



Forestry England

Mortimer Forest

Community and Recreation Plan
2020—2030

Introduction

Forestry England wants to connect everyone with the nation's forests by creating and caring for our forests for people to enjoy, wildlife to flourish and business to grow.

Mortimer Forest is the largest forest in the Marches area and receives around 100,000 visits each year. It is home to nationally rare wildlife such as goshawk, Wood white butterflies, long-haired fallow deer, reptiles and amphibians. It also produces some of the finest timber in the country, notably its Douglas fir.

How we put the plan together...

The plan has been developed by undertaking a community survey exercise in 2019, which included:

- Collecting over 600 survey responses from individuals
- Talking to specialists, groups of interest and clubs
- Holding community drop in sessions
- Surveying tourism businesses through Shropshire and Hereford tourism networks
- Reviewing our permits that have been issued for different activities and events

The feedback from the community survey exercise has been aligned to Forestry England's national aims and developed with input from the West District Forestry England team, including:

- Head of Recreation and Engagement
- Community Engagement Officer
- Recreation Manager
- Marches Area Forester and the local forestry team

Forests for the future

This plan is intended to focus Forestry England's community and recreation activity in Mortimer Forest now and for communities that will use the forest over the next ten years. The plan is intended to guide our work but we are always open to considering new ideas and trialling new approaches.

We have set the plan out using Forestry England's strategic aims as headings, to bring together what we aspire to achieve nationally with what our communities would like to see locally.

Finally, Forestry England is a Government Agency. We will always respond to direction from Ministers and support new national initiatives and policies.





Tell Mortimer Forest's story

Raise awareness and understanding of sustainable forestry

Our approach to sustainable forest management allows us to keep our public forests and woodlands as special places for nature, which people can enjoy and businesses can thrive in. Each woodland is unique and there is a balance to achieve between social, environmental and economic priorities, depending on the qualities and features of the individual woodland.

What we found out from the community survey exercise...

There are a variety of views on how Mortimer Forest should be managed and used. Some people see the forest as a wild and natural wood that should be left alone for wildlife, untouched by man. For others it is a place for walking, riding, cycling, or enjoying the annual Woodpecker car rally.

Enterprise in the forest was an issue for many local people, who didn't want to see any 'commercial activity' in the forest; others were supportive and understand that the forest has a role to play in the local and national economy generating income from timber sales and recreation.

Overall, the welcome signage and onsite signage is seen as good or acceptable, with requests for more information about the wildlife, forest management and features of interests.

What we plan to do over the next ten years...

We want to get to know our local and visiting communities in Mortimer Forest better and share more information about how Forestry England manages Mortimer Forest for people, wildlife and the economy.

We plan to do this by:

- Guided walks to discuss forest management activity
- Update the welcome signage, information and directional signage to the new Forestry England branding, as the old signage needs to be replaced
- Maintain and promote the existing car parks and way marked trails network
- More social media conversations about what we're doing and why
- Improve onsite information about wildlife and how the forest is being managed to produce sustainable homegrown timber



Increase natural capital

The natural capital value of the nation's forests is increasing

The nation's forests help clean our air and our rivers. They keep people healthy by being open and accessible for all kinds of exercise and enjoyment. They provide local employment through businesses small and large. The value of a habitat such as woodland is more than that of the timber sold in the marketplace. Woodlands also provide habitats for important pollinating insects, mammals, birds and rare reptiles.

They do these and many other things that lack a market value, but nonetheless have significant value. This is what we refer to as 'natural capital'. The community and recreation plan activity will help to increase the value of Mortimer Forest's natural capital.

What we found out from the community survey exercise...

Supporting the wildlife in Mortimer Forest was one of the most popular themes throughout the community survey exercise.

Giving space to nature and enhancing biodiversity is also a priority for Forestry England.

People use Mortimer Forest for a variety of different reasons including physical and mental health, wildlife watching, creative inspiration and all important family time.

Groups, organisations and clubs use it for training, activities and races.

Businesses use it for horse riding, foraging and training. Tourism businesses use it as a selling point.

Schools use it for forest schools and fundraising events.

What we plan to do: Volunteering in Mortimer Forest

The online survey and drop in sessions both showed that there is an appetite for volunteering in Mortimer Forest to help support recreation and wildlife activities.

We then ran a guided walk event for people to find out more about future volunteering in Mortimer Forest and discuss their preferences for setting up a programme.

Over the coming years, a volunteering programme will evolve in Mortimer Forest, based on what can be achieved and what people are interested in getting involved with.

Contact the local office to find out what volunteering opportunities are available.



Give space for nature

Give space for nature

What we plan to do over the next ten years...

Mortimer Forest has designated 11% open space throughout the forest, which presents real opportunity to enhance it for the benefit of wildlife.

It also has many geological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) that attract international visitors.

We will work with our wildlife ranger, foresters and specialist groups to develop a volunteer programme to:

- Undertake surveying and monitoring to collect data on wildlife
- Create an open space management plan that benefits wildlife
- Undertake practical management to improve the quality of habitat
- Help manage the geological SSSIs

Why is open space important?

Much of the wildlife in Mortimer Forest needs a variety of habitats to flourish. Woodlands containing scrub, brambles, bracken, grassland, tracks, rides, open water, marshy spots and clearings are ideal.

Keeping spaces open in the forest can be a challenge. The management team have identified an opportunity to improve open spaces for wildlife in the forest with the help of volunteers.



Forestry operations already take wildlife into consideration and some successful work has been undertaken with Butterfly Conservation's guidance.

We want to build on that work, maintaining and connecting open areas.

Through this programme volunteers, forestry teams and contractors can work together to make a real difference for wildlife.

The ten year aim is to improve and connect open space for wildlife in Mortimer Forest.



Widen participation

Widen participation in woodland recreation for all abilities

What we learned through the community survey exercise...

The Easy Access Trail from Vinnalls car park is well used and helps to open up the woodland to users with additional access needs. However, the trail is difficult to navigate in a standard wheelchair and there was feedback requesting more easy access routes from other car parks in the forest.

Groups representing young people and people with additional requirements provided feedback on their specific needs, which they felt were best taken forward through partnership working. Alzheimer UK also provided feedback on how to improve access to activities and volunteering for people with dementia.

What we plan to do over the next ten years...

We want to support more people to connect in Mortimer Forest. To do this we hope to:

1. Work with local groups like South Shropshire Youth Forum, Working Together Ludlow and The Foyer to make the forest more accessible to their members and service users by developing volunteering opportunities and forest activities.
2. Partner with local specialists and wildlife groups to run wildlife walks, survey events and promote opportunities for people to learn about the woodland wildlife.
3. Over the longer term we will:
 - Monitor the nature and number of visitors to the woodland
 - Look at how accessible the forest and forest based activities are with groups like Working Together Ludlow
 - Monitor and review visitor facilities

Virtual tours

We want to work with volunteers to make use of the publications created for Mortimer Forest under previous partnership projects and bring them to life through digital interpretation.

The ambition is to have virtual guided tours of the forest's wildlife, history and current day management that can be enjoyed on-site or off-site by those who can no longer physically access the forest.



Support healthy lifestyles

Support and encourage healthy lifestyles

What we learned through the community survey exercise...

The forest is used by people for a variety of different recreation activities including walking, dog walking, relaxation, peace and tranquillity right through to more adrenaline fuelled activities like mountain biking and car rallying.

Wildlife watching, mental health and wellbeing and connecting with nature were also mentioned frequently.

What we plan to do over the next ten years...

Over the coming years visits to Mortimer Forest are likely to increase with more homes being built in the local area and more people visiting from farther afield. We will:

- Continue our partnership with groups like Shropshire Wild Teams to provide volunteering opportunities for health and wellbeing
- Develop new partnerships with the NHS, local GP's and other organisations to promote forest activities to people through social prescribing, where there is demand
- Work with social prescribers and voluntary organisations to get more people of all ages active and improving their health in the forest



A photograph of two women jogging on a dirt path through a forest. The woman on the left is wearing a pink tank top and black leggings, and the woman on the right is wearing a blue tank top and black leggings. They are both smiling and looking towards the camera. The path is covered in fallen leaves, and the background is filled with trees and green foliage.

Third party events

Third party events and activities in Mortimer Forest

Mortimer Forest hosts a wide range of commercial, voluntary and charitable activities and events, including:

- parkrun
- Horse riding
- Foraging courses
- Tractor rambles
- Scouts
- Downhill mountain biking competitions
- Fun rides
- Sponsored walks
- School trips
- Forest schools
- Woodpecker car rally
- Geocaching
- Commercial dog walking
- Bushcraft
- Wildlife surveying
- Practical volunteering
- Guided walks
- Wildlife walks
- Orienteering

Forestry England is very supportive of events and activities in the forest.

Organisers must apply for permission to run any sized events and activities through the established permission system to help us manage car park use, forestry operations and wildlife considerations.

No matter what size your event or activity, most insurance companies require event organisers to hold valid permission from the landowner.

For further information or to discuss your event or activity idea, contact the local office.

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Partnership working

Increase our capacity and effectiveness through partnership working

What we learned from the community survey exercise...

Over 95% of people that responded to the online and paper questionnaire agreed that different user groups got along with each other, when sharing the forest for different activities.

This is a fantastic finding and we want to support that ethos to continue into the future.

Issues that were highlighted in the questionnaire results, community group conversations and drop in sessions were about:

- Dog poo and dogs not under control
- Some conflict where groups other than walkers were using way marked walking trails, particularly when they churn them up in the winter making it difficult for walkers to use them
- Conflict between different user groups (walkers, dog walkers, horse riders, mountain bike riders) came up in conversations at drop in sessions,

What we plan to do...

Over the coming years we will:

- Establish physical and/or virtual partnership group or groups to communicate better with regular forest users and work together to tackle any issues that may arise
- Use partnerships with businesses, groups and clubs to improve provision and management of recreation opportunities.



High quality investments...

The nation's forest estate is financially sustainable, standing on its own feet

We cannot rely solely on our timber for revenue. To ensure we are less reliant on support from the government and have diverse sources of income to sustain our activities, we also work with commercial partners.

We play a key role in supporting businesses and local economies around the country. Across the nation's forests we support over 640 private businesses through our cafes, shops, recreational, woodland and estate management.

We also generate additional income from other parts of the nation's forests. This can include mineral production from our sites or letting land and buildings for residential or commercial use.

What we learned from the community survey exercise...

The individual survey showed that respondents were in favour of activities and visitor facilities that would cost Forestry England money to provide:

- Guided walks
- Toilets
- Visitor centre
- Art trails

Activities and facilities that would help to generate income to manage the forest were generally viewed less favourably, particularly overnight accommodation in the forest.

In the drop in sessions, there was a lot of discussion around the use of visitor facilities to manage people's visits to the forest, should it become busier in future years; some people were supportive and others not.

Overall, most people accepted that visitors number were likely to increase and that this would present a challenge for the current parking facilities and trail network.

People were keen that any income generation from recreation activity was done sympathetically to retain the forest's unique, tranquil character and atmosphere.





...and sustainable finance

What we plan to do...

Mortimer Forest already generates some income from recreation activities and commercial properties in the forest. Over the coming years we will:

- Assess the options for the Forestry England owned properties, Sunny Dingle Cottage and Haye Park House, and communicate what will happen to them to the public
- Trial a voluntary contribution scheme
- Put out a call for expressions of interest for a temporary café vendor space at Mortimer Forest (the pop-up vintage tea room was mentioned many times) to see if we can find a suitable partner for the site
- Monitor the number and nature of visits to the forest and develop a business case for relevant facilities, if they are needed e.g. café, visitor centre, cycle centre

Please note: There are no current plans for the provision of any new visitor facilities, additional trails or extending any of the car parks.

What does the money get spent on?

The money raised by Forestry England through timber sales, recreation and partnerships is spent on:

- Managing the existing woodlands
- Checking tree safety
- Undertaking safety checks on all Forestry England way marked routes and trails
- Providing visitor facilities like car parks and trails
- Buying land and planting new forests
- Restoring native woodland
- Wildlife recovery projects
- Supporting wildlife reintroduction projects (e.g. pine marten)





Supporting documents

Mortimer Forest Plan (2019–2029)

This plan sets out:

- Background information about Mortimer Forest
- Overall vision for Mortimer Forest
- Information on the management of the woodland

Community survey results

All of the plans and the results of the community survey exercise are available to download from:

www.forestryengland.uk/mortimer-forest

Get in touch with your local office:

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