



THE NATIONAL
FOREST

National Forest Company

European Landscape Convention

Action Plan 2008-13

1) Importance of the ELC to The National Forest

The principles of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) strongly mirror the philosophy of approach and wide ranging objectives of the National Forest's creation. The Forest's creation has been rooted in a landscape-led approach since its inception (1991), encompassing the ELC principles of: all landscapes matter; respecting landscape character; taking a holistic approach to landscape planning, management and enhancement; and connecting people with place (see below). This landscape-led approach has been the driver to achieving wide-ranging environmental, economic and social, sustainable development objectives, which also reflects the intent of the Convention.

The ELC provides an over-arching framework which helps to shape the future direction of the Forest's development. It also provides a strong landscape context for the objectives of the Forest's creation and its landscape policies in particular. These include:

- transforming the area by creating a coherent wooded landscape across 200 square miles – that integrates urban, rural and former coalfield landscapes. (All landscapes matter).
- creating a geographically diverse landscape – that respects landscape, ecological and cultural heritage character. (Respecting landscape character).
- enriching a diversity of landscapes and wildlife habitats - by achieving landscape-scale habitat connectivity. (Holistic approach to landscape).
- creating a major, new recreation and tourism resource with extensive public access – enabling residents and visitors to see and experience the Forest's landscapes. (Linking people with place).
- enabling community and educational involvement in Forest creation and the process of landscape change – thereby re-connecting people with their local landscape and creating a new sense of place and identity for the area. (Linking people with place).
- creating a sustainable new landscape entity – that achieves environmental, economic and social sustainable development objectives. (Holistic approach to landscape).

In turn, the Forest's creation is an exemplar of how the ELC can be implemented, demonstrating stakeholder and community involvement in landscape policy development (the National Forest Strategy), through to achieving landscape transformation on the ground. The perfect fit between The National Forest and the ELC in terms of common principles, objectives and means of delivery is set out in Annex 1.

The process of producing an ELC Action Plan has enabled the National Forest Company (NFC) to audit its activity against ELC objectives and to provide a focus towards planning landscape related activity. This has the benefit of positioning the NFC's work within the context of the ELC, as well as providing a framework for measuring the NFC's progress in contributing towards the ELC's implementation.

2) National Forest ELC Action Plan

The National Forest Action Plan covers the period 2008-13. This will coincide with the review of the National Forest Strategy planned for 2013/14. The Plan follows the working headings produced by Natural England for producing Action Plans. Each section includes a baseline of activity undertaken up to 2008, followed by future actions. Progress against the achievement of actions will be monitored annually and new actions will be added during the course of the Plan, as appropriate.

i) Improving performance within the current legal and regulatory framework

Baseline to 2008

- National Forest Strategy 2004 - 14

The National Forest Strategy sets out how The National Forest will achieve landscape-scale change across 200 square miles of the Midlands. The Strategy includes a dedicated chapter on landscape and has the following objectives relevant to the ELC:

- respecting landscape, ecological and cultural character.
- achieving a cohesive wooded landscape, by integrating urban, rural and former coalfield landscapes.
- enriching a diversity of landscapes and wildlife habitats and achieving landscape-scale habitat connectivity.
- creating a major new recreation and tourism resource with extensive new public access, opening up opportunities for local residents and visitors to see and experience the Forest's landscapes.
- community and educational involvement in the Forest's creation and changing landscape.
- monitoring the effects of, and community views on, landscape change.

These objectives provide the basis for achieving an inter-connected landscape planning, management and enhancement approach. Through dynamic landscape change this is achieving multiple environmental, economic and social objectives. The Strategy demonstrates how landscape can be a driver towards achieving sustainable development (see below).

The process of producing the Strategy achieved wide-ranging buy-in from stakeholders and the public (1,000 consultation responses); and the Strategy document is endorsed by Government.

- Sustainable Development exemplar

"The National Forest: An Exemplar of Sustainable Development" (2007) report provides the evidence, through 20 environmental, economic and social indicators that a landscape-

led approach can achieve wide-ranging sustainable development objectives. The transformation of the Ashby Woulds coalfield landscape, written up as a case study in the report, won the UK Sustainable Development Award in 2008.

2009 - 13 Action

- National Forest Delivery Plan 2009 - 14

During 2008/09 the NFC undertook a mid point review of its Forest Strategy. This provided the opportunity to highlight how The National Forest is helping to implement the ELC and how it provides a framework for achieving wide-ranging objectives of the Forest, in particular:

- landscape planning, management and enhancement;
- habitat connectivity;
- recreational access across landscapes;
- community involvement in landscape change;
- planning for growth (Growth Points agenda);
- and integrating landscapes across urban, rural and former coalfield areas.

Arising from the mid point review a new Delivery Plan was produced in 2009, setting out how the Forest will be implemented through to 2014.

Progress against action: The National Forest Delivery Plan 2009 - 14 includes a specific ELC policy action.

- Growth Points

The Forest area includes parts of two Growth Points – Burton upon Trent and East Staffordshire in the West Midlands and the Three Cities and Three Counties (6Cs) in the East Midlands. Around 33,000 new houses are planned across the Forest area. It is essential that the Growth Points respect landscape character in planning for new development and green infrastructure (GI); and that strategic approaches are developed towards landscape-scale planning for GI, to match the scale of growth planned.

The NFC will promote landscape character as a basis for developing GI strategies and landscaping plans; and encourage landscape-scale GI planning in masterplanning for sustainable urban extensions.

Progress against action: The NFC is represented on the 6Cs GI Board and the Burton and Staffordshire (BES) GI Steering Group. The BES GI Strategy (2009) and the draft 6Cs GI Strategy are underpinned by landscape character assessment; and both have adopted strategic approaches towards landscape planning for GI. NFC has helped to influence these outcomes.

The NFC has produced a GI vision related to the growth agenda that advocates 30% GI for

development sites over 10ha (and 20% for smaller sites). This cross-Forest policy approach has been agreed with the Forest's nine local authorities.

The proposed 120ha sustainable urban extension at Drakelow, Burton upon Trent includes 36% GI. The NFC has worked with the developers to influence the masterplan for this application (yet to be determined).

- Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) and Local Development Frameworks (LDF)

The NFC plays an active role in influencing regional and local planning policy to further the Forest's objectives. As part of its consultative work on RSS and LDFs it will promote appropriate landscape policies which help further the Forest's creation.

- Sustainable Development

The NFC will continue to promote The National Forest as an exemplar of sustainable development, using its Sustainable Development (SD) report (see above), which received 1,327 downloads from the NFC website (November 2008 – October 2009). The SD report will be updated in 2010 and approximately every three years thereafter.

Progress against action: Data collection to update the SD report in 2010 is underway.

ii) Improving the understanding of landscape character and dynamics and the monitoring of change and trends

Baseline to 2008

- Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) has provided the foundation for understanding the Forest's landscape and guiding landscape change since the production of the first National Forest Strategy in 1994. The Forest's character areas match those on the character map of England and landscape types provide the basis for forestry design guidance for landowners. In 2004 the LCA was reviewed and updated in response to the landscape change achieved since 1994, through woodland and other habitat creation.

- Historic Landscape Character Assessment (HLCA)

The NFC has supported HLCA undertaken by Leicestershire County Council in the Leicestershire part of the Forest. Previous HLCA work has also been undertaken by Staffordshire and Derbyshire County Councils. This work helps to guide woodland creation activity, protect archaeological assets in the landscape and provide information to interpret the historic landscape to residents and visitors.

- Monitoring Forest creation

The NFC undertakes extensive monitoring of the Forest's creation and landscape change. This includes:

- Annual reporting through the NFC annual report and Corporate Plan.
- Auditing of progress against National Forest Strategy actions (2002 and 2008).
- GIS spatial monitoring of landscape change achieved through woodland creation.
- Monitoring of the environmental, social and economic effects of the Forest's creation through bespoke research - summarised in The National Forest Sustainable Development report (see above).
- Independent monitoring (2004) of the 'fit' of new woodland planting related to landscape types and use of the NFC's forestry design guidance. This concluded that woodland planting related very well to landscape character and landscape planting objectives.
- In 2007 the NFC developed a GIS-based landscape connectivity system and added landscape visualisation capabilities to its GIS, to help monitor landscape change and target woodland and other habitat connectivity.

2009 - 14 Action

- Landscape-scale habitat connectivity

The NFC will complete the development of its landscape connectivity system; promote it to key partners as a tool to help target woodland and habitat creation; and pilot its use with landowners. A landscape connectivity approach will enable more focused targeting of landscape enhancement in certain areas, for example identifying small-scale habitat connections in areas which are close to having enough trees. This approach will be delivered with and through partners and is a good example of sharing research and development so that it is quickly deployed on the ground.

Progress against action: The landscape connectivity system is complete and is being used to develop woodland opportunity mapping across the Forest's landscape character areas.

A pilot connectivity project has been set up with FWAG (2009) to promote woodland connectivity with 12 landowners in target areas within the Charnwood landscape character area. An extensive Higher Level Scheme (120 ha) is also planned to achieve parkland and grassland connectivity in the Melbourne Parklands character area.

Landscape connectivity has been added to the scoring criteria for the NFC's Changing Landscapes Scheme. Several new schemes have been specifically designed to enhance their landscape connectivity potential.

- Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)

The NFC will continue to promote LCA and landscape types forestry design guidance to

landowners and agents, to guide new woodland design plans and help make informed decisions about landscape change. LCA and landscape types design guidance will underpin promotion of the NFC's new Changing Landscapes Scheme, as well as helping to target the Company's other financial mechanisms.

Progress against action: The design of Changing Landscapes Schemes and new land acquisition sites is being strongly influenced by landscape character considerations and use of the NFC's forestry design guidance.

- Landscape visualisation

Landscape visualisation will be used to help demonstrate and assess the landscape impact of woodland creation. It will be used as part of the design process to help visualise and communicate to stakeholders and local residents how the landscape will change through woodland creation.

Progress against action: Landscape visualisation has been used to help demonstrate the design and future landscape effect of the Packington land acquisition site (6ha), in discussions with the local parish council.

- Monitoring the effects of landscape change

The NFC is following up its Sustainable Development report by undertaking further work to monitor the effects of landscape change arising from the Forest's creation. In particular:

- commissioning Forest-wide breeding bird surveys (2008 and 2013) and undertaking ecological site surveys at two young woodland sites (every five years, with the next planned for 2011). This work helps to measure habitat and biodiversity quality across the changing landscape.
- measuring the effects of insect and wildlife pest (deer, grey squirrels) damage to young woodlands and their spread across the landscape, resulting from landscape-scale habitat expansion and the effects of climate change.

Progress against action: A breeding bird baseline survey was completed in 2008, covering 10% of the 1km squares across the Forest. This recorded 107 species, including 16 red listed and 36 amber listed species of conservation concern. Certain red listed species were recorded more abundantly than in the wider Midlands region. Overall the Forest area is currently on a par with wider regional and national trends.

Annual deer population monitoring is being undertaken across four landscape character areas, with evidence of habitat damage by deer recorded through the work of the Deer Initiative and the National Forest Deer Management Group.

- Historic Landscape Character Assessment (HLCA)

The NFC will support HLCA work in the Forest area and assess with English Heritage and County Archaeologists how the findings of HLCA can be communicated to land managers through targeted advice.

Progress against action: The NFC held a heritage liaison meeting (2009) with English Heritage, County Archaeologists and the Forestry Commission Archaeologist to discuss a common approach to HLCA work across the Forest. In Leicestershire, HLCA guidance for stakeholders is being produced and in Derbyshire, plans are in place to update their HLCA to the Leicestershire standard.

- Geodiversity

The NFC will work with the British Geological Survey (BGS) to raise awareness of the geodiversity value of the Forest's landscape.

Progress against action: NFC and BGS have developed a partnership project with mineral companies (2009 - 11) to produce a geological map and descriptive booklet on the geology, biodiversity, archaeology and industrial heritage related to the geology of the Forest's landscapes. Geological trails will also be created to help interpret the geological landscape for residents and visitors.

iii) Engaging people through comprehensive and accessible awareness and understanding activities as well as through promotion, education and training

Baseline to 2008

- Stakeholder, community and educational involvement

The NFC involves local, regional and national organisations, local authorities, businesses, the voluntary sector, local communities and visitors to the area in the Forest's creation. Through a wide range of means (see below) this enables involvement in landscape change from a strategic to a local project level.

National Forest Strategy consultation – around 200 organisations and 800 members of the public provided comments for the 2004 Strategy consultation exercise.

National Forest Forum – between 150 - 250 organisations are involved in the NFC's bi-annual Forest Forums.

Technical Working Groups – the NFC convenes stakeholder working groups on access and recreation, nature conservation, tourism, planning, landscape and the woodland economy. These meet 2-3 times each year and involve around 80 specialist organisations.

Partnership working – a wide range of new woodland creation and other Forest-related projects are developed each year, involving many different organisations, local communities and schools.

Specialist research – The joint Forestry Commission, Lancaster University “Growing Places” study documented the positive social change experienced as a result of the Forest’s creation.

In addition the NFC, with partner organisations runs a wide range of community and educational involvement programmes. These involve over 20,000 adults and 40,000 children each year, providing opportunities to contribute to the changing landscape and learn about the scale of landscape change underway. These programmes include:

Community tree planting – Free Tree Schemes, Tree for All, Grow a Tree from Seed, NFC’s Plant a Tree Scheme, community planting at new woodland creation sites.

Conservation volunteering – through the work of the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, Wildlife Trusts and the North West Leicestershire Volunteering Project.

Health promotion – including healthy walking and ‘Get Active’ programmes and practical conservation work.

Environmental education – through visits to Conkers Discovery Centre and Rosliston Forestry Centre, Forest School, Tree for All and the Forest Songs project – all using woodland settings to help deliver aspects of the UK educational curriculum.

Local heritage projects – through continuing to support projects arising from the NFC’s Landshapes project (2004 - 06).

Arts activities – including sculptures, village features and festivals.

‘Friends of’ Groups and Community Fora – set up in connection with several woodland and area-based projects.

National Forest Wood Fair – communicating the multiple benefits and many aspects of forestry as part of landscape change (5,000 visitors in 2009).

Action 2009 - 14

- National Forest Mid Strategy Review (2008)

As part of the review the NFC will seek stakeholder and public views on the effects of the Forest’s creation and whether to adopt a landscape connectivity approach across the Forest. Public views will be canvassed through community perceptions research (see below), Citizen’s Panels and Parish Council consultation.

Progress against action: Around 50 stakeholder organisations and 1,200 members of the public submitted comments. The review highlighted overwhelming support for the continued creation of the Forest. Landscape related responses included:

- support for a landscape-scale approach to habitat connectivity.
- the need for sensitivity to new tree planting in well-wooded landscapes that might have enough trees.
- the increasing need to target woodland creation in specific landscapes.
- support in contributing to the European Landscape Convention.

All of these issues have been reflected in new policy actions within the 2009 - 14 National Forest Delivery Plan.

Citizen's Panels research (1,000 people) across the three counties in the Forest, highlighted that over 86% of respondents thought that The National Forest has improved the local environment; with 76% identifying the "expanding woodland landscape" as a major factor.

- Community perceptions research

The NFC will commission a study into residents' views to gauge opinions on how the Forest has changed the landscape and the effects this has had upon the area.

Progress against action: A community perceptions study was undertaken in 2008/09 in three different housing areas. Over 200 local residents were involved through 11 focus group meetings and on-street questionnaire surveys. There was widespread agreement that the Forest has improved the landscape for the better as it has:

- made communities more attractive places to live.
- created better places for walking.
- created more open spaces, leisure and tourism attractions.
- restored derelict sites.
- resulted in more local wildlife.
- improved facilities for children.

84% of people rated the standard of National Forest sites as good or very good.

- Landscape Advisory Group

The NFC will convene regular meetings of its Landscape Advisory Group (local authority and Natural England representatives). This will help to guide landscape policy development and implementation and will oversee how the Forest can contribute towards implementing the ELC.

Progress against action: The Landscape Advisory Group meets twice a year. It has inputted to the Mid Strategy Review (see above) and is helping to guide the NFC's approach towards maintaining the landscape quality of the Forest resource.

- National Forest long distance trail

The NFC has commissioned research to help develop a 100 mile National Forest trail, which will link the six landscape character areas within the Forest and its attractions. The trail, linked with other shorter walks across the Forest, will increase public access and understanding of the landscape through information and on-site interpretation. The trail will be developed between 2009 - 13.

Progress against action: In 2009 the NFC appointed a Project Officer on a 12 month contract to take forward the detailed planning and feasibility of the long distance trail.

- National Forest Walks pack

The NFC will update its pack of 17 medium distance walks. This offers the opportunity to promote the landscape through which these trails pass. The NFC will also add to its website other promoted walks produced by other organisations.

Progress against action: This action was achieved in 2009. The Forest's walks promote the area's landscape character and qualities. In addition, 60 other walks produced by other organisations are also promoted on the NFC website.

- Landscape visualisation

The work referred to in section (ii) is also relevant to engaging stakeholders and the public in raising awareness and understanding of landscape issues.

- Stakeholder and community involvement programmes

The range of activities described in the baseline activity will continue to be carried forward into annual programmes.

Progress against action: In 2008/09 over 20,000 adults and 40,000 children were involved in Forest related activities. In 2009 the NFC launched a new work stream to involve more local people in community management of young woodlands. This was highlighted as a new action in the National Forest Delivery Plan 2009 - 14.

iv) Sharing experience and best practice

Baseline to 2008

The National Forest is a national exemplar of multi-purpose forestry and sustainable development and is increasingly seen as a test bed for innovative approaches which have broader applicability elsewhere. The NFC is always keen to share its experience and best practice with other organisations. Within the context of the ELC the following areas of activity are particularly relevant:

Sustainable development – especially the NFC’s approach to Sustainable Development reporting, with landscape transformation being the driver for this.

Landscape transformation – integrating rural, urban and former coalfield landscapes.

Landscape-scale habitat connectivity – The NFC’s GIS-based approach to targeting connectivity.

Community involvement in landscape change – see above; plus national research carried out in the area (“Growing Places” – Lancaster University and the Forestry Commission), which documents the Forest as a changing social place.

Rural diversification – Forest creation mechanisms have achieved landscape change with multiple environmental, economic and social benefits.

Recreation and tourism - Developing a new, national landscape resource for leisure and tourism.

Greening urban landscapes – the Forest’s planning policy approach towards securing development-related green infrastructure is particularly relevant for the growth agenda.

Action 2009 - 14

- Disseminating best practice

The NFC will continue to disseminate best practice from the Forest area. In particular it will:

- promote the National Forest Sustainable Development exemplar report.
- promote the NFC’s approach to landscape connectivity amongst key stakeholders.
- host study tours.
- speak at national conferences.
- disseminate the results of research.

Progress against action: The NFC has undertaken the following:

- promoted its landscape connectivity approach to landscape and nature conservation stakeholders through its Landscape and Nature Conservation Working Groups.
- hosted study tours by Forestry Commission Wales; the Institute of Chartered Foresters (40 people); and Woodland Heritage (80 people).
- made presentations to the Association of AONBs conference; West Midlands Green Infrastructure workshop, Natural England/Forestry Commission; Natural England ELC seminar in Herefordshire (80 people); North West Leicestershire developers workshop (80 people).
- a summary report of National Forest related research projects is being produced. This will be launched at an NFC exemplar event in 2010.

- Twining with other projects

The NFC is keen to continue to share its experience by hosting visits to The National Forest from interested organisations (see above). This will build upon a growing number of visits over recent years from international, national and local organisations.

The NFC would be particularly interested in sharing experience with other like-minded organisations involved in similar types of environmental-led regeneration projects. This would enable us to learn from the experience of others to help our own work. In 2009/10 the NFC will research the potential for twinning with other European projects.

- National Forest as an ELC exemplar

The NFC is keen to present The National Forest as an exemplar of how implementation of the ELC can be taken forward at a sub-regional level, in an area of non-designated landscape, which spans a variety of landscape character areas. Given the multi-purpose nature of the Forest's creation, it is an excellent example of demonstrating how landscape regeneration and protection can be a driver to achieving sustainable development.

The NFC will consider the potential to put the Forest forward for an ELC award, when guidance on awards is produced.

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November 2009.

Annex 1 - The National Forest and ELC – a perfect fit

1) The Principles are the same

European Landscape Convention	The National Forest
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <u>Inclusive</u> – all landscapes matter. ▪ <u>Comprehensive</u> – landscape is a holistic concept that links nature and people, past and present. ▪ <u>Democratic</u> – landscape matters to everyone. ▪ <u>Participatory</u> – people should be involved in landscape. ▪ <u>Informed</u>- action should be based on landscape information and have clear aims. ▪ <u>Realistic</u> – landscapes will always change – it’s how that matters. ▪ <u>Sustainable</u> – landscape can support people’s aspirations and jobs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is concerned with all its landscapes, rural and urban. ▪ Takes a broad view of landscape – ecology, cultural heritage, people, recreational access, character and sense of place. ▪ People and community involvement are central aims, from landscape planning through to Forest creation. ▪ People are involved in a wide range of ways that matter to them. ▪ Landscape character assessment has formed the bedrock of landscape decision making, as a core element of the Forest Strategy. ▪ Acknowledges rural and urban forces for change and works with them to secure landscape protection and enhancement. ▪ Sees the landscape as an economic, environmental, cultural and social resource.*

* As evidenced in: “The National Forest: an exemplar of Sustainable Development” – NFC (2007); and “Growing Places”: a study of social change in The National Forest – Lancaster University and the Forestry Commission (2007).

The Objectives are the same

European Landscape Convention	The National Forest
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <u>Landscape protection</u> – action to conserve heritage features of a landscape. ▪ <u>Landscape management</u> – action to ensure the regular upkeep of a landscape. ▪ <u>Landscape planning</u> – strong, forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscapes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Aims to identify, protect and bring into sympathetic management existing features, as opportunities arise. ▪ Seeks to ensure a high standard of landscape management and maintenance throughout. ▪ Aims to achieve large-scale landscape change, which links historic landscape assets with the creation of new landscapes where they have been damaged (in urban, rural and mineral worked settings). Creative landscape planning is fundamental to the Forest’s creation.

2) The Means are the same

European Landscape Convention	The National Forest
<p>Calls for countries to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify and assess landscape. ▪ Develop landscape policies. ▪ Set landscape objectives. 	<p>Has put in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Landscape Character Assessment to identify and assess its landscape and pro-actively target landscape change. ▪ Enriching landscape diversity is a key principle and landscape policies are embedded in the Forest Strategy. ▪ The Strategy includes landscape objectives and clear implementation

<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Enable public participation. ▪ Integrate landscape into other policy areas. ▪ Support programmes of public awareness, training and education.	<p>actions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Engaged the public, land managers and other stakeholders at every stage. ▪ Influences planning and other policies affecting the area – a critical area of activity given the area’s current growth agenda. ▪ Has initiated and actively supports a wide range of public awareness, involvement, education and training programmes.
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