier and warmer climate of the future. More restored and new ponds will form a network of steppingstone wet habitats, some connected by old hollows, which will be wetter and less treed. These areas will be bathed in sunlight during parts of the day and dappled shade at others. The ponds will no longer be disturbed by dogs and will support a multitude of aquatic and water-loving species which would otherwise be absent from the forest. The areas around the ponds will be havens for biodiversity.

We will know more about the health and condition of the wet habitats in Savernake to inform our management decisions and prioritisations. Using eDNA and other assessment tools, we will know more about what inhabits these areas and in what abundance.

Natural processes will have taken charge and will define the watery habitats and functions in the Forest. Wetter areas are allowed to develop and expand naturally, without significant intervention or management. Water and its associated habitats will be allowed to develop as and where it finds its way in the Forest so that its influence can be felt organically.

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

Our commitments:

1 Restore historic ponds.

2 Monitor the health and progress of wet woodland habitats.

3 Restore the unwooded hollows and bottoms which cross the Forest.

1 Restore historic ponds.

Ponds and wetland areas support dragonflies, invertebrates, and frogs. These, in turn, provide food and habitats that are attractive to varied important bird species, such as Hobby, Honey Buzzard, and Willow Tit. We have already done a significant amount of work to re-establish certain old ponds by removing trees and vegetation to allow light to penetrate. We will continue this process, which has delivered considerable benefits for the range and abundance of species in these areas. To bolster the benefit of these historic ponds, we will look to create new ponds in the right areas where opportunities arise.

2 Monitor the health and progress of wet woodland habitats.

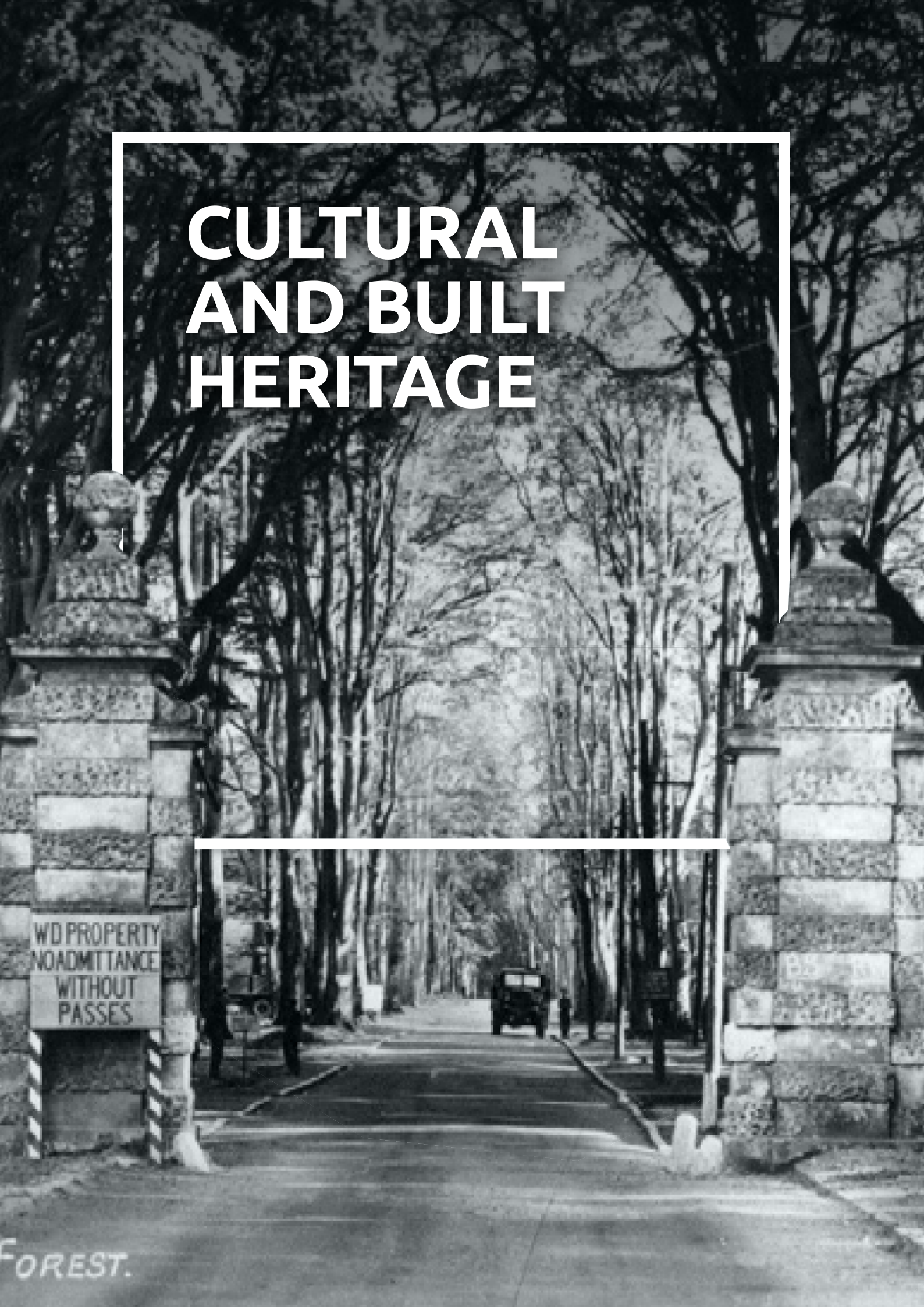
We have worked with graziers to ensure the grazing woodland cattle are not treated with chemicals that could affect our riparian habitats. But we have already observed the impact on invertebrate life of dogs allowed to bathe in the ponds. We must explore new ways to secure these vital wetland ecosystems to stem the loss of active, visiting, and potential new species to Savernake. We will encourage wet areas to remain wet in the drier months to enhance amphibian populations. We will embrace emerging technology, such as eDNA, to help inform the condition and managed improvement of our wetland habitats. We will use this information to monitor and identify trends in habitat and water quality so that we can tailor our management to how habitat develops.

3 Restore the unwooded hollows and bottoms which cross the Forest.

Building on work over recent decades, we will continue to remove dense tree cover from the lower lying hollows and bottoms which run from west to east across the Forest. Through tree felling and defined areas of regeneration, we will encourage natural process-led restoration of these habitats. These areas will become a mosaic of grassland and reeds, regenerating scrub, and dappled shade created by mature trees. These bottoms will act as highways for wet woodland habitat-loving species and create a network with the historic ponds and other suitable habitats.

These are our principles of land management to safeguard and enhance our wetlands and water quality in Savernake Forest.

CULTURAL AND BUILT HERITAGE



WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Savernake Forest has a long, complex cultural and social history. Its layers of historical and cultural significance, and management as an ancient forest, are unique and rivalled by few others.

First referenced in a 934AD charter, Savernake Forest is one of the oldest forests in England. Starting life as a royal hunting forest, Savernake today offers a glimpse into English history from the Bronze Age to the Second World War.

Evidence of thousands of years of occupation and land use can be found across the Forest in the form of visible or buried archaeological remains. Sites include prehistoric burial mounds, Roman infrastructure and industry, surviving attributes of the medieval hunting forest, designed landscape features attributed to Capability Brown, and structures erected during the war efforts. Of these sites and histories, a number have been identified as nationally significant, with Savernake encompassing six scheduled monuments, five listed buildings, and a substantial portion of the Tottenham House and Savernake Forest Grade II* registered park and garden. As is common within forested environments, the level of preservation of the sites, monuments, and relic landscapes within Savernake Forest is significantly high.

Good forestry practice, in accordance with the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) and UK Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS), means that known heritage features have been avoided and maintained, preserving Savernake's rich past for generations to come. However, little work has been done to further our understanding of the site's past, to identify lost and forgotten features and stories, and to use this information to enhance and inform Forestry England's ambitions for the Forest.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO GET TO?

In 100 years, Savernake's distinct landscape, which has been shaped by humans over thousands of years, will be further enhanced, restored, shared, and enjoyed. Visitors will be able to trace and understand its story on the ground. Key heritage sites will be preserved, understood, and interpreted for locals and visitors alike.

Savernake's past has moulded it into the nationally significant site that we see today. Veteran trees, unique habitats, flora and fauna, landscapes and varying land use practices have all been created or influenced by past human activities. We will maintain all known significant sites and design landscapes found within the Forest.

Where possible, we will also look to maintain, enhance, or restore significant sites, designed views, and landscape features that would benefit the Forest. We will undertake research and practical work to better understand the known and unknown sites and histories of Savernake. We will use this knowledge to inform future management decisions and tell the Forest's stories, to engage and educate existing and new audiences.

We also aspire to support and encourage historic grazing of woodland pasture that is sympathetic and complementary to the site's history, while preserving Savernake's status as a living working forest.

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

Our commitments:

1 Maintain historic monuments.

2 Redefine and maintain significant landscape design.

3 Unearth features of Savernake Forest's past.

4 Support and encourage the historic grazing of woodland pasture.

5 Preserve Savernake's status as a living working forest.

1 Maintain historic monuments.

The Forest is a Grade II* registered park and garden and has a statutory designation, as well as numerous scheduled monuments, many dating from the Neolithic-Bronze Age period. These monuments and features have been surveyed and we will preserve them by keeping them free of scrub and tree cover. We will ensure that any developments of the site are in keeping with or enhance the Forest's cultural heritage and historic environment designations. There are also remnants of Roman presence, kilns, and an important Roman Road, with the ware being locally specific to Savernake and Wiltshire. We will strive to learn more about these sites and other features of cultural and historical significance so that we can tell others about them, better maintain their condition, and enhance their setting within the rich cultural landscape. We will work with local experts to undertake surveys and condition assessments, to ensure that the features and significance of these monuments are properly recorded for future reference.

2 Redefine and maintain significant landscape design.

There are numerous features and designed rides and views – many of which are listed – associated with the layers of landscape design and redesign of Tottenham House and Park. These include the main gates into the Forest, the ride and walk layouts, monuments, and columns. The Capability Brown-designed Grand Avenue is one of the most notable landscaped features and requires constant maintenance. We will restore and maintain some of the key rides, drives, avenues, roundel, and individual trees, as well as the designed and historic vistas within the Forest and out into the surrounding landscape. We will work with partners and neighbours to restore the landscape to its former glory, in keeping with its historical context, helping to support and influence other parties that can improve its risk status. We will explore how we can better protect features such as the Grand Avenue from wear and tear.

3 Unearth features of Savernake Forest's past.

First recorded as 'Safernoc' in a 934AD Saxon Charter by King Athelstan, Savernake has played a long and evident role in history. From unique Roman pottery ware to the association with Henry VIII, Jane Seymour, and Wolfhall, the Forest has plenty of stories to tell. Many of these could be better understood. We will use key periods in time, such as pre-history, Roman, medieval, and World War Two to frame our research into – and interpretation of – Savernake's past. This information will help inform management decisions and tell a story to engage with people.

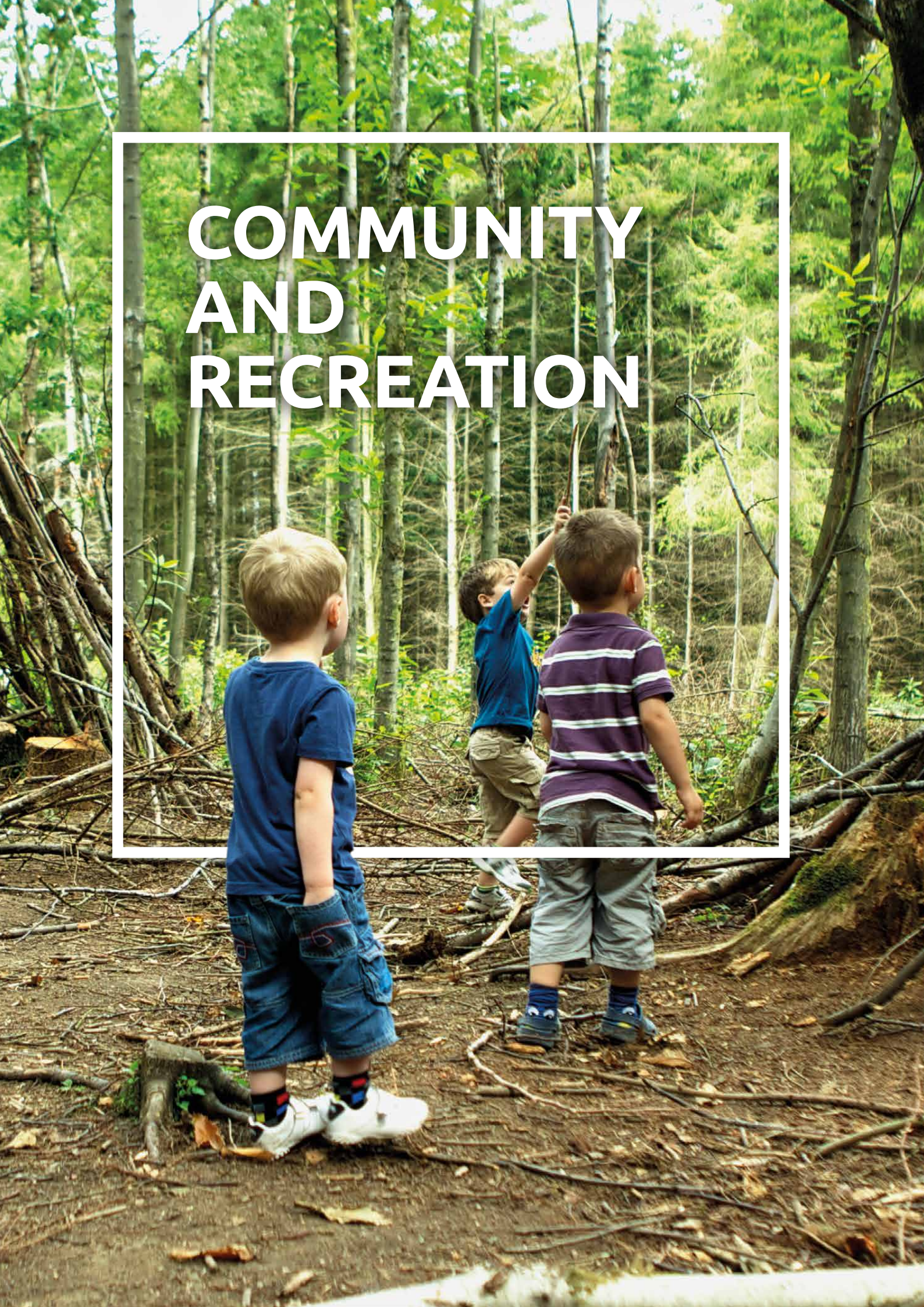
4 Support and encourage the historic grazing of woodland pasture.

Working closely with graziers, we will continue to reinstate the ancient practice of grazing in Savernake. We will closely monitor the impact of herds on each site, moving them as required. In the process, we hope to shape a wider appreciation and understanding of the role grazing animals play in maintaining and improving the ecological and aesthetic qualities of the Forest. We will work with leading experts in wood pasture to ensure the density of grazing and tree cover has the right effect to benefit floral, fungal, and invertebrate assemblages. The reintroduction of grazing will itself bring back an element of natural process as large ungulate grazing will have been a part of the Forest's history for centuries, if not millennia.

5 Preserve Savernake's status as a living working forest.

Savernake Forest as we know it was built on a centuries-long association between people and trees. These traditions, interactions, and interventions throughout history, from hunting to agriculture and silviculture, are the reason we have this unique slice of ancient woodland to secure for the future. Savernake was a royal hunting ground in the 12th Century; a practice that shaped the Forest we know today. Hunting has been a constant in the Forest through all the generations since, not simply as a private tradition for a privileged few, but as essential deer management to reduce the negative effects of the population on trees and ecosystem. The ongoing management of historic features, cultural heritage, and historic practices will support natural capital through better land management. This will support ecosystems through heritage management approaches and traditional grazing; vegetation and wildlife management techniques; and supporting visitors.

These are our principles of land management to safeguard our cultural and built heritage in Savernake Forest.



COMMUNITY AND RECREATION

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Savernake is a haven for local people and visitors to relax and enjoy the quiet peace of the Forest. Its accessibility, beauty, and natural health and tranquillity benefits are valued by many.

Those who enjoy Savernake Forest are exceptionally passionate about it. But the level of shared understanding of the Forest varies significantly between individuals.

The Forest is well used by visitors to the area and on a daily or weekly basis by local people for walking, dog exercising, and cycling. There is a variety of surfaced and non-surfaced paths and tracks within the Forest, and a car park and seasonal toilet facilities at Postern Hill.

We host several volunteers, delivering meaningful and rewarding opportunities that support the maintenance and enhancement of the Forest. These opportunities provide an important mechanism to aid social cohesion and grow community capacity, as well as deliver direct benefits to those engaged with them.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO GET TO?

In 100 years, we want the Forest to be a distinctive and cherished landscape, loved and cared for by people who experience nature and wildlife, and learn about our shared story in an engaging and inspirational way.

Communities will be using the Forest as individuals or groups for a diverse range of purposes that collectively support active and healthy lifestyles, and build community capacity, cohesion, and inclusiveness.

The facilities provided will be well maintained and of a quality that meets the expectations of our diverse visitor base. They will support and encourage healthy lifestyles as people enjoy a variety of activities. However, the Forest will not be a manicured theme park. Wild areas will thrive within layers of rich history and management, while formal rides and avenues remain evident. The Forest will be a place where a person can immerse themselves and be at one with nature.

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

Our commitments:

1 Maintain and enhance key access points and pathways.

2 Work with local groups on meaningful and sustainable projects.

3 Provide structured opportunities for volunteering that deliver mutual benefit.

4 Promote responsible use of the Forest by all visitors, increasing their understanding and respect for other woodland users and local wildlife.

5 Tell Savernake's story to celebrate what is special about its unique history and ecology.

6 Review opportunities to enhance visitor facilities.

1 Maintain and enhance key access points and pathways.

We will identify key access points and pathways to help manage public access for recreation and protect the natural environment. We will focus on providing parking facilities at Postern Hill to discourage access and parking elsewhere. Interpretation at key access points will explain why Savernake is so special, showcasing its history and rare wildlife. We will work to improve the visual and physical qualities of these points to ensure they are accessible for all visitors. We will seek to recruit a network of volunteers who can help maintain those accesses and pathways, and report on condition so remedial works can be scheduled.

2 Work with local groups on meaningful and sustainable projects.

The Forest presents a myriad of opportunities for community-based projects. These are an important mechanism to aid social cohesion and deliver direct benefits to those engaged with them. We will work with the local community to focus on projects that support healthy lifestyles and active engagement with the Forest's cultural, built, and natural heritage.

3 Provide structured opportunities for volunteering that deliver mutual benefit.

We will engage with a growing number of volunteers on meaningful and rewarding opportunities. We will provide volunteering that supports the individual to live a healthy and rewarding life, and contributes to the maintenance and enhancement of the Forest.

4 Promote responsible use of the Forest by all visitors, increasing their understanding and respect for other woodland users and local wildlife.

The Forest is very well used by visitors to the area, and enjoyed by local people for walking, dog exercising, and cycling. We will promote responsible use of the Forest by encouraging all visitors to better understand and respect other woodland users and the needs of local wildlife, particularly in sensitive locations.

5 Tell Savernake's story to celebrate what is special about its unique history and ecology.

We know that most visitors to Savernake are exceptionally passionate about the Forest. But understanding of the Forest varies significantly between individuals. We will develop and implement a new communications strategy to raise awareness of the importance of the water, geology, soils, built heritage and archaeology, cultural heritage, wildlife and wild spaces, and trees and woodlands in shaping the landscape. We will expand our communication channels to include digital media, mobile phone apps, press, and face-to-face engagement – such as guided walks – for the benefit of the local community, schools, and visitors.

6 Review opportunities to enhance visitor facilities.

Through discussion with partners and the Savernake Estate, we will review the visitor facilities at Postern Hill which, while safe and acceptable, are outdated. This review will focus on car parking, toilets, and the potential to enhance picnic areas or introduce a pop-up/modular cafe, while minimising the impact of traffic in sensitive areas. However, the forest will not become a manicured theme park. Wild areas will thrive within layers of rich history and management, while formal rides and avenues remain evident. The Forest will be a place where a person can immerse themselves and be at one with nature.

These are our principles of land management to maintain and support our recreation facilities for all and support community involvement in Savernake Forest.

Forestry England

www.forestryengland.uk/savernakeoursharedforest