BUILT HERITAGE AND ARCHAEOLOGY
WHERE ARE WE NOW?

The Forest of Dean has a long and complex history of exploitation for its mineral wealth and timber resources.

While that exploitation has, at times, been brutal, the continuity of woodland management across a very large area has resulted in an incredibly rich legacy of built heritage and archaeological features surviving within the Forest landscape.

These features trace the patterns of our use of the landscape over thousands of years of change.

The Forest has a relatively small number of scheduled ancient monuments, but a myriad of remnant structures surviving as ruins or wall lines or just earthworks. In addition to the surviving built heritage, there is a wealth of buried archaeological features – some known and recorded associated with surface features, and probably far more unknown and unrecorded, with no obvious surface features to attract attention.

Many of the features have already been, or are in the process of being, reclaimed by nature, greening up, or becoming buried. These natural processes of decay and woodland renewal are valued and appreciated aspects of our Forest heritage.

While, individually, sites can be incredibly exciting, and some, such as the DarkHill / Titanic steel works complex, are of international importance, it is very much the density and mass of surviving features in the landscape that make the Forest of Dean nationally important for built heritage and archaeology. Much of the local distinctiveness is the ability to find, trip over, or stumble across these features without the ‘theme park’ approach of protective fencing and interpretation signage.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO GET TO?

In 100 years, the Forest will be a distinctive and cherished landscape shaped by man, where our story can be traced and understood on the ground, with key heritage sites preserved, understood and interpreted for locals and visitors alike. The heritage of the Forest will be better understood, and we will be able to confidently state that we have a comprehensive record of known features and a robust understanding of what those features are and what they represent. There will be a myriad of built heritage features being reclaimed by nature, or becoming buried, but no built features will have been deliberately destroyed or damaged.

In 10 years, we will have completed the categorisation of all known sites, and have extended our knowledge through identification of new sites, and / or completed excavations or other investigations of those known sites. Management planning for the category one sites will have been completed and subsequent monitoring will show those sites to be in good condition with active management and interpretation in place.
WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

Our commitments:

1. **Categorise our built heritage and archaeological features**
   
   Our approach in the Forest of Dean will be to manage to three distinct categories of built heritage and archaeological features.

   **Category One:** Scheduled ancient monuments and listed buildings. These will have individual management plans that will separately lay out the agreed management actions to protect and enhance the social and historical values of those structures. These plans will be approved by Historic England. Additional structures or sites that have no statutory protection may be identified and agreed by us to be treated as Category One sites. These will be structures or sites that have particular importance in telling the story of the Forest. The plans for these sites will not be submitted to Historic England for approval.

   **Category Two:** Sites or structures that are locally or regionally important examples of their type that are not nationally scheduled or listed, nor identified as being of particular importance in telling the story of the Forest. These sites or structures will be protected from degradation through site management actions such as vegetation control, managing erosion or other low input site stabilisation measures. They will not have a site-specific management plan, but will be identified in Forest Plans.

   **Category Three:** All other sites and structures that are known about by us in the Forest will be recorded on the Commission’s GIS system and operational maps. As far as is practically possible, these sites will be protected from damage by Forest Operations or other works but will not receive any specific interventions to prevent their degradation through natural processes – such as erosion, decay or vegetation growth.

2. **Involve members of the local community to help monitor and maintain our built heritage and archaeological features**

3. **Continue investigation and research into our built heritage and archaeological features**

4. **Pragmatically manage public safety through inspection and fencing**

5. **Establish a new advisory group, to be known as the ‘Built Heritage and Archaeology Advisory Panel for the Forest of Dean’, to assist with decision making**
We will look to support community engagement in monitoring and maintaining built heritage and archaeological features by facilitating appropriately trained and experienced community groups (and/or individuals) to do so. Our initial focus will be on completing the ground survey of the LIDAR points started by Gloucestershire County Council and currently being worked on by Worcestershire County Council, with volunteers through the Foresters’ Forest Programme.

3 **Continue investigation and research into our built heritage and archaeological features**

As funds allow, we will look to expand our knowledge of known features, completing the ground testing of LIDAR results and undertaking focused archaeological investigations to further our knowledge and understanding of specific features, sites or the landscape as a whole. This work will link to the research priorities published by Gloucestershire County Council.

4 **Pragmatically manage public safety through inspection and fencing**

As a responsible manager of public land, we have a duty to maintain that land in a safe condition. By their nature, structures that are left to decay naturally will pose, at various times, a hazard. In the context of the Forest, there are two main categories of risk – collapse of an upstanding structure (falling masonry etc) and/or collapse of an underground structure (tunnel, mine shaft etc). To discharge our duty of care, we will ensure that structures that are deemed to pose a risk from collapse are placed upon an inspection register. As and when the risk to the public is assessed as moving from low to medium, remedial action will be taken to mitigate that risk. For category one sites, this is likely to be action to repair or stabilise the structure. For category two sites, this is likely to be stabilisation or fencing off the risk zone. For category three sites, we will normally just look to fence off the risk zone. We will actively seek to avoid demolition or removal of structures that become dangerous, but that may be unavoidable in some cases.

5 **Establish a new advisory group, to be known as the ‘Built Heritage and Archaeology Advisory Panel for the Forest of Dean’, to assist with decision making**

The sheer number of known (and unknown) sites within the Forest presents an immediate challenge for categorising. For the avoidance of doubt, all unscheduled, unlisted sites that are currently mapped by us will be deemed to be Category Three until categorised differently.

A new advisory group will be formed, to be known as the ‘Built Heritage and Archaeology Advisory Panel for the Forest of Dean’. This group will provide advice to us regarding categorisation, as well as make recommendations for future works to improve the condition of, and our shared understanding of, the historic features/sites/landscape.

The categorisation process will need to be largely completed before the development of the more detailed Forest Plans, as it would be expected that the categorised sites will be mapped in each Plan (and the Category One Management Plans will be captured in each plan).

The Panel will support us by providing advice on site management, advice on future archaeological investigations, and support to maintain accurate recording of features on our systems.

The Panel will have representation from organisations with a statutory interest in the built or archaeological heritage of the Forest, as well as local voluntary/interest groups. This will include representation from any volunteer group that is engaged in site maintenance and monitoring for us.

**These are our principles of land management to safeguard the built heritage and archaeology in the Forest of Dean.**