

South Downs Forest Plan

Phase 1

South England Forest District

Woodlands Included Within This Forest Plan

Queen Elizabeth Country Park

West Harting Down

Head Down Plantation

Ditcham

Date of Commencement of Plan: **25th January 2017**

 Approval Period: **2017 to 2027 (10 Years)**
Summary of Activity within Approval Period:

Forestry Activity	Habitat Type (ha)			
	Conifer high forest	Broadleaf natural regeneration or replanting	Mixed natural regeneration or replanting	Open/non forested area
PAWS Restoration thinning.	88.8			
Native broadleaf woodland thinning.		586.7		
Mixed woodland thinning.			123.6	
Mixed woodland management under a low impact silvicultural system (Reserve Shelterwood).		2.1		
Native broadleaf woodland managed under a low impact silvicultural system (Reserve Shelterwood).		31		
Establishing Woodland		26.4		
Mature yew woodland managed under a low impact silvicultural system promoting a mosaic of open space and scrub habitat.		15.2		
Open space				16.9
Other—Recreation area, Agricultural land, Car park				16.6
TOTAL MAPPED AREA			910.1	

FOREST ENTERPRISE Application for Forest Plan ApprovalsForest District: **South England Forest District**FC Geographic Block No: **67 & 68**Forest Plan Name: **South Downs Phase 1**FE Plan Reference Number: **304/67&68/17-18**

Nearest town or village: Petersfield

OS Grid Reference: SU71841811

Local Authority: Hampshire County Council & West Sussex County Council

I apply for Forest Plan approval for the property described above and in the enclosed Forest Plan.

I undertake to obtain any permissions necessary for the implementation of the approved Plan.

Signed:

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Bruce Rothnie, Deputy Surveyor, South England FD

Date:

21/1/17

Approved:

.....
for Forest Services Area Director

Date: 25/1/2017

Introduction**Forest Planning****Consultation and Approval Process****Objectives****Context****Location****Landscape and Historical Context****Tenure****Current woodland structure****Biodiversity and Conservation****People****Historic Environment****Soils****Water****Tree Diseases and Pests****Climate Change****Wildfire Resilience****Forest Plan Maps****Statistics****SSSI Citation****Wild Fire Risk Assessment****Monitoring and Indicators of****Success****Glossary****References****Appendix A—Consultation****Appendix B—CSM 6**

Forest Planning

Forest Plans define the long term vision for a woodland or a collection of woodlands, usually looking 50 to 100 years ahead. It sets objectives and illustrates how management will move towards achieving this vision over the initial 10 to 30 years.

This plan represents the first major review of the South Downs Forest Plan (phase 1) that was originally consulted upon and approved in 2006. The revised Forest Plan has been prepared following a review of the original plan undertaken by FC staff, and in consultation with stakeholders. It has incorporated developments in policy and local initiatives that have occurred in the intervening years.

Consultation and Approval Process

At key points throughout the Forest planning process, we seek the views of external stakeholders, including local communities and organisations involved with nature conservation, public recreation and the timber industry. Through this consultation process we can ensure that an appropriate balance of objectives is achieved. Details of the consultation strategy for this forest plan can be found in Appendix B.

Approval of the Forest Plan is granted by the regulatory arm of the forestry commission, known as Forest Services. This regulatory approval is usually valid for 10 years and grants a 10 year felling licence.

The Approved plan will be reviewed at year 5 to ensure proposals are still relevant, suitable and in line with current policy and guidance. This will also be an opportunity to evaluate the success of management over the 5 year period and engage any amendments to the forest plan that may be required.

Objectives for South Downs Phase 1

- Maintain and increase the native composition of ancient semi-natural woodland.
- Initiate restoration of planted ancient woodland sites to native and honorary native woodland.
- Take opportunities to increase the nature conservation value of existing habitats and enhance and support the development of open space
- Work with partner agencies to provide, maintain and where possible enhance the recreational capacity of the woodland.
- Maintain and increase the species and age diversity of the woodland.
- Control invasive non native plant species and reduce their impact across the sites.
- Provide a regular supply of quality timber to support local employment and local timber processing industries.

Location

Reference: Location Map

Queen Elizabeth Country Park, Head Down Plantation, Ditcham Wood and West Harting Down lie approximately 3 miles to the south of Petersfield on the Hampshire/West Sussex county border.

Landscape and Historical Context

The 4 woodland blocks cover 911 hectares and fall within a notional 6x6km square, marked out by the villages of Buriton, South Harting, Compton and Chalton.

The woodlands are located within the South Downs National Park and contribute significantly to all the forestry objectives in the partnership management plan. The area also contains a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) as well scheduled and unscheduled ancient monuments. The existing designations have all been taken into account when construing the most appropriate management for the woodlands and will be considered further in operational planning prior to an intervention.

Queen Elizabeth Country Park (QECP) is prominent within the landscape when seen by visitors to Butser Hill and by motorists travelling North and South along the A3 London to Portsmouth highway to the immediate West of the woodland. QECP ranges from 110-244m a.s.l and contains internal viewpoints that look out over the surrounding landscape.

Head Down Plantation and Ditcham Woods are visible from the London to Portsmouth railway line that runs between the two blocks.

West Harting Down is also prominent in the landscape when seen from Ditcham Park school to the west and the south downs way to the north-east. It ranges from 80—215m a.s.l and borders neighbouring woodland and hedgerow habitat. The higher ground in the North of West Harting Down, provides significant views out to the Solent and the Isle of Wight.

The climate is typical of south-east England with rainfall below 700mm per annum and temperatures ranging from a mean 14.2 °C for the warmest month and 5.3°C for the coldest month.

The forest falls within South England Forest District and is managed by Forest Enterprise an agency of the Forestry Commission.

Tenure

The Forestry Commission is a freehold owner of Queen Elizabeth Country Park, Head Down Plantation and large parts of West Harting Down. The rest of the woodlands are lease hold (ref tenure map).

Current Woodland Structure

Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland comprises a total of 220.1 hectares which makes up 26.1% of the blocks.

Plantation on Ancient woodland comprises a total of 449.1 hectares which makes up 53.3% of the blocks.

There is a significant conifer component throughout the blocks including Corsican Pine, Douglas Fir, Scots Pine, Western Hemlock, and Norway Spruce. Broadleaved species present include, Oak, Beech, Birch and Ash (ref statistics section).

The age structure is fairly diverse reflecting a history of active management.

This plan aims to move the wood towards a continuous cover management system which will continue promoting this age structure and produce a more resilient woodland for future generations.

Biodiversity and Conservation

Both Queen Elizabeth Country Park and West Harting Down are characteristic of the NVC communities W12 and W12b (Beech woodland). They are also smaller areas that display NVC community W8 (Ash woodland), W13 (Yew woodland) or W14 (pine woodland) characteristics. Both QECP and Ditcham Wood fall within an area of Special Interest for Nature Conservation (SINC) and lie within a Hampshire County Council Biodiversity Opportunity Area (BOA 12 The South Downs, East Hampshire). The significance of which recognises the tracts of ancient semi natural and replanted woodland as well as secondary woodland. Systematic restoration of Planted or Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) using low impact silvicultural systems will be carried out during the plan which should preserve and enhance the biodiversity status of these areas. Operational planning prior to harvesting will take account the characteristics of individual stands including the presence of veteran trees. Consultation with the Limewood working group has highlighted the presence of veteran lime trees *Tilia cordata* along boundary's in the woodland. Management should aim to conserve and enhance these important features.

Prior to 1928 the areas known as Holt and War down in Queen Elizabeth Country Park supported a mixture of chalk grassland, that was grazed by sheep and cattle, and areas of native scrub and Yew woodland. In 1928, the Forestry Commission purchased this land for the planting of trees for timber. The forest blocks now provide a variety of habitats ranging from Beech plantation and Hazel coppice to conifer plantation and areas of open space.

The West Harting Down SSSI covers 13.9ha and was notified in 1980 and 1985 under section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The area of mature woodland lies on the upper chalk of the South Downs and is chiefly composed of mature yew *Taxus baccata* trees, many of which are over 100 years old. Developing yew scrub and small areas of chalk grassland are also features of the site. The work identified in this forest plan will look to develop and enhance the SSSI by carrying on the management started in the previous plan. This primarily involves a system of minimum intervention with selective felling of trees growing between and adjacent to the existing blocks of yew to create open chalk habitat that can then be colonised. This forest plan revision involves continuing this management beyond the current extent of the SSSI into the northern sub-compartments. Precious management also involved the thinning of western red cedar and the erection of deer fenced areas to further facilitate yew regeneration.

The biodiversity interest in the woodlands has been enhanced and maintained through a history of sustainable forest management and open habitat maintenance. Management interventions during the period of this plan will seek out opportunities for ride enhancement in order to improve structural diversity and ecological connectivity across the forest block. This will prove of principal benefit to invertebrates associated with open and warm conditions as well as the resident reptile populations, both common and rare.

In West Harting Down a network of woodland glades and scrubby grassland has been created to provide suitable habitat for the Duke of Burgundy Butterfly (*Hamearis Lucina*) section 41 species of principal importance under the NERC Act in England. These are mapped as priority ecological areas in the Forest Plan and will continue to be maintained in the future.

Consultation with the Butterfly Conservation charity have also identified the Drab Looper moth, *Minoa murinata* and Striped Lychnis *Shargacucullia lychnitis* as being high priority species. Operational planning prior to interventions will take opportunities to enhance the habitat for these species where appropriate.

People

Queen Elizabeth Country Park is managed as a partnership by the Forestry Commission and Hampshire County Council Countryside Service. It is Hampshire's biggest country park, offering 20 miles of trails for walkers, cyclists & horse riders. The park includes the Butser Hill National Nature Reserve, the highest point on the South Downs and 567 ha of open access woodland and downland (including Head Down Plantation).

Queen Elizabeth Country Park contains a visitor centre, shop, café and theatre that provide a point of orientation for visitors to the forest. Way marked trails and the associated barbeque and play facilities are maintained to encourage visitors to appreciate and enjoy the surrounding woodland and chalk grassland.

The trees that surround the forest drive, car parks, play and picnic areas form an integral part of these recreation facilities and should therefore be selected for retention or removal on an individual basis, with the primary aim of increasing the recreation value of the woodland.

A number of long distance trails pass through the woodland blocks including the 50 mile Shipwrights way and the South Downs Way. QECP is also the start point for the 12 mile Staunton Way and the end point for the 21 mile Hangers Way. West Harting Down is also situated on the route of the 240km Sussex Border Path the result of a partnership between East Hampshire District Council, Hampshire County Council, South Downs National Park Authority and the Forestry Commission, who pooled their resources and expertise to bring about the route.

Recreation pressure within Head Down Plantation is limited to permissive activities, e.g. off-road driving and orienteering, pressure within Ditcham woods is low.

West Harting Down is popular with local dog walkers and horse riders. The public footpath within this wood suffers inappropriate use by horse riders establishing a link between the Sussex Border Path and South Downs Way.

Tree Diseases and Pests

The main diseases of concern currently are Dothistroma (red band) Needle Blight on Corsican Pine, Phytophthora ramorum on Larch, Hymenoscyphus Fraxinea (Ash Dieback) and Chronic Oak Dieback. These species are all present in the woodland, however the move towards diversifying species makeup in the long term should make the woodland more resilient if a significant pathogen does arise.

Impatiens glandulifera (Himalayan balsam) are also spreading and will require a joined up landscape wide approach.

However continued monitoring does take place to ensure that species posing a threat to native flora do not become established particular after fly tipping events.

Guidance and action plans regarding plant health are constantly evolving to adapt to plant health threats. The sudden emergence of a disease can result in the need to fell a coupe earlier than planned or alter restocking plans. We will continue to monitor for disease as required and take appropriate action. Any changes to the forest design plan will be notified or agreed with Forest Services in accordance with the relevant guidance.

Mammal browsing is also a threat to the sustainability of woodlands in Southern England. Muntjac and Roe are the most prevalent browsing mammals within the woodlands covered in the plan.

Deer will be managed in accordance with the South England Forest District Deer Management Strategy. Invasive non native plant species which may pose a threat to native flora and fauna will be monitored in accordance with policy and guidance.

Historic Environment

Historic England is a statutory advisor to the government that works with local landowners to conserve and enhance the historic environment. Forestry Commission staff liaise with the local Historic England Team to ensure that Ancient Monuments are protected during forestry operations and managed in accordance with their associated management plans.

Queen Elizabeth Country Park contains an extensive area of scheduled archaeology covering 13.4ha. In 1997 a survey was carried out over 20ha with 'Holt Down Roman Villa' at its centre. It identified earthworks that consisted of lynchets, holloways, ponds, drystone structures and possible barrow mounds.

Soils

Overall the 2 prevailing types of soil found in West Harting Down and Queen Elizabeth Country Park are - Rendzina—Typical surface water gleys and brown earths.

Wildfire Resilience

Reducing the incidence and impact of wildfires in forests and woodlands through good management planning is important for sustainable forest management and to protect the provision of forest ecosystem goods and services.

This plan will aim to build on the wildfire resilience already present in the woodlands by acting on the following points

- Managing the vegetation to maintain a network of fire breaks, reducing fuel across an entire site especially along roads and rides.
- A wide of use of continuous cover forestry to create a diverse woodland structure.
- Where appropriate fragment high risk species and habitats into smaller areas to reduce the risk of fire spread.
- Restore, maintain, enhance and increase broadleaved native woodland particularly around high risk areas.
- When restocking sites use appropriate species relative to the forests wildfire risk.

These management principals will be implemented during the operational stage of planning and are intended as a guide only. A site specific wildfire risk assessment for this plan can be found in the appendices and should be should used in conjunction with a site specific wildfire management plan.

Climate Change

Climate change represents one of the greatest long-term challenges facing the world today. Conventional forest management systems have developed in a climate that has undergone fluctuations but remained relatively stable since the end of the last ice age (around 10,000 years ago). However, the average global temperature is now rising, there is evidence that rainfall patterns are changing. There is also likely to be an increase in the incidence of extreme weather and the frequency and severity of summer drought. This is likely to represent the greatest threat to woodlands from climate change in the UK over the coming decades. UK forest management needs to respond to these threats in two principal ways: through mitigation, including ensuring management is sustainable and adaptation, including species diversification.

Forest plan maps

When Consulting on the maps, please refer to the glossary, for further details about the prescriptions.

Location

Shows the location of the woodlands in the wider landscape.

Aerial

Shows the location of the woodlands in the wider landscape using aerial photography

Tenure

Show which areas are owned by the Forestry Commission and which are managed under a lease agreement.

SSSI Extent

Shows which areas of the woodland have been designated as a specialist site of scientific importance.

Ancient Woodland

Shows which areas are categorised as ancient woodland (woodland which has existed for several centuries or more) and the % of native trees.

Indicative age

Shows the planting year and age of the trees in the woodland.

Species diversity

Gives an indicative illustration of the number of different species within the woodlands (includes open space). However it should be noted that the data only accounts for trees in the canopy and should only be taken as a general overview of the number of different species present.

Medium Term Vision

Illustrates the proposed medium term structure of the woodlands and other habitats consistent with the Forest Plan objectives. While there is no fixed time scale for the habitat transformations depicted, an indicative term of around 20-40 years is assumed.

Long Term Vision

Illustrates the proposed long term structure of the woodlands and other habitats consistent with the Forest Plan objectives. While there is no fixed time scale for the habitat transformations depicted, an indicative term of around 100 years is assumed.

Current structure

An overview of the current habitat types existing in the woodlands.

Habitat restoration and felling

Shows the management proposals in the shorter term, 10 to 30 years. These proposals are the initial stepping stones towards achieving the long term vision.