



# HIGH WEALD FOREST DESIGN PLAN 2009–2039



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(1x Legal Status, 2x SSSI, 6x Ancient Woodland, 6xExisting Species, 16x Design Concept, 16x Habitat Restoration & Felling, 16x Future Habitats)

## 1. FOREWARD

On behalf of the Forestry Commission, Forest Enterprise is responsible for managing the largest single landholding in England and some of the country's most important natural areas. We earn two thirds of our income from trading activities that range from timber sales to the Forest Tour Concert programme. The balance of our funding comes from the Forestry Commission.

We want our woods in the High Weald to make an increasing contribution to the sustainable development of the South East region, in both rural and urban areas. Our woodlands can help to deliver the visions set out in the Forestry and Woodlands Framework for South East England and the Management Plan for the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). These visions involve creating better places for people to live, an enhanced environment and biodiversity, a stronger contribution to the economy and a secure future for our woodland resources.

The multifunctional nature of our woodlands in the High Weald is sustained by good management and maintenance activities. The strongest influences on the way we manage these woodlands in the future are:

1. The high proportion of Ancient Woodland Sites (95% of land managed by Forest Enterprise).
2. The nature of the surrounding landscape, which is heavily wooded (30% of land cover in the AONB) and in diverse ownership (9.6% of woodland in the AONB is managed by Forest Enterprise. 24% is in private ownership and managed under the Woodland Grant Scheme).
3. The benefits that the woodlands bring to local communities (land managed by Forest Enterprise accounts for nearly 35% of all accessible natural greenspace in the South East).
4. The presence of Bedgebury Forest, which is the largest block of woodland (850 ha) in the area that is in single ownership and open to the public.
5. The international importance of Bedgebury as an established Botanical Garden.
6. The importance of the AONB designation, whose primary objective is to conserve and enhance natural beauty in the High Weald.
7. The presence of two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and numerous other woods that are important for biodiversity.
8. The variation in soil types belonging to the Lower Cretaceous Hastings Beds Group of the Wealden Series. Alternating layers of clay and sand/silt give rise to a great diversity of vegetation, both across the High Weald and within individual woodland blocks. For example, St. Leonard's Forest contains both heathland vegetation and wet woodland flora.
9. The presence of numerous unscheduled archaeological features, many of which have yet to be identified and mapped.
10. The need to find local markets for hardwood timber deriving from sustainably managed broadleaved woodland, e.g. woodfuel markets.
11. The effect that climate change may have on woodland species in the future.



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## 2. WHAT IS A FOREST DESIGN PLAN?

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The High Weald is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the management of its landscape is undertaken with considerable care. We look after 20 woodlands within this area, many of which are ancient woodland sites with considerable biodiversity and heritage value. All of our woodlands are managed through an approved forest design plan that has been shaped through the involvement of local communities and organisations.

Forest design plans in the south-east are produced by us, in order to set out the medium term (30-year) management proposals for the woodlands that we look after. Forest design plans aim to:

- Provide descriptions of our woodlands in the surrounding landscape.
- Show the process that we follow in deciding how to manage the woodlands.
- Show what we would like the woodlands to look like in 30 years time.
- Detail our management proposals for the first 10 years of the plan and outline our proposals for the subsequent 20-year period, in order to show how we might achieve our vision for the woodlands.
- Provide an opportunity for Forest Enterprise to listen to a range of organisations and local people to find out how they think our woodlands can contribute to the visions set out in the Forestry and Woodlands Framework for South East England (see page 7) and the management plan for the High Weald AONB. As part of the forest design plan process, stakeholders are invited to participate in the drafting of a design concept. Consultation aims to debate strategic issues relating to the content of the forest design plan and to find a compromise between social, economic and environmental objectives that will bring about sustainable management.

Another part of the Forestry Commission is responsible for checking that this forest design plan meets all of the relevant standards and statutes. If it does, then approval is granted for the first ten year period of management activity (2009 to 2019). We also seek outline approval for the subsequent twenty-year period of proposals (2019 to 2039). The plan will be examined by us after the first five years (2014) to see if the objectives are being met.

Approval is sought from Natural England for the management proposals that concern the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). English Heritage approval is sought for management proposals concerning Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs).



### 3. WHAT STANDARD PRACTICES AND GUIDANCE DO WE FOLLOW?

Underpinning the management proposals set out in all forest design plans is a suite of standard guidance, described briefly below. Some of this guidance is strategic national policy, whilst other directions are based upon a local expression of national policy, which reflects the particular conditions found in SE England - the policy level is indicated in brackets.

#### **The United Kingdom Forest Standard (national)**

The UKFS sets out standards for the sustainable management of all forests and woodlands in the UK and describes, in outline, good forest practice.

#### **The Certification Standard for the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (national)**

This certification standard sets out the requirements that woodland and forest owners and managers and forest certification bodies can refer to in certifying woodland and forest management under the United Kingdom Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS). It is the document that guides all of the Forestry Commission's management practices and is used by outside consultants to appraise our compliance.

#### **‘Keepers of Time’-a statement of policy for England’s ancient and native woodland (national)**

Our ancient woodlands are those areas of forest where trees are known to have been present in 1600AD. They are not all in good condition and some are covered by non-native species, especially conifers. Keepers of Time sets out a framework for action to deliver the Government's vision for ancient woodlands, veteran trees and native woodlands.

#### **European Protected Species (national)**

In August 2007, amendments to the Habitats Regulations came into force in England and Wales. Those protected species most likely to be found in woodland include all species of bat, hazel dormouse, great crested newt, otter, sand lizard and smooth snake.

Where one or more of these species has been confirmed, or where the habitat and local distribution of European Protected Species are such that their presence could reasonably be expected, Forest Enterprise SE England will manage the woodland in accordance with the practice guidance documents that have been produced by the Forestry Commission in conjunction with Natural England. On the rare occasion when woodland management operations can not be undertaken in compliance with the guidance, Natural England will be consulted and an application will be made, where necessary, to undertake the operation under licence.

It is recognised that European Protected Species can occur outside of woodland and that the management of open habitats identified within this forest design plan will also need to consider the presence of these species.

#### **Woodscape Project (SE England)**

The Woodscape Project within SE England Forest District aims to return ancient woodland sites to native species. The project contains both a strategy and guidance for implementation.

#### **Deadwood (national and SE England)**

Deadwood is important in the forest as a host for birds, beetles and some primitive plants. Guidance is given on how we will provide deadwood in the forest of different sorts and sizes and how this will be distributed.

#### **Natural reserves (national and SE England)**

Natural reserves are areas of the forest where little or no management activity will take place, in order to create relatively undisturbed conditions for trees, plants and animals. These are important in our otherwise actively managed countryside.

#### **Environmental Corridors (SE England)**

Environmental corridors are the veins and arteries of the forest that usually run alongside streams, roads and tracks. These allow access and movement of visitors, wildlife and those working in the woods. This document covers how we manage these, and in particular, how we provide attractive and wildlife rich features.

These local guidance notes have been prepared as separate statements so that we do not have to repeat them in each forest design plan. As they are revised, only one document requires amendment to effect changes to all of the forest design plans that refer to them.

Along with the standard guidance given above, we have individual plans for each of our protected sites - Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAM). These documents describe the work that is required to maintain and enhance the designated features. These prescriptions will be integrated into our forest design plans where appropriate.

In addition, the Forestry Commission has a number of practice guides and specialist bulletins which further inform our management. These have a national context but provide a good general background when working with a particular aspect of forest management. Titles are available on archaeology, birds, water, nature conservation, community woodland design, soil conservation and recreation.

If you wish to look at any of these documents, please contact the Forest Enterprise office in Farnham, Surrey (01420 23666) or speak to a member of staff directly.

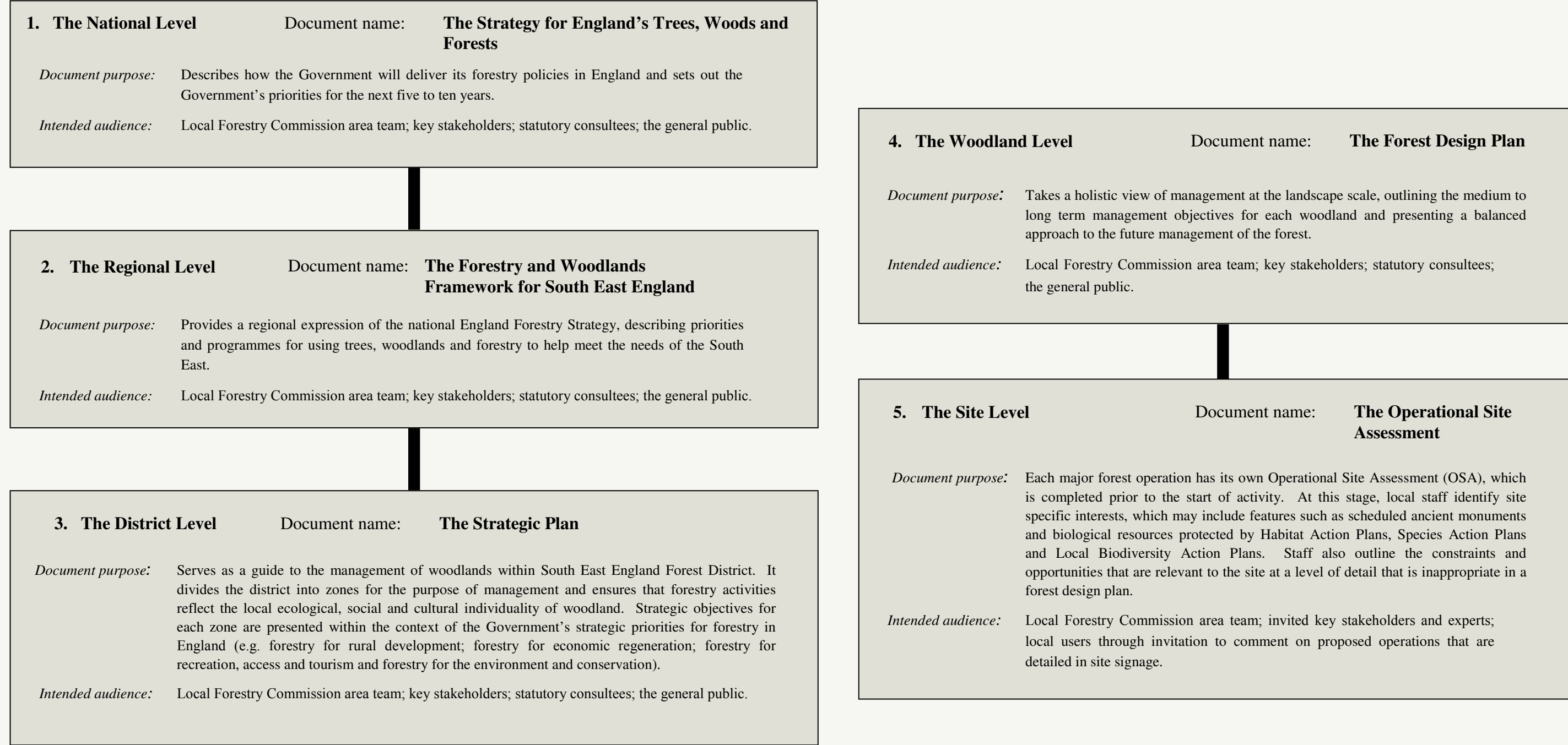
# 4. HOW DOES THE FOREST DESIGN PLAN FIT IN WITH THE NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK?

As with all of our forest design plans, the High Weald Landscape Forest Design Plan takes direction from the strategic plan that has been written for Forest Enterprise South East England.

The Strategic Plan describes how the management of our woodlands contributes to the goals of the South East region and the policies of the country.

All forest design plans are implemented through a series of site planning documents, known as Operational Site Assessments (OSA - see Level 5 below). This process is carried out prior to the start of major forest operations and is crucial to the management of our woodlands. As part of the OSA, reference is made to the forest design plan and further research is carried out into the site records and management plans that exist for a woodland. Local staff also make field visits to survey and identify site specific interests and outline the constraints and opportunities that are relevant to the site at a level of detail that is inappropriate in a forest design plan. Experts are often invited to provide on-site information and local users and neighbours of the woodland are engaged through the use of site signage.

The five main planning documents that apply to the management of our woodlands are described below:





## 5. WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS FOREST DESIGN PLAN?

### The Regional Priorities

Forest Enterprise England is an agency of the Forestry Commission in England whose purpose is ‘to manage the public forest estate owned by the Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs in a sustainable way, so as to contribute towards the economic, social and environmental objectives of the England Forest Strategy’.



The ‘Forestry and Woodlands Framework for South East England’ provides a regional expression of the ‘Strategy for England’s Trees, Woods and Forests’. The diagram shown above is the symbol of the Forestry and Woodlands Framework for South East England. It illustrates how the environmental, social and economic benefits that woodlands can provide depend, like the branches on a tree, upon the roots of sustainable management. The vision is for our woods to make an increasing contribution to the sustainable development of the South East region, in both rural and urban areas. This vision has much in common with the vision set out in the High Weald AONB Management Plan. Both of these documents have been used to guide us in drafting management proposals for the High Weald Forest Design Plan.

### What will this Forest Design Plan Achieve?

Through this forest design plan and subsequent operational planning, Forest Enterprise aims to create:

1. **Better places for people to live**
2. **An enhanced environment and biodiversity**
3. **A stronger contribution to the economy**
4. **A secure future for our woodland resources**

These 4 objectives reflect the shared priorities of the Joint Accord between the National Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Forestry Commission in England (published 2000). These shared priorities are:

1. Securing an attractive and sustainable landscape
2. Protecting existing woodlands
3. Reversing the fragmentation of ancient and semi-natural woodlands (ASNW)
4. Promoting appropriate management practices
5. Gaining public support and confidence

Table 1 on page 8 shows what we hope to achieve through the implementation of this forest design plan over the next 10 years and how these outputs will be monitored. The forest design plan outputs will be attained through a combination of management systems detailed in the Design Concept maps, the Habitat Restoration and Felling Maps and the Future Habitats Maps (see Appendix 2 - Maps).

The table below shows what we hope to achieve through the implementation of this forest design plan over the next 10 years and how these outputs will be monitored.

Forest Design Plan Objectives	Forest Design Plan Outputs At Year 10 (2019)	Monitoring
Better places for people to live	The area of woodland with public access has been maintained.	Record of woodland closure under CROW Act (2000/1).
	The woodlands provide high quality accessible natural greenspace and people have been encouraged to use and enjoy the woodlands in the High Weald, including ASNW, for leisure purposes and healthy living.	Recreation and access web pages on FC website. Facility inspection records. Permission system records. Ordnance Survey Landranger and Explorer maps show Forestry Commission public access land. Education and events programme.
	Bedgebury Forest provides an 850 hectare site for multi-activity outdoor sport and healthy living.	Recreation and access web pages on FC website. Facility inspection records. Permission system records. Education and events programme.
	Bedgebury Pinetum has been integrated with the surrounding forest to enable visitors to appreciate the conifers in a woodland setting.	Sub-compartment database. Aerial photographs.
	Woodland has been managed in accordance with the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000/1).	Record of woodland closure under CROW Act (2000/1).
	Informal recreation has been encouraged in freehold woodland.	Ordnance Survey Landranger and Explorer maps show Forestry Commission public access land. Recreation and access web pages on FC website.
	Opportunities have been created for people to learn about the unique landscape heritage of the Weald Forest Ridge.	Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme. FC website. Interpretation board installed in St. Leonard's Forest, Tilgate Forest and Birchden Woods (Harrisons Rocks). Operational site assessments have prescribed management of ride-side vegetation and glades to make Birchden Woods feel safer and more welcoming.
	Recreation events have been encouraged in freehold woodland and opportunities sought to permit them on leased land in agreement with the owner of the freehold.	Permission system records. Education and events programme.
	Freehold woodlands contain areas suitable for community activities and projects.	Permission system records. Education and events programme. Partnership agreements.
	Internal landscape has been managed to create an attractive and inviting woodland when viewed from public rights of way and permissive trails.	Operational site assessments have been prepared with the FC Landscape Guidelines in mind.
	In leasehold woodland, visitors have been encouraged to use the public right of way network and permissive trails only.	Public rights of way accessible. Dangerous tree inspection programme. FC website.
	The number of day visits to woods and forests has increased.	Visitor survey.
	New routes have been investigated to support healthy activity initiatives.	Correspondence with potential partners. Partnership agreements.
	Quality environments have been provided to attract enterprises, tourism and employment associated with woodland.	Operational site assessments have prescribed low impact silvicultural systems and long term retentions to provide continuous woodland cover (including a conifer element) in the High Weald landscape.
	The woodlands have been designed to provide an attractive backdrop to proposed development and managed to provide multi-functional green space near developments and existing local communities.	Budget actuals identify resources targeted at woodlands close to communities.
	The existing extent of woodland within the landscape has been maintained.	Sub-compartment database (SCDB) records. Aerial photographs.
	Clearfell areas have been designed to complement the scale and topography of the surrounding landscape.	Clearfell areas in the approved forest design plan have been designed with the FC Landscape Guidelines in mind. Operational site assessment checks show that areas have been felled as prescribed by the approved forest design plan.



Forest Design Plan Objectives	Forest Design Plan Outputs At Year 10 (2019)	Corresponding UK BAP Habitat	Monitoring
Enhanced environment and biodiversity	There has been no loss of ancient and semi-natural woodland (ASNW).	Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland Wet Woodland, Hedgerows	Sub-compartment database records. Aerial photographs.
	A range of age classes is present in ASNW.	Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland Wet Woodland	Sub-compartment database records.
	ASNW contains <=20% non-native tree species.	Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland Wet Woodland	Sub-compartment database records.
	ASNW is being regenerated through the use of group shelterwood systems (that create small clearings in existing woodland) and uniform shelterwood systems.	Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland	Sub-compartment database records. Operational site assessments have prescribed shelterwood systems.
	All (2000 ha) non-native plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS) continue to be gradually restored to native woodland through the use of clearfelling and felling of individuals/groups of non-native tree species.	Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland	Sub-compartment database records. Operational site assessments have prescribed the removal of non-native species on ancient woodland sites.
	Units 4 and 5 of St. Leonard's Forest SSSI have been brought into favourable condition through a reduction of the conifer component to <5% of the area (larch to be retained) and the removal of rhododendron and Portuguese laurel.	Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland	Natural England Condition Assessment. Sub-compartment database records
	Unit 3 of St. Leonard's Forest SSSI remains in favourable condition.	Rivers Wet Woodland	Natural England Condition Assessment. Sub-compartment database records
	Units 1 and 2 (parts on FE land) in Darwell Wood SSSI have been managed as oak woodland with <5% conifer content and remain in favourable condition.	Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland	Natural England Condition Assessment. Sub-compartment database records
	Wet woodland, including gill woodland, is being managed to provide a diversity of features, including natural regeneration and old and fallen trees.	Rivers Wet Woodland	Operational site assessments have prescribed work aimed at maintaining diversity in wet woodland.
	247 ha (8%) of the woodland area is broadleaf coppice habitat.	Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland.	Sub-compartment database records.
	Existing and potential veteran trees have been identified and conserved.	Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland Wet Woodland	GIS veteran tree records.
	Deadwood habitat has been retained or created in the woodlands.	Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland Wet Woodland	Operational site assessments have prescribed deadwood retention or creation.
	Environmental corridors (roads, rides and tracks) have been managed to provide internal edge habitats for fauna, including bats, woodland edge birds, purple emperor and dormice.	Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland	Operational site assessments have prescribed corridor work in line with Environmental Corridors Guidance for SE England. Aerial photographs. Sub-compartment database records.
	Deer and rabbit populations have been maintained at a low enough level for natural regeneration to become established in order to provide a range of age classes in ASNW and PAWS.	Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland	Sub-compartment database records. Deer records. Coupe records.
	Ponds have been created and management aimed at maintaining/enhancing their biodiversity value.	<b>Ponds</b>	GIS records. Operational site assessments have prescribed work in and around ponds.

Forest Design Plan	Forest Design Plan Outputs At Year 10 (2019)	Corresponding UK BAP Habitat	Monitoring
<b>Enhanced environment and biodiversity</b>	Shifting areas of temporary open habitat have been created through the use of coppicing, clearfelling in PAWS and group shelterwood systems in ASNW.	<b>Lowland Heath</b>	Sub-compartment database records. Aerial photographs.
	Wood residues arising from clearfell operations have been treated to provide temporary open habitat for ground nesting birds.	Lowland Heath	Operational site assessments have prescribed the treatment of residues arising from clearfell operations.
	Key environmental corridors (roads and tracks) have been managed to provide a permanent network of rides supporting ground flora. These corridors have been integrated with patches of wooded heath (20-70% tree canopy cover) and provide links to patches of open habitat on neighbouring land.	Lowland Heath Lowland Dry Acid Grassland Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland	Sub-compartment database records. Aerial photographs.
	Woodland adjacent to patches of heathland on neighbouring land has been thinned to 20-70% tree canopy cover, where appropriate, to encourage heathland flora to extend onto Forest Enterprise land.	Lowland Heath	Sub-compartment database records. Aerial photographs.
	The existing extent of heathland vegetation within the woodlands has been maintained or increased.	Lowland Heath	Sub-compartment database records. Aerial photographs.
	Bedgebury Pinetum has been managed for the global conservation of conifer species and groups of specimen plantings have been introduced along the edges of rides and roads in the adjacent forest.	Contributes to the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation	Pinetum records. Sub-compartment database. Aerial Photographs.
	Records of cultural/archaeological interest within the woodlands have been improved.		Reports from archaeological surveys carried out in St. Leonard's Forest, Tilgate Forest, Bedgebury Forest, Sheffield Forest and Funnels Wood. Archaeological features found during the operational site assessment process have been recorded in the GIS. County Historic Environment Record.
	The cultural/archaeological interest that is associated with the woodlands has been protected and conserved.		Operational site assessments have taken account of woodland archaeology and sought expert advice from English Heritage and County Archaeologist where appropriate. Grade II Listing of Bedgebury Pinetum under Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest.
	Unscheduled ancient monuments have been protected during forestry operations.		Operational site assessments have taken account of woodland archaeology and sought expert advice from English Heritage and County Archaeologist where necessary.

Forest Design Plan	Forest Design Plan Outputs At Year 10 (2019)	Monitoring
A stronger contribution to the economy	Forestry Commission woodlands continue to provide examples of best practice for appropriate and sustainable management and utilisation of England’s woodland resource.	FSC Certification. UKWAS audit. Professional meetings held, e.g. Royal Forestry Society, Institute of Chartered Foresters.
	An output of sustainably produced wood products has been maintained for local and national markets.	Sales Recording Package (SRP). Production forecasts.
	Local contractors have been encouraged to tender/bid for forestry contracts.	Sales Recording Package (SRP).
	Employment opportunities have been created for offenders as part of the Community Service programme.	Correspondence with Probation Service.
	Timber products have been produced through sustainable thinning of the forest (except in ‘natural reserves’) and from clearfell and lower impact harvesting operations.	Sales Recording Package (SRP). Operational site assessments have prescribed sustainable thinning volumes.
	The woodlands have been designed to provide an attractive backdrop to development and managed to provide multi-functional green space near the existing local communities.	The forest design plan and operational site assessments have been prepared with the FC Landscape Guidelines in mind. Budget actuals identify resources targeted at woodlands close to communities.
	Opportunities have been sought through the Forest Design Plan consultation process and during subsequent management of the woodlands to develop appropriate recreation facilities.	Consultation record. Recreation facility inspection records. Budget actuals identify resources assigned to recreation facilities. Operational site assessments prescribe work aimed at improving the recreation experience of visitors to the woodlands.
	The number of visits to the woodlands has increased.	Visitor survey. Car park meter records.
A secure future for our woodland resources	The woodlands continues to provide examples of best practice for appropriate and sustainable management and utilisation of England’s woodland resource.	FSC Certification. UKWAS audit. Professional meetings held, e.g. Royal Forestry Society, Institute of Chartered Foresters.
	The woodlands have been managed in accordance with the UK Forest Standard (UKFS), the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000).	FSC Certification. UKWAS audit. Record of woodland closure under CROW Act (2000/1).
	Stakeholders have been involved in the initial development and subsequent revision of the Forest Design Plan and local people and users have been kept informed of operations through appropriate media.	Consultation record. Press releases. Operational site assessments have highlighted the need for communication with stakeholders.
	The woodlands have been managed in a sustainable way to provide continuing employment opportunities for local contractors and staff.	Sales Recording Package (SRP). Employment records.