

The Development of the National Forest: the transformative agency of trees in the English Midlands

PhD Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis argues that the creation of the north-midland National Forest in Britain is one of the most ambitious and successful large-scale woodland regeneration projects in the nation's history and therefore critical historical analysis of its development is important for informing the planning and management of future regional reforestation schemes. It demonstrates how a concept for a large-scale forest modelled upon the New Forest and developed by the Countryside Commission became the inspiration for a new forest in lowland England, close to major conurbations, that would provide crucial new social and economic opportunities through woodland industries, leisure and tourism. The thesis provides the first full comprehensive and authoritative analysis of the development of the National Forest during its first few decades in regional and national context, demonstrating its importance for the future of forestry and the pivotal role of major community afforestation schemes in the adaptation to- and mitigation of- climate change. Researched and written by a community environmental and heritage activist with close personal knowledge of the formation of the National Forest, it utilises archival, institutional and media sources and draws upon interviews with key players in the development of the Forest. The thesis provides essential original contributions to knowledge and informs understanding of current and future impacts of afforestation and national environmental policies. Through an examination of the vital role played in the development of multi-purpose forestry and ecology infrastructure, it demonstrates the dramatic impact of extensive afforestation strategies. The thesis shows how and why the National Forest has had a major regional economic, social and environmental impact, in an area that had experienced long-term fundamental economic and environmental problems, transforming those parts of North West Leicestershire, South Derbyshire and East Staffordshire into the first English National Forest. The region had previously relied heavily on the industries of coal mining and clay extraction for employment, but by the late 1980s these were in steep decline, leaving a legacy of mounting unemployment, slag heaps and despoiled landscapes, with a mere 1 per cent tree cover in the worst affected areas.

The National Forest plan that emerged, based upon the Needwood-Charnwood bid, succeeded because it was founded upon partnership working from the outset, had high public support and provided the strongest economic, social and ecological benefits. The cultural power and value of trees was recognised and harnessed through connecting the remnant ancient forests of Needwood and Charnwood, lending authenticity and credence. However, the thesis demonstrates how the development of this multi-purpose forest providing environmental regeneration through the creation of a new economic base was not an inevitable outcome of the original plans but only emerged after sometimes tense negotiations involving all stakeholders across the region, especially local and national government bodies, landowners, environmental associations, community organisations and the general public. In adapting to shifting political and economic circumstances, the National Forest facilitated economic and social regeneration and had a major environmental and ecological impact upon the north Midland countryside and nearby urban areas. The importance of tree planting and the role of trees in providing social and health benefits is also revealed and the thesis argues that urban forestry and the integration of towns and cities with tree places is of prime importance for future similar projects. The thesis maintains that by demonstrating the role of partnership working, social engagement and sustained public consultation in the creation of

the Forest, a critical historical analysis of its development illustrates how it provides a valuable model for future multi-purpose afforestation projects. The role of the National Forest Company, for example, and its close partnerships with local and broader communities, can inform other woodland-based environmental regeneration schemes such as the Northern Forest and the Welsh National Forest. Critical examination of the National Forest's history is indispensable for our understanding of woodland conservation and development and demonstrates how such future tree-based projects can provide sustainable environmental and economic regeneration and therefore help to mitigate and adapt to the realities of climate change.

List of Abbreviations.

ADB: Ash Die Back
APRS: Association for the Preservation of Rural Scotland
BC: British Coal
CCC: Committee on Climate Change
CEO: Chief Executive Officer
CLA: Country Landowners' Association
COP 21 (or other number): Conference of Parties
CPRE: Council for the Protection of Rural England
CPRW: Council for the Protection of Rural Wales
CRIL: Campaign for the Reopening of the Ivanhoe Line
CSD: Commission on Sustainable Development
CSR: Comprehensive Service Review
DCC: Derbyshire County Council
DEFRA: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DES: Department of Education and Science
EA: Environment Agency
EEC: European Economic Community
EFRA: Environment Food and Rural Affairs committee
ELC: European Landscape Convention
ESBC: East Staffordshire Borough Council
EU: European Union
FoE: Friends of the Earth
HFCT: Heart of the Forest Charitable Trust
HNFF: Heart of the National Forest Foundation
HoFF: Heart of the Forest Forum
HS2: High-Speed Rail 2
LCA: Landscape Character Assessment
LCC: Leicestershire County Council
LSOA: Lower Super Output Area
MAFF: Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
NDPB: Non-Departmental Public Body
NFC: The National Forest Company
NFCT: National Forest Charitable Trust
NFU: National Farmers' Union
NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation
NIACE: National Institute for Adult Continuing Education
NMA: National Memorial Arboretum
NOP: National Opinion Poll
NPPF: National Planning Policy Framework
NT: National Trust
OS: Ordnance Survey
PMDU: Prime Minister's Delivery Unit
PSA: Public Service Agreement
RBL: Royal British Legion
RICS: Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors

RTPI: Royal Town Planning Institute
SAC: Special Area for Conservation
SCC: Sheffield City Council
SCC: Staffordshire County Council
SDDC: South Derbyshire District Council
TCV: The Conservation Volunteers
UNCED: United Nations at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

Acknowledgements

If I look up from my desk and out of the window, I can see trees, thousands of them, rolling away to the horizon in a seemingly unbroken canopy of green. I know it's an illusion, in amongst those trees are roads, houses, schools and shops, and the occasional village, but the illusion of trees is there. My connection to the National Forest goes back to its beginnings, or earlier. For my sixteenth birthday in 1981 my parents bought me my first 35mm film camera, and as I'd recently read *The Lord of the Rings*, I decided on a project to take photographs that the scenes in the book had suggested to me. For the great forest of Mirkwood I trespassed into the remnants of the ancient woodland at Grangewood, for the beautiful Lothlorien I cycled to Willesley and snapped some of the ancient chestnuts there, but for the wasteland of Gorgoroth, the grey slag mounds at the gates of Mordor, I had only a short walk to the blasted spoil heaps around the east of and even into my home village, the ground being almost entirely a thick slime of sucking clay, pools of ochre-coloured water with an oily film to them, and very little in the way of plant or animal life anywhere. The same area now is a canopy of trees and a riot of life beneath.

I spent the summer of 1981 unemployed other than with my photography project and the following January landed an apprenticeship at the local colliery, the last place my mum wanted me to go. My dad worked underground at the mine and my apprenticeship took me there too, following in the footsteps of him and my forebears. As it turned out, I was to be the last of the colliers, the local mines finally closed for good in 1990 and I found myself out of work. I spent that spring as I'd spent the last five or six, scattering acorns that I'd gathered from oak trees locally, in the hope that some of them would grow to maturity. When the announcement of the planting of a local forest came, I was pleased, thrilled even, but for a long time it didn't feel real, and I continued to gather and scatter acorns. True involvement for me, other than my random guerrilla planting tactics, didn't come until the summer of 2007 when I became a parish councillor and was selected as the parish representative to the Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum, although then coming towards the end of its life. From the ashes arose the Heart of the Forest Forum which continued to contribute, in however small a way, to the success of the National Forest. Much of this history is written from a personal perspective, it would be nigh-on impossible to separate myself from the change I have witnessed, and some of that personal connection comes across in the writing of it.

I have enormous respect and gratitude for my Ph.D. supervisor, Professor Paul Elliott, whose unwavering interest and enthusiastic discussions have kept me focussed through all the times I nearly gave up; and to Doctor Kathleen McIlvenna for stepping into the project at late and very short notice to act as second supervisor (a daunting task in itself). Paul and Kathleen have acted as proof-readers and editors alongside their tasks as supervisors and guides: I would not have completed this thesis without them. Their valuable discussions and thoughtful insights have managed to inspire me when I've been stuck. My heartfelt thanks are due to my wife, Kay, whose forbearance through the writing process has kept me going, and who has pointed out the priorities along the way, joining me on what she has come to endearingly call my 'fool's errands'. Thanks go also my friends, who, along with Kay, have listened to me talk at length about the transformative 'magic' of trees and of environmental change for what must've seemed to them an eternity, joining in enthusiastically with the tree-related projects that have suggested themselves along the way. My sincerest thanks also to

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Mark Knight
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Summary of key findings

There has been a remarkably small amount of literature written specifically about the history of the National Forest, which was itself established from 1990. John Parry's *The National Forest: Heritage in the Making* of 2006 is the one exception, itself written for the National Forest Company as part of its *LandShapes* programme of 2006. The Nottingham University journal *The East Midlands Geographer* created a special edition in 1998: Wade, P.M., Sheail, J., & Child, L. *The East Midland Geographer; The National Forest: from vision to reality*. John Sheail mentions the Forest at length in *An Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain* of 2002 and has been the author of reports and journals as the forest has grown. There are several reports and journals about the forest of course, many of those sponsored by or created on behalf of the National Forest Company, and they are listed in the bibliography. The historiography of trees and forests has tended generally from early twentieth century attention to forestry and timber production with the creation of the Forestry Commission in 1919 towards trees more broadly in the landscape and general environment, as well as their vital importance for the environment at the end of that century and into the new millennium. There has been significant attention to the social and cultural dimensions of trees-and-human interface, alongside a trend towards urban forestry. The efforts to explore urban and rural tree places and their importance to each other and to us over the last two or three decades is welcome. On the whole though, there is not a specific academic work dedicated to the National Forest's history, despite it being hailed as 'one of the boldest environmental projects in the world'.¹ This thesis seeks to address that gap and begin to redress the balance. The National Forest is something of a visionary creation and as we shall see, was the brainchild of the Countryside Commission, developed over a period of time and many meetings. The Commission was established by government in 1968 as part of a restructuring and broadening of the responsibilities of the National Parks Commission.² The creation of a forest for the nation was a project imagined first in their offices in Cheltenham and quickly gained traction there.

The Countryside Commission were considering options for a proposal for a lowlands forest in England during the mid 1980s, for a number of reasons that included the rise in environmental awareness and their desire to create a flagship project in lowland England to serve the requirements of several cities and conurbations, and to demonstrate their own continued value in a period of uncertainty over their survival. At a similar time, the heavy industry based around mineral extractive industries in North-West Leicestershire, South Derbyshire, and areas of Staffordshire on its boundary with Warwickshire was nearing its demise and the County and District Councils had begun exploring ways in which the derelict landscapes of slag heaps and clay mounds left behind by the mineral extractive industries could offer economic regeneration through environmental restoration. When the Countryside Commission announced that it was looking for sites in the English Midlands, a three-county approach was made from Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Staffordshire County Councils linking the remnant ancient forests of Needwood in Staffordshire with Charnwood in Leicestershire, taking in the South Derbyshire Coalfield. There was stiff competition, especially from Nottinghamshire; its Sherwood bid demonstrated that it had a functioning tourist economy

¹ <https://www.nationalforest.org/about> (accessed 26th April 2021).

² Clout, H.D. *Rural Geography: An Introductory Survey*. Pergamon Press, Oxford 2013 p:138.

already in place, the other bids would have to build theirs from scratch. The Needwood-Charnwood bid emerged as the winning candidate through its regenerative approach; it was the most problematic of all the five bids in terms of landscape restoration requirements, it being the most denuded of trees, but had the highest payback in terms of landscape transformation and economic regeneration. In a strongly contested competition, the very significant role of the general public and the local press in its unwavering support for the Forest project coming to the area played a highly contributory factor in the Countryside Commission finally awarding the project to the Needwood-Charnwood bid.

The establishment of a Development Team by the Countryside Commission proved crucial to the long-term success of the Forest. It had a number of key objectives: to define the final Forest boundary and include urban forestry as well as plantation in rural locations, to build on the support of the general public and keep that support progressing as the Forest began to be developed, to create working partnerships and develop a role as enablers, to convince ministers and politicians of the veracity of the entire project and to convince landowners and farmers to change their businesses and way of life from food production to growing trees. Not least, the team needed to create a deliverable strategy for a multi-purpose, multi-user forest, and finally, to create a workable business plan. Landowners were concerned that compulsory land purchases would be made, the Ramblers' Association and others were keen for full public access rights to be made across the new Forest area; a policy that the Development Team thought would scupper the entire project in its tracks. The partnership-working policies created by the Development Team worked well with the landowning groups too, the forestry grants systems used by the Development Team included permissive access to land which created a solution to the land access concerns, at least in the medium-term. Public relations strategies were developed to ensure positive press coverage, encouraging government ministers and MPs to take advantage of photo opportunities and associate themselves with the upbeat and positive aspects of the Forest. A public consultation paper was produced in late 1993 and received a very positive response, again applying pressure on ministers to make a full commitment to support the creation of the Forest. A public relations strategy aimed at encouraging the Government to commit was eventually successful, the announcement by the Secretary of State confirming that the project would receive full Government support.

The Forest was brought into being by a new Government-backed company, the National Forest Company, who, as a Non-Departmental Public Body, receive funding through DEFRA. The company was set up with several members of the Development Team in senior roles there, the Director of the Development Team was appointed as CEO of the new company, along with other senior members of staff. The company moved into new offices and increased its headcount but remained few in number, preferring to continue the strategy of influencing and enabling through partnership working created by the Development Team. By mid 2002, although well over 4,600 hectares of land had been afforested, this was significantly below the targets set for itself by the Development Team and the NFC, and planting targets were a growing problem, threatening the credibility of the company. The Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum, created in 1992, had representatives from over sixty different interest groups from the Heart of the forest area, from local councils to business leaders, from local museums to the NFC itself. The Forum produced a regeneration strategy for its focus area that included proposals for landscape regeneration, alongside social and

economic regeneration. This Forum was of prime importance to the early successes in regeneration at the Heart of the Forest and its work was recognised by the Royal Town Planning Institute. Once the key projects of the Forum were complete, the group reimagined itself as the Heart of the Forest Forum, with a new set of objectives. Partnership working, as promoted by the Development Team and the NFC was a powerful part of the strategy for the success of the Forest.

Urban forestry was part of the blend of landscapes pursued by the National Forest project from the outset and the failure of the 1996 funding bid in Burton upon Trent, Staffordshire, was a setback that this thesis argues prevented the town from integrating fully into the wider Forest, and real inclusion and fusion only began to occur with the current (2021) Trent Washlands Scheme, again part of a wider partnership plan that may bring the Forest into the heart of the town. Coalville and Swadlincote, themselves both industrial and post-industrial towns in Leicestershire and Derbyshire respectively, have developed successful urban forestry initiatives, which I argue will be a requirement of urban spaces as the climate increases in temperature and seasonal flooding events rise in frequency. I maintain that the recent attention given to edgelands helps focus upon the adaption of these uncared-for spaces by natural regeneration that can be harnessed by activists and environmentalists to promote green agendas, and to help drive down deprivation and promote social health agendas whilst maintaining equitable and fair access to natural spaces without inadvertently promoting green gentrification.

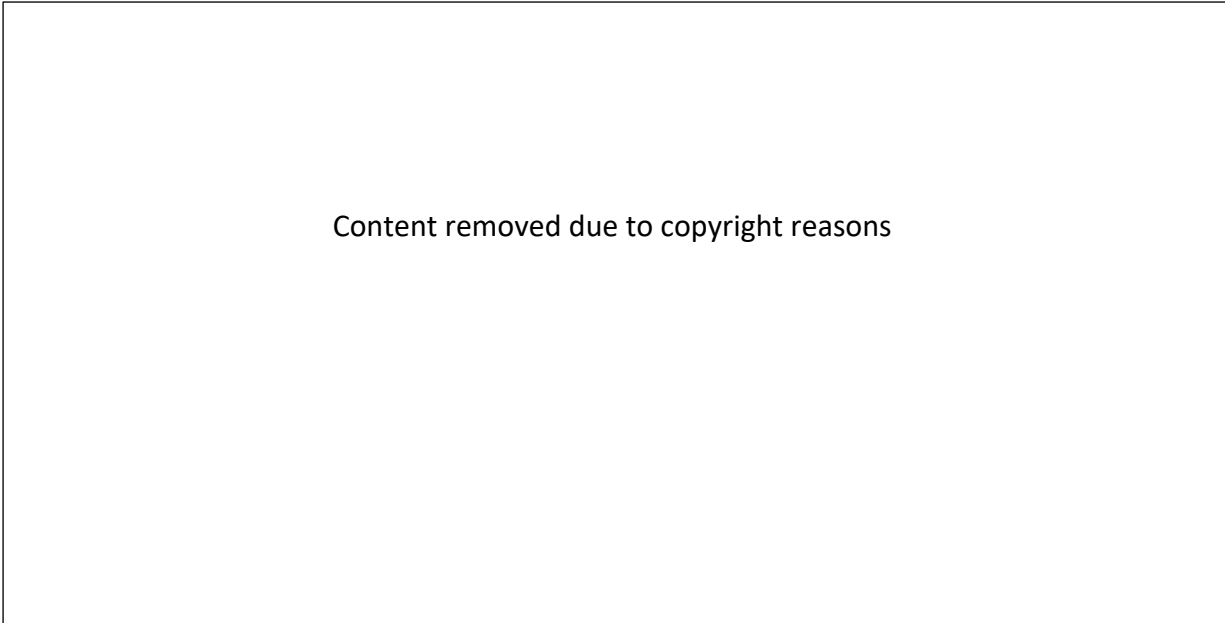
The thesis demonstrates that the National Forest Company's adaption to changing political and economic circumstances was one of its strengths and that by continually providing leadership that promotes partnership working, it reaches out into local communities whilst maintaining levels of influence at ministerial and governmental levels that would not otherwise be attainable. I argue that consultation with the people of the Forest has bolstered support for the Company's policies on several occasions and demonstrated to ministers that the funding is money well spent, especially at critical moments when even the future of the Company itself has been brought into question. Certainly, the independent reports that have taken place from time-to-time have indicated this is the case. The NFC has adapted its strategies at times, in response to public consultation and to changing environmental and political requirements, whilst continuing its green and environmental agendas, alongside the business of planting a multi-purpose forest-for-all. One of the areas that the NFC needs to address is that of its own identity which has at times conflated with that of the Forest itself, apparently forgetting that it is a corporate body and not the geographical area. The NFC and the Development Team before it, have promoted the creation of an encompassing Forest identity, itself no easy task in an area that has a variety of landscapes, rural and urban backgrounds and local and regional identities. If the intention is to create a new identity for the people of the Forest then that can (and must) be supported by the Company, but I contend that it should let that happen. Its own social media and corporate brand is vitally important, but it does not allow differentiation between the Company and the Forest proper, when separation of corporate body and the Forest as an entity of itself is crucial if the new identity is to emerge, so the Forest folk become aware of their new shared culture. That fledgeling identity is emerging, and I give examples of how this Forest 'awakening' is happening.

A new identity is supported by the NFC's strategy for the next quarter century, the Greenprint for the Nation, part of which has a strand based around the continued creation of a social forest and a Forest society. The Greenprint itself blurs the distinction between the National Forest itself and much broader environmental concerns and proposes an environmental agenda for the whole nation. This is a slightly contentious position for the NFC to take as it seeks to maintain distinct boundaries of the area it represents whilst recommending a series of environmental policies for the nation. Overall, the document shows leadership, vision, and clear common sense in the policies it advocates, and this thesis uses that to argue for the linking of Forests and tree places across the midlands. On balance, the position currently occupied by the NFC is a sensible course of action, provided it does not take up a silo mentality. Lines drawn on a map are just that, ink on paper and a burred edge to those is recommended during the course of this thesis. In recommending a series of proposals to the nation in the Greenprint the NFC should promote to its partners that they provide green linkages to connect the National Forest to the wider midlands. I argue that compartmentalised thinking and compartmentalisation of green space will ultimately fail to provide necessary ecological support that is required for environmental regeneration and that the broad approach policy of the Northern Forest Project would also be helpful in the English Midlands.

The National Forest project has been a truly remarkable success and has demonstrated that environmental projects across large areas can provide economic and environmental regeneration for relatively small financial cost so long as political will and public support is behind it. Using the lessons learned and the policies developed by the National Forest Company, its partners and partnerships within local and broader communities, is of fundamental importance to landscape and environmental projects like the Northern Forest and the Welsh National Forest and demonstrates how they and future projects can provide sustainable environmental regeneration, a requirement for our survival and of singular importance for the ecological welfare of the country during this climate crisis and period of rapid environmental decline.

Introduction.

When the successful bid to create the National Forest across parts of the three counties of Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Staffordshire was announced in October 1990 it was the culmination of thousands of hours of groundwork and large expenditure. A great deal of effort and planning had gone into realising the proposal by the Countryside Commission, the County and District Councils and other authorities involved in the eventually successful bid, and also the unsuccessful ones, some of whose members went on to be involved in the National Forest and other woodland creation. The gamble on the Countryside Commission's part was that of reputation, staking both this and possible survival in a climate where departmental bodies such as theirs were under threat of closure, that a new forest could be created where none then existed in an area that was in large part ravaged by mineral extraction, heavily industrialised, urbanised or farmed, with a landscape scarred and denuded of woodland. It was bordered by two relict ancient forests which would give structure and framework to the enterprise but had little else in its favour, other than the opportunity to make a real difference, in terms of landscape change on a dramatic scale and also to revitalise and reinvigorate an area that was about to go into steep economic decline as the heavy industry that had supported the area's former wealth had come to a sudden and rapid conclusion, namely the coal industry, with the clay industry having already diminished almost to nothing. The gamble on the government's part was that of finance - how would the forest be paid for? How would trees be planted on largely private land and how would landowners – traditionally a risk averse section of society – be persuaded to adopt a different mentality and attitude towards land stewardship?³



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Figure 1. Report in the Burton Mail, 12th October 1993 (see note 2).

³ Vollemweider, X., Di Falco, S. & D'Donoghue, C. *Risk preferences and voluntary agri-environmental schemes: does risk aversion explain the uptake of the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme?* Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment. Working Paper No. 48 May 2011 p: 6.

Even by 1993, after the Forest's announcement and planning had begun, landowners' representatives and others remained unsupportive and reluctant to turn over large tracts of land from agriculture to silviculture.⁴ The gamble on the part of the local authorities was that of funding and supporting the creation of an entirely new economic base, from almost nothing. And then of course, there were the people of the area. How would they be persuaded to adopt a new and very different environment and economic base? The folk on the eastern and western fringes might already consider themselves to have a woodland connection but that, especially in Needwood, was tenuous at best and almost a folk memory. The majority of the area had little in the way of tree cover, especially in the central zone, where mineral extractive industries had held virtually free reign for almost two centuries and tree cover was at less than 1%. And there, in that tiny percentage of tree cover, was the grand opportunity, the great gamble, the big win. The Countryside Commission, the local authorities and, as it turned out, the local folk could see the opportunity for what it was, and when it came, they grasped it with both hands. As the Forest began to be planted an expectation became almost palpable; as the trees grew, slowly at first, a small wood here, a stand of woodland there, so did the people of the area begin to connect with the green spaces and new access to woodlands. In 2002 the National Forest Company published an audit of the first National Forest Strategy, itself created in 1994, independently audited. The *Entec* audit report stated that 'the planting of trees has created a focus for activity and initiative which might not otherwise have happened [...] The National Forest offers a common language, *and hence identity*, for local and regional communities, creating a synergy of effort and outlook'.⁵ The people in the Forest looked the gift-horse in the mouth, recognised it, and so began a new chapter, one with woodland as its key theme.

The people of what in 1990 was termed 'the new National Forest' had a steep learning curve in front of them in terms of creating and adapting to new ways to be in a landscape that began its transition to woodland relatively quickly. A new aesthetic began to materialise, and a different type of connection to place as access to greater areas of land held privately since the enclosures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries began to emerge. Enclosure of former land held in common, 'waste land' or 'the waste', held profound consequences for our understanding of nature and the uses to which the land is put.⁶ That understanding was about to go through and continues to go through a series of profound changes for the people of the National Forest.

There were precedents for the National Forest and there are health benefits to forests, be they physical or mental in nature. Augustine Henry's *Forests, Woods and Trees in Relation to Hygiene* of 1919, published after the experiences of timber shortages during the First World War when the new Forestry Commission was being established to help address the problem, noted both the environmental and sanitary benefits of woodland, along with their positive effects on physical and mental health of people. Henry noted the benefits of plantation of forests around cities and promoted the idea of the creation of a forest in the English Midlands

⁴ As reported by the local press at a forum meeting in October 1993. Newspaper clipping of an article in the *Burton Mail*, October 12th 1993 stored in the SDDC archive at Rosliston Forestry Centre and lent to the author by Kate Allies, the Environmental Development Manager there.

⁵ Reported in *Forest Scene: News and Views from the National Forest*. Spring/ Summer 2003. The National Forest Company, Moira 2003 p:2 Author's italics.

⁶ Di Palma, V. *Wasteland: A History*. Yale University Press 2014 pp: 4- 5.

particularly to provide improved personal health and environment in the Birmingham area. He also advocated the extension of woodland through the continued creation of parks and arboreta within city boundaries. In chapter six of *Forests, Woods and Trees*, in a passage that might have described the heart of the National Forest in the 1980s, Henry wrote 'Many spots, once green fields and woodlands, are now covered with pit mounds- great heaps of slag, shale and coal waste. These render the landscape desolate, as they are poorly clad with vegetation, and assist by their depressing nature the bad effect of the atmosphere on the physical and moral health of the population'.⁷ He goes on to discuss the possibilities, and indeed the relatively small-scale attempts by the *Midland Reafforesting Association* of planting a forest. In this case he is discussing the area around the Black Country and Birmingham, a project which in the event was never fulfilled, although the planting that was assisted by the association proved successful. Henry points out here the value and importance of recruiting locals into the scheme as part of a strategy to ensure long-term success. He goes on to note the swift improvements in the health of schoolchildren where they have been recruited into planting schemes, both physical and mental, along with 'improvements in civic pride' and reduction in vandalism despite the 'district being inhabited by a rough class' and that [...] 'the plantations are regarded by the neighbours with positive affection'.⁸ It is true to say that the National Forest is also regarded by the people who live within it 'with positive affection'. I have found no evidence linking the creation of the National Forest to Henry's comments in 1919 and the practice of partnership working and 'recruiting locals to ensure long-term success' by the Countryside Commission's Development Team seems to have come about independently.

There are a number of strands that run throughout this work and these are returned to as it unfolds:

- landscape change on a huge scale and the reconstruction of habitats after generations of environmental degradation.
- the meaning and role of multi-purpose forestry and public access to that, both by the inhabitants of the Forest and visitors to the area, alongside the initially strong reluctance from landowners to provide that access with claims by the Country Landowners' Association of the fear from farmers of vandalism if the public were allowed in.
- The planning and administration of change over such a large area and timeframe, alongside the changing demands of tree planting as an awakening to the climate crisis that unfolded over the last 30 years and more, environmental awareness demanding sustainable development outcomes being demanded of the Forest and planned into the economic development of the area, including planting targets.
- The growing understanding of the agential force of trees themselves.
- The changes required both of and by the inhabitants of the Forest area as it grows in regard to their perception of themselves and their personal identities.⁹

⁷ Henry, A. *Forests, Woods and Trees in Relation to Hygiene*. Constable and Company, London 1919.

⁸ Henry, *Forests, Woods and Trees in Relation to Hygiene*. pp 59-66.

⁹ In the newspaper report in figure 1, the CLA were concerned with loss of revenue for their members from the change from farming to forestry, and worried about compulsory access to newly afforested land, with TV naturalist and countryman Phil Drabble quoted as saying that if people were prepared to look to the future and plant trees for nothing then 'they should not be hounded for access'. Of course, planting trees 'for nothing' was never expected. Drabble himself owned a modest estate in Needwood and remained a pro-

- A final strand is entwined throughout, that of liminality. Forests are also sometimes considered as the ‘shadow of civilisation’, a place beyond normal law, magical, mysterious, and at times menacing in the imagination.¹⁰ Forest Law did indeed make the medieval forest a place outside the usual laws that governed the land, governed by its own rules, and from childhood, fairy tales prepare us for the forest to be a place of difference and otherness. Forests are themselves, as tree-places, locales of liminality by their very nature, and different ontological ‘rules’ apply within them.¹¹

The exploitation of forests for millennia has resulted in Britain having low levels of tree cover, 13% of land area in the UK compared to around 35 per cent in the EU, with England at about 10% and Northern Ireland even lower at 8 per cent.¹² Following the announcement of the National Forest and the 10 Community Forests in the government white paper of 1990, forest cover continued to rise in the UK, from a total of 18,000 hectares in the last decade of the twentieth century, a further 11,000 hectares in the first decade of the twenty-first century and by 2015 another 17,000 hectares had been afforested (see figure 2).

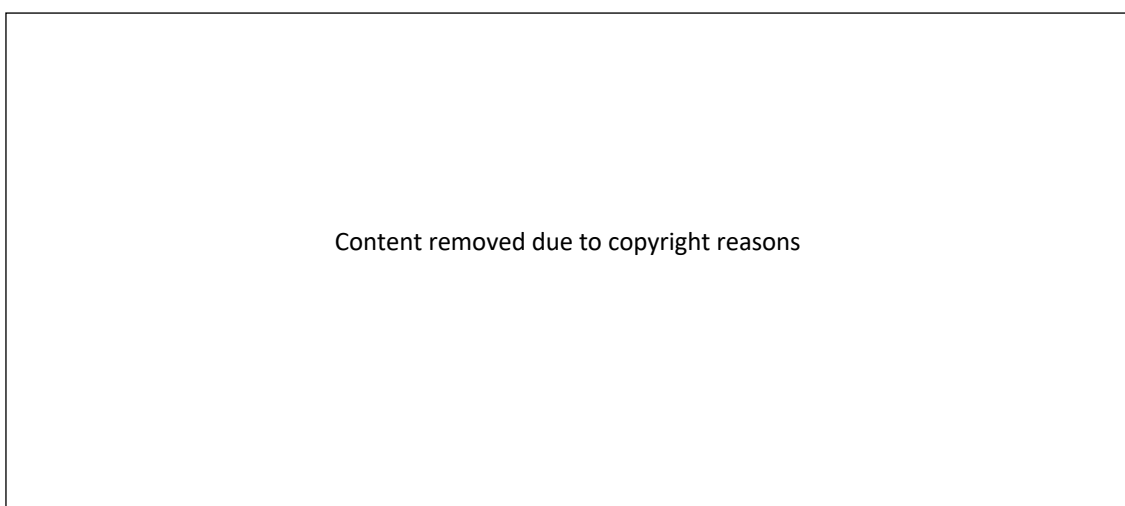


Figure 2. Annual Changes in forest area, 1990-2015. Source: Forest Research.¹³

Figure 3 shows tree cover across Europe from the 2015 survey, and despite recovering somewhat from the previous decade’s steep decline in tree cover, the United Kingdom still falls into the second lowest categories of countries’ afforestation. Only Iceland has fewer trees.¹⁴

environmentalist until his death in 2007. See an obituary here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2007/aug/02/broadcasting.guardianobituaries> Accessed 1st December 2020.

¹⁰ Harrison. R.P. *Forests: The Shadow of Civilisation*. University of Chicago Press 1992 especially chapter London versus Epping Forest.

¹¹ A discussion related to this arose recently during the planning of woodland management with a local conservation volunteer group, how to best manage the space so as to make it wildlife-friendly but open enough to encourage visitors and not appear frightening. Pers. Comm. Email exchange with Dorothy Morson, 21st-25th November 2020 (COVID-19 restrictions making in-person meetings virtually impossible).

¹² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-41551296> (Accessed 7th November 2020).

¹³ <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/forestry-statistics/forestry-statistics-2018/international-forestry/annual-changes-in-forest-area/> (Accessed 7th November 2020).

¹⁴ <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/forestry-statistics/forestry-statistics-2018/international-forestry/forest-cover-international-comparisons/> (Accessed 7th November 2020).



Figure 3. Forest Cover, international comparisons 2015. Source: Forest Research.

Tree cover in the National Forest area in 1990 was at six per cent, with the area that became known as the Heart of the Forest at less than one per cent. The change since then has been dramatic and tree cover across the Forest now stands at around 21 per cent, the target eventually being one third afforested. To understand the scale of the work required, a series of Landscape Character Assessments were undertaken in 1991-1992 by the Development Team which had been appointed by the Countryside Commission to undertake the work of planning and implementing the initial stages of the Forest. First though the area of search needed to be addressed and the boundary of the Forest defined. The process of drawing up the eventual Forest boundary is discussed in chapter one but the repercussions of that, and confusion too, to an extent, continue to be felt.

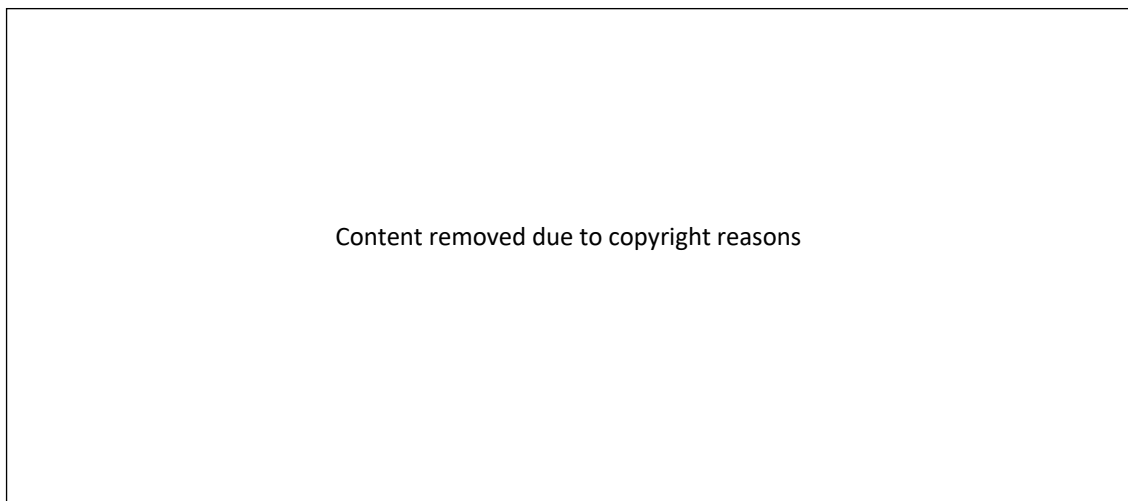


Figure 4. The National Forest boundary in 1990 with tree cover at around 6%. Source: The National Forest Company.¹⁵

Figure 4 demonstrates the approach favoured by the National Forest Company of a mosaic of scattered woodland across the area, with eventually, green linkages between them. This approach was at least partially dictated by a mixture of opportunism and planning, land that needed immediate attention through the restoration of worked out industrial sites, and whatever land became available through the Tender Scheme.

¹⁵ <https://www.nationalforest.org/about/our-history> (Accessed 6th November 2020).

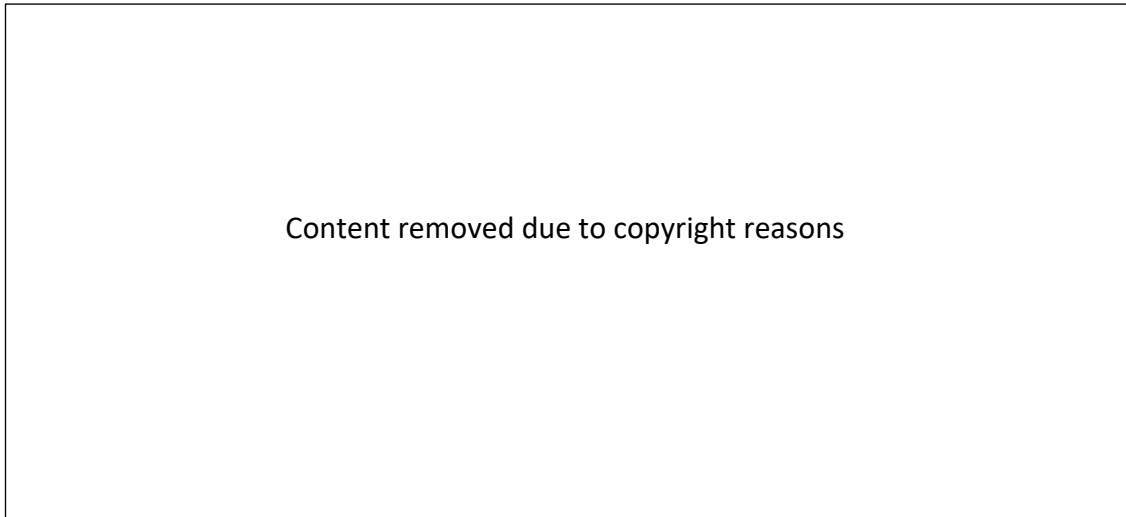


Figure 5. The National Forest in 2020, tree cover at almost 21%. Source: The National Forest Company.

The process of creating the National Forest involved Landscape Character Assessments (LCAs) of the area being made. These are examined in chapter 2, and in essence they are the process of identifying and describing variation in character of the landscape.¹⁶ The six LCAs themselves were created by the National Forest Development Team when the Forest was under development, and little more than a boundary drawn on a map:

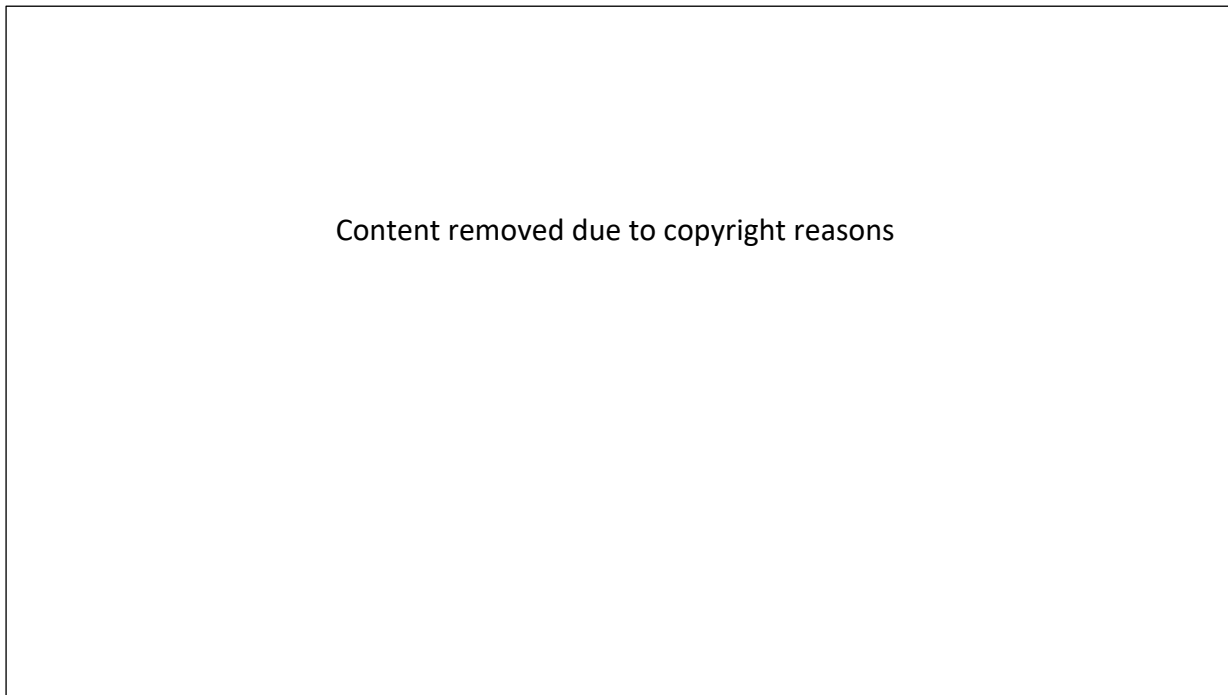


Figure 6. Landscape Character Assessment map of the forest zones in 1992¹⁷

The first of these divisions is defined by Needwood and the South Derbyshire Claylands. Needwood is itself an ancient forest that had been a private hunting preserve since the mid-thirteenth century, first under the de Ferrers family and later under the crown until it was

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/landscape-and-seascape-character-assessments> (Accessed 23rd May 2019).

¹⁷ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Strategy Audit 1994 – 2002* Moira 1994 p: 19.

enclosed following a parliamentary enclosure award at the beginning of the nineteenth century.¹⁸ On Christmas day 1802 the forest ceased to be recognised as such, all common rights were extinguished, and centuries of forest history were swept aside. Much of the remaining woodland was cut down and sold as timber, and the grid pattern of fields and the network of straight roads were created which is still visible today.¹⁹ It is now characterised by a scattered settlement pattern of villages and hamlets of timber framed houses and red brick farmsteads in pockets of remaining ancient woodland.²⁰

Plantation in the Needwood Forest zone has been designed to blend existing woodland with rural farmland.²¹ This region was intended from the outset to have an emphasis on quiet, informal recreation and also for high quality leisure developments within a woodland setting, whilst retaining the pastoral landscape character.²²

The second landscape character division is the Trent Valley Washlands, which are notably characterised by a wide flat flood plain with slow meandering rivers, interspersed with large areas of gravel extraction and other industrial workings.²³ This zone also includes the largest town in the forest, Burton-upon-Trent, which along with its industrial character also has some of the areas with the highest concentrations of deprivation in the forest.²⁴ The Trent Valley zone is also home to the National Memorial Arboretum, a visitor attraction in its own right with visitor numbers continuing to grow year-on-year, over 300,000 visitors visit per annum, which we will examine in detail in chapter seven.²⁵ The Trent Valley also includes grazing marsh, field ponds on agricultural land, extensive reed beds and meadowland.²⁶ The Trent Valley was identified as the prime focus for water-based recreation, provided mainly by the Trent and Mersey Canal and the Barton Marina leisure complex.²⁷ The valley is generally unwooded with thickets of shrubs fringing pools reclaimed from gravel extraction.²⁸

The third division is the Mease and Sence Lowlands, which have a strong rural character, with spired churches indicating nucleated villages in a well-managed agricultural landscape of rolling open fields, scattered hedgerow trees and rural lanes linking the settlements.²⁹ Forest creation is very clearly visible in this landscape and care has been taken to preserve vistas and according the NFC information, views towards the church spires have been preserved (although frustratingly, no information as to where these views are from is given), along with grassland habitat preservation and creation. The intention with this zone has been similar to

¹⁸ Parry, J. *The National Forest, Heritage in the Making*. Moira. The National Forest Company, 2006 p: 35.

¹⁹ Parry, *The National Forest, Heritage in the Making*. p: 36.

²⁰ The National Forest Company. *The Forest Strategy 2004-2014*. Moira, The National Forest Company 2004 p: 110.

²¹ *The National Forest Strategy Audit 1994 – 2002* p: 47.

²² *The National Forest Strategy Audit 1994 – 2002* p:47.

²³ The National Forest Company. *The Forest Strategy 2004-2014*. 2004 p: 110.

²⁴ DC Research. *Much More Than Trees 3. The Socio-Economic Impact of the National Forest*. Leicester, DC Research 2010 p:69.

²⁵ <http://www.thenma.org.uk/news-centre/news-releases/general/arboretum-welcomes-record-number-of-visitors/> (Accessed December 15th 2012).

²⁶ Parry, *The National Forest, Heritage in the Making*: p: 153.

²⁷ *The National Forest Strategy Audit 1994 – 2002* p: 47.

²⁸ The Countryside Commission. *The National Forest. The Strategy: The Forest Vision*. Northampton, The Countryside Commission 1994 p:16.

²⁹ The National Forest Company. *The Forest Strategy 2004-2014*. p: 110.

the Needwood area; to retain a quiet, peaceful character.³⁰ Parts of the landscape have historically been well-wooded, especially along river corridors and large areas of new plantation are evident which have been designed with irregular shape to break up the former geometric field patterns.³¹

The domination of former mining activity is apparent in the fourth landscape division, which includes part of the Midland coalfield, which has left a strong industrial character on the landscape. The spoil heaps and derelict land have provided many opportunities for new plantation although they do not dominate the landscape entirely; the vistas are open and rolling with agricultural land interspersed and interwoven with towns, villages and industrial sites.³² The settlements however, tend to be large and sprawling, especially the densely populated areas close to the coal deposits around Coalville and Swadlincote, while localised derelict sites gave the landscape a 'disturbed and fragmented appearance' when the Forest Strategy was published in 1994 and although in many cases this has been improved with plantation in the intervening years, the ribbon of houses connecting one settlement to the next gives the impression of continuous housing.³³ The increase in housing and industrial development, both planned for the future and currently underway, brings employment and homes to the forest but may also place strains on forest development.³⁴ The majority of the new building development is in the Midland Coalfield zone, as is much of the focus of forest plantation, the coalfield zone remains strategically important to the creation of a unified National Forest, being centrally located between the ancient forests to east and west.³⁵

The fifth landscape zone, Melbourne Parklands and Calke Uplands retains the designed emparked landscape of the eighteenth century. The forest plan in the 1994 strategy document was to enhance the historic character of the original plantation schemes and link individual woodland schemes that had been eroded over time with changes in farming methods and with devastation caused by Dutch Elm disease. The strong rural character to the area, along with the reservoirs at Staunton Harold and Foremark, and the tourist attractions of country houses at Calke and Staunton Harold meant that forest planning was based around retaining the rural flavour. Again, the planning was for high-quality leisure developments in a largely rural zone, with incentives for traditional land management practices.³⁶ The National Forest Company actively encourages the restoration and management of historic parklands along with the renovation of public parks within urban environments.³⁷

³⁰ *The National Forest Strategy Audit 1994 – 2002*, p: 48.

³¹ The Countryside Commission. *The National Forest. The Strategy: The Forest Vision*. p: 17. The National Forest Company. *The Forest Strategy 2004-2014*. p: 117.

³² The Countryside Commission. *The National Forest. The Strategy: The Forest Vision*. p: 16.

³³ As clearly demonstrated by a journey on the Arriva Bus service No 9A 'National Forest Hopper'. Parry, J. *The National Forest, Heritage in the Making*. The National Forest Company, Moira 2006 p: 13. The Countryside Commission. *The National Forest. The Strategy: The Forest Vision*. Cheltenham 1994 p: 17.

³⁴ The National Forest Company. *The Forest Strategy 2004-2014*. p: 94. Edge Analytics Ltd. *Population and Household Projections for South Derbyshire*. Edge Analytics, Leeds 2011. pp: 9-12.

³⁵ The Countryside Commission. *The National Forest. The Strategy: The Forest Vision*. p: 88.

³⁶ The Countryside Commission. *The National Forest. The Strategy: The Forest Vision*. p: 88.

³⁷ The National Forest Company. *The Forest Strategy 2004-2014*. Moira. Undated but inferred publication date 2004 p: 52.

The sixth landscape area is that of Charnwood, a former ancient forest with a rugged upland character; rocky outcrops and open heathland are a prominent feature of the higher areas, with dry stone walls enclosing the fields in the upland slopes and hedged fields on the lower slopes.³⁸

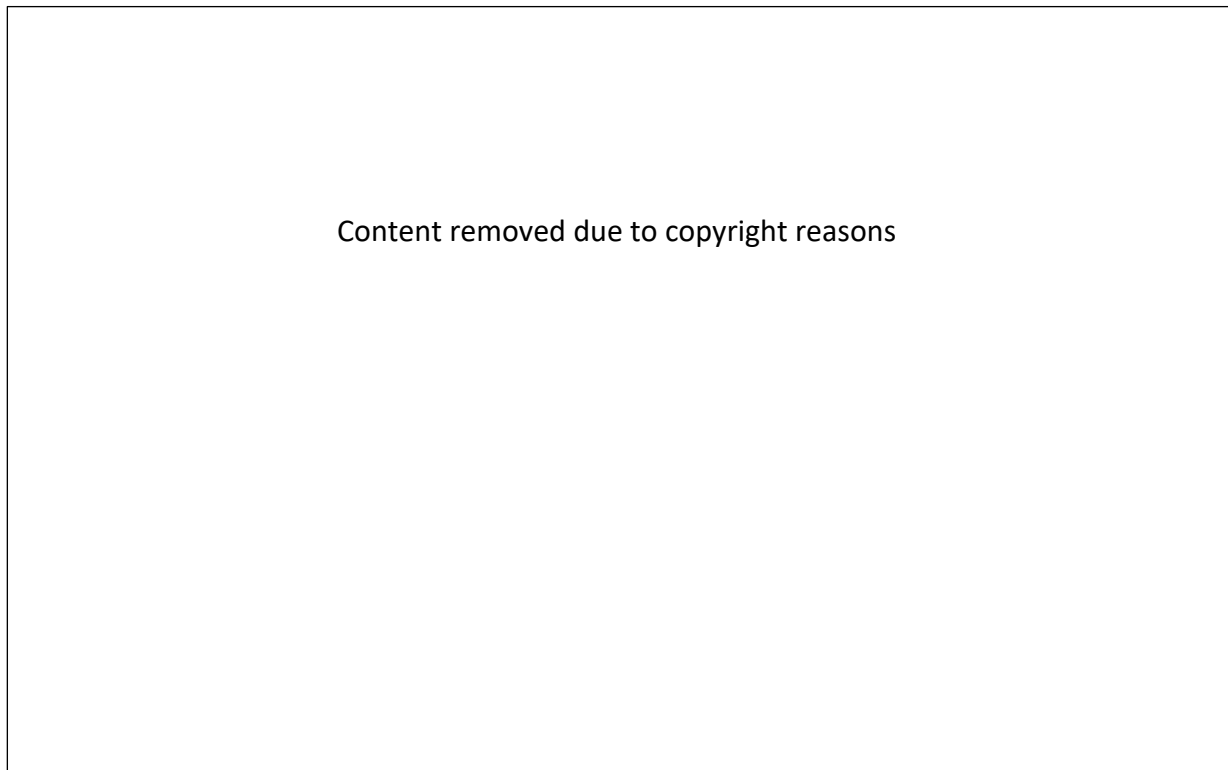


Figure 7. Excerpt from John Priors' 1779 map of Leicestershire.³⁹

The Prior map of 1779, along with other earlier maps reproduced in *Charnwood Forest: A Changing Landscape* show the hilly, upland nature of the Charnwood area, along with the emparked areas and the manorial rabbit warrens. Deer parks were common across medieval England and there were at least forty-six in Leicestershire.⁴⁰ There are remains of ruined priories and evidence of early bell-pits in the Coleorton area. There are several stone quarries in Charnwood which are generally well screened with trees and there have been several areas of grass and heathland brought into management.⁴¹

³⁸ The National Forest Company. *The Forest Strategy 2004-2014*. p: 111.

³⁹ Reproduced from Crocker, J. (ed) *Charnwood Forest: A Changing Landscape*. Loughborough Naturalists' Club 1981 p: 51.

⁴⁰ Squires, A.E. & Humphrey, W. *The Medieval Parks of Charnwood Forest*. Melton Mowbray, Sycamore Press 1986 p:8.

⁴¹ The National Forest Company. *The Forest Strategy 2004-2014*. p: 111. The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Strategy Audit 1994 – 2002*. Moira, inferred date 1994 p: 48.

Charnwood has recently adopted the status of Regional Park.⁴² Consideration was given to obtaining Geopark status (and was discussed with the British Geological Survey in 2009) and World Heritage Site status. After consultation it was decided that pursuing both was unnecessary and that financial considerations meant that Regional Park status was within the groups' budget for attainment. Regional Parks are well established entities in Europe and the concept of regional open spaces in the UK was pioneered by Patrick Abercrombie's 1944 Greater London Plan, Abercrombie having been associated with regional open spaces since decentralised regional planning committees were established after the Town Planning Act of 1925.⁴³ An interim steering group was created to develop the Regional Park status, and the Charnwood Forest Regional Park Partnership, led by the NFC and with County and District Councils, alongside Natural England manages the implementation of the project.⁴⁴ The creation of the Charnwood Regional Park was recognised as a requirement in the East Midlands Regional Plan, to further develop the distinctiveness of the area, and 'offering public benefit in terms of improved quality of life, increased biodiversity and supporting the Sub-Regional economy'.⁴⁵ One of the unplanned outcomes of creating a Regional Park in Charnwood is bolstering the sense of identity in an area with an already strong sense of local culture and distinctiveness; the East Midlands Regional Plan also recognised that local identity needed to be protected and promoted, and that 'culture is an inclusive concept embracing a wide range of activities, places, shared beliefs, values and customs, which contributes to a sense of identity'.⁴⁶

Industrialisation of the central zone had come about due to its geology; the clays proved to be excellent for creating sewage and drainage channels, and the coal measures that lay beneath were exploited to power the engines of industrialisation. To do so, parliamentary enclosures were enacted from the eighteenth century onwards.

One of the most important things that has shaped the character of the National Forest landscape are the patterns of enclosure over the course of the past centuries. Charnwood lies on the eastern fringe of the National Forest, an upland area of outcropping eroded Precambrian granite, slate and quartzite rocks, some of the oldest in Great Britain.⁴⁷ Its upland nature compared to much of the rest of Leicestershire meant that enclosure and development as farmland did not occur as early as elsewhere and there is evidence to show that the common land here too was fiercely defended. Charnwood Forest itself was a chance concentration of the wastes of four great manors of Groby, Barrow, Whitwick and Shepshed,

⁴² Minutes of meeting of *Charnwood Forest Regional Park Steering Group*, 27th February 2012.

⁴³ www.nwleics.gov.uk/files/documents/charnwood_forest_topic_paper_1_origins_and_objectives/Charnwood%20Forest%20Topic%20paper%201%20_origins_and_objectives.pdf (Accessed 18th October 2020). Wannop, U.A., *The Regional Imperative: Regional Planning and Governance in Britain, Europe and the United States*. Routledge, London 1995 pp:2- 3.

⁴⁴ www.leics.gov.uk/index/environment/countryside/environment_management/treeswoodland/charnwood_forest/charnwood_forest_regional_park.htm (Accessed 17th October 2020). Charnwood Forest Landscape Partnership. Unpaginated booklet published by the NFC. Moira 2019.

⁴⁵ Government Office for the East Midlands. *East Midlands Regional Plan*. The Stationery Office, Norwich 2009 p:137.

⁴⁶ Government Office for the East Midlands. *East Midlands Regional Plan*. TSO, Norwich 2009. pp:122 & 93.

⁴⁷ Reed, M.A. *The Landscape of Britain: from the beginnings to 1914*. Barnes & Noble, Maryland 1990 p:8.

together with a small portion of the Loughborough manor waste.⁴⁸ Leicestershire itself had very little waste, some 95% of the county being cultivated by this period.⁴⁹ Parliamentary enclosure of Charnwood was enacted in 1808 but it took a further twenty-one years to complete the terms of the award, although as evidenced in the map of 1754, some enclosure had already taken place.⁵⁰ Disputes, often violent ones, over creeping enclosure broke out in earnest and lasted from 1748 until 1751. As a result, right of common was proved in court for twenty-six neighbouring townships and villages and Charnwood remained unenclosed for a further sixty years.⁵¹

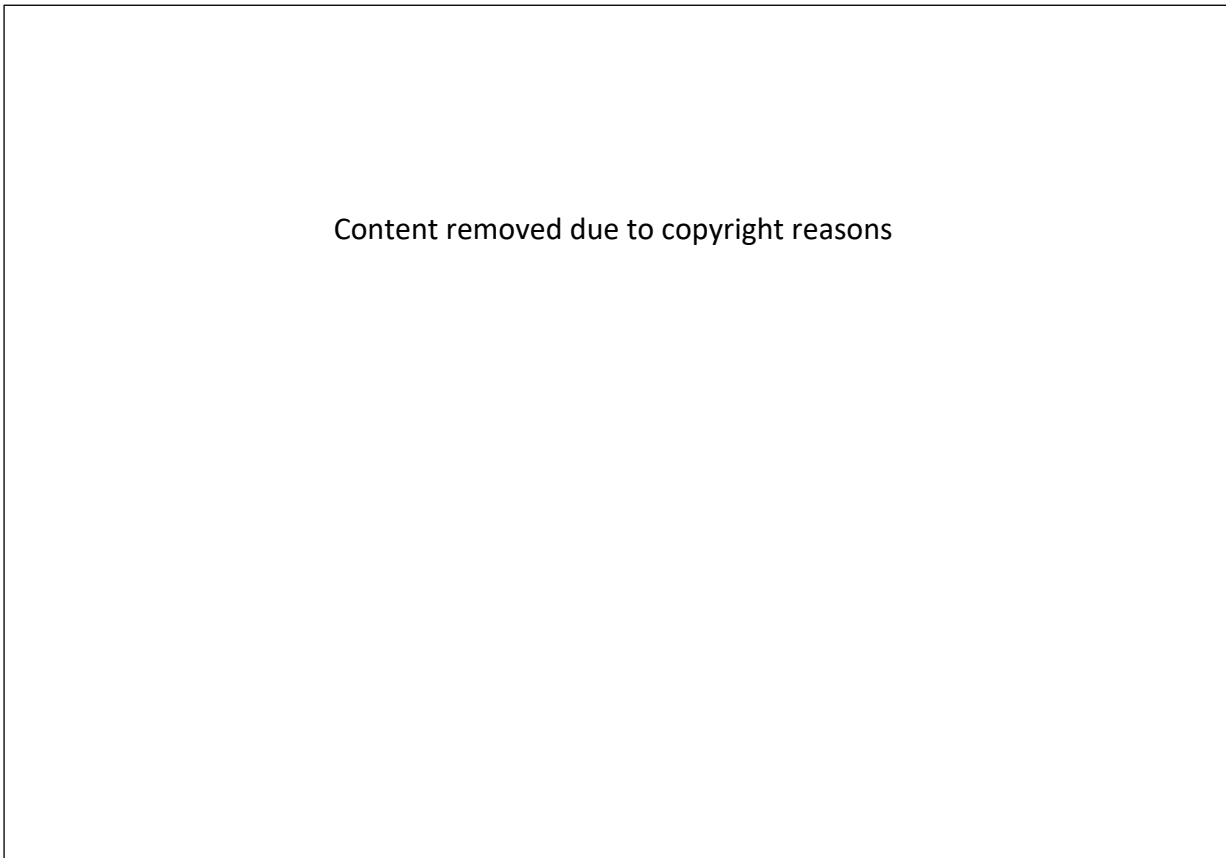


Figure 8. A plan of Charnwood Forest in 1754.⁵²

Victory was celebrated by the creation of a ballad, known as 'The Charnwood Opera', which was performed at the Holly Bush Inn, Charnwood and then apparently 'lost' for 200 years. The manuscript of *The Charnwood Opera* was rediscovered by a Nottingham book seller who

⁴⁸ Farnham, G.F. quoted in Millward, R. *A History of Leicestershire and Rutland*. Philimore, Chichester 1985 p:98.

⁴⁹ Hoskins, W.G. *Provincial England: Essays in Social and Economic History*. MacMillan, London 1963 p:150.

⁵⁰ Millward, R. *A History of Leicestershire and Rutland*. Philimore, Chichester 1985 p:96.

⁵¹ Wall, D. *The Commons in History: Culture, Conflict and Ecology*. MIT Press, London 2014 p:8.

⁵² Squires, A.E. & Humphrey, W. *The Medieval Parks of Charnwood Forest*. Sycamore Press, Melton Mowbray 1986 p:11.

alerted the ‘maverick antiquarian’ William Tate (1902-1968) to its existence.⁵³ Tate may not have realised the importance of the manuscript and after his death Tate’s collection, including the manuscript copy of *The Charnwood Opera*, was deposited at the University of Reading by his wife. It was rediscovered in 2005 by Gerald Porter and Jikka Tiusanen and discussed in their paper in the University of Pennsylvania Press the following year.⁵⁴

The western edge of the National Forest is framed by Needwood Forest, formerly an area occupied by Royal Forest, and prior to that it was owned by the Duchy of Lancaster. It had been a royal deer park and subject to Forest Law. Forest Law was administered by the woodmote, which in met in Tutbury castle, although more serious offences were tried at the county assizes.⁵⁵ Needwood Forest was famed for its beauty, the extent and size of its timber, and the richness of its pasture.⁵⁶ The entire enclosure of the forest and its sale had been attempted, and successfully resisted, in the seventeenth century. During the Interregnum, and then following the Restoration, both Parliament and Charles II had attempted the sale of Needwood to raise finances, both attempts were unsuccessful, defended by local gentlemen siding with commoners and raising a defence of the forest and commons against soldiers sent to break down the forest pale.⁵⁷

By the end of the eighteenth century however, the political landscape had changed. The Duchy of Lancaster, a royal palatinate since 1399 and owner of much of Needwood Forest, was not considered a rapacious landlord and was keen to act in what it saw as the best interests of the tenants. The value and preservation of wood for timber had increased during the eighteenth century whilst the value of deer parks for hunting had declined (although there were still some 1,500 deer in Needwood in 1801) and the pressure for the final enclosure of Needwood came from the freeholders themselves, with the Duchy trying to act fairly and on their behalf, granting land for a church and the endowment of a minister.⁵⁸ Parliamentary enclosure occurred after an award of 1801 and an act of 1805 had been passed, allocating forest areas to the crown, and a second award in 1811 allocating lands in the various townships of the forest to smaller landholders.⁵⁹ Common rights were extinguished on Christmas Day 1802, the post of master forester was disbanded and the forest roads drawn.⁶⁰ The beauty of the forest had been celebrated in verse by Francis N.C. Mundy (1739-1815) prior to its enclosure: *Needwood Forest in 1776*.⁶¹

⁵³ <https://blogs.reading.ac.uk/merl/2015/07/24/dicovering-an-unknown-opera/> (Accessed 22nd July 2019).

⁵⁴ Porter G. & Tuisanen, J. *Performing Resistance to the New Rural Order: An Unpublished Ballad Opera and the Green Song*. University of Pennsylvania Press 2006 *The Eighteenth Century*, 47(2/3), 203-232. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41468000> (Accessed 22nd July 2019).

⁵⁵ Baigent, E & Mayhew, R.J. *English Geographies 1600-1950*. St. John’s College Research Centre, Oxford 2009 p:26.

⁵⁶ Cox, J.C. *The Royal Forest of England*. 1905 p:137 Quoted in Baigent, E & Mayhew, R.J. *English Geographies 1600-1950*. St. John’s College Research Centre, Oxford 2009 p:25.

⁵⁷ Gottlieb, E. & Shields, J. (eds). *Representing Place in British Literature and Culture, 1660-1830, from Local to Global*. Routledge, London 2013 p:160. Fissel, M.C. *The Bishops’ Wars: Charles I’s Campaigns Against Scotland, 1638-1640* CUP 1994 pp: 275-277.

⁵⁸ Bendal, S. in Baigent, E., & Mayhew, R.J. *English Geographies 1600-1950*. St. John’s College Research Centre, Oxford 2009 pp:25- 36.

⁵⁹ www.staffordshire.gov.uk/leisure/archives/services/publications/EnclosureAwardGuideApr07-1.pdf Accessed 20th January 2017.

⁶⁰ Parry, J. *The National Forest; Heritage in the Making*. The National Forest Company, Moira 2006 p:36.

⁶¹ spenserians.cath.vt.edu/TextRecord.php?action=GET&textsid=34888 (Accessed 3rd March 2017).

With what fond gaze my eye pursues
Needwood, thy sweetly varying views!
Satyr, or Nymph, or sylvan God
A fairer circuit never trod.

And after its subsequent felling following parliamentary enclosure: *The Fall of Needwood* in 1808:⁶²

Ah, will not indignation rise,
As Fancy views, with weeping eyes,
Nymphs, Satyrs, Fauns, in cheerless row,
And Dian with a broken bow;
Hears Druid's groan and Dryad's shriek
Oft through the moonlight stillness break,
Yon prison'd cliffs their griefs repeat,
Dove howling hoarsely at their feet?

The difference between the defence of the forest by gentleman and peasantry in common cause in the 1640s and its enclosure in 1801 had a political edge. The argument had been lost by those representing the commons as a method of food production and as a way of life by allowing the argument to be dictated and framed by those supporting enclosure as 'improvement' by identifying enclosure with the national interest.⁶³ Commons were equated with 'waste' on the part of many larger landowners and farmers. Mundy, whilst expressing sadness at the passing of the forest does not take up the argument to defend the commoners' rights, nor to hold any party to blame, he too seems to accept that the argument against enclosure was lost and the end inevitable. As a member of the elite, he was unlikely to have common cause with the labouring poor anyway; his love of the forest as seen through his and other's poetic writing was aesthetic and spiritual rather than utilitarian and mundane.

⁶² Mundy, N.C. *The Fall of Needwood*. www.allpoetry.com/The-Fall-of-Needwood (accessed February 5th 2017).

⁶³ Neeson, J.M. *Commoners: common right, enclosure and social change in England, 1700-1820*. CUP 1996 p:51.

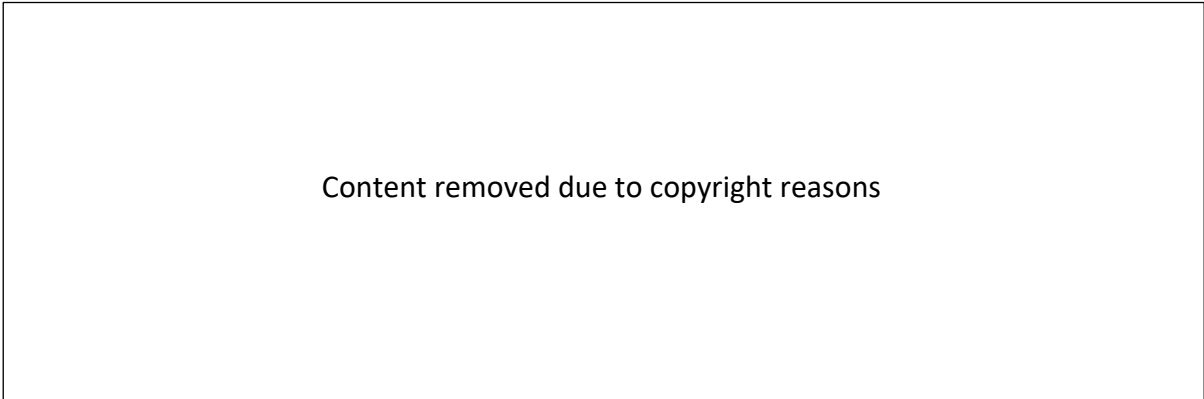


Figure 9. One of the maps created for the enclosure of Needwood held in Staffordshire Record Office. Author's photograph.

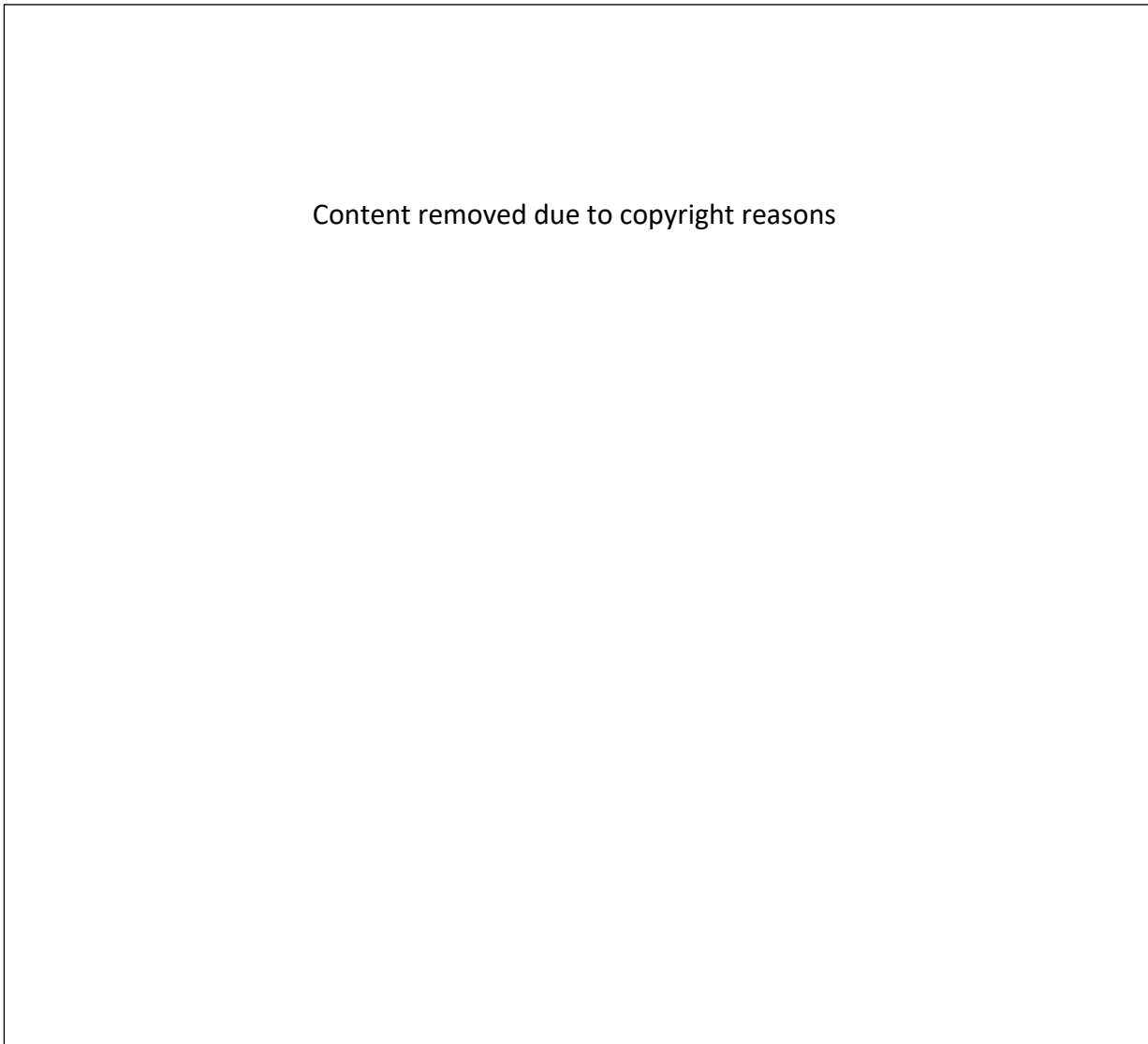


Figure 10. A copy of the Needwood Enclosure Act held in Staffordshire Record Office. Author's photograph.

As James Parry states, 'it is hard to dispute that in many cases it was the already rich and landed who benefitted most from enclosure'. Indeed, the disproportionate acreage of land given to the five main claimants demonstrates this case, the Earl of Stamford alone received almost 7,000 of the 16,000 acres enclosed, most of the remainder being divided by the other four main claimants.⁶⁴

The reinvention of the countryside brought about by the enclosures movements of the later seventeenth through to the nineteenth centuries resulted in the disruption of the link between humans and the natural world, and this change was often marked by social unrest and disorder. This unrest is a continuing theme throughout the history of enclosures and is still with us today; enclosure is at once profoundly social as well as spatial.⁶⁵ There are social, political, and economic ramifications associated with any changes to landscapes and access to the countryside.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, there is not space to examine those in detail, they have had a continuing effect across the Forest that lasts to this day and will, one suspects, continue to be a problem.⁶⁷ As we have already seen, access rights presented a problem from the very beginning and the subject was raised by the Rambler's Association during the consultation of 1990. Exclusion from the land is a concern created by the very laws that gave us the word 'forest', at once fencing in and privatising, whilst fencing out and excluding the populace at large. In providing financial incentives to a relatively small number of people to afforest a large area of the Midlands from the public purse, the money provided to the Government through taxation of the people that are excluded from those very areas is a difficult negotiation at times and the Development Team and National Forest Company since 1995 have worked to provide access to land under the Tender Scheme, with a high rate of success, as will be seen below. For how long that access is made available, with no permanent rights written into the tender scheme payments remains to be seen, gates may easily be closed and locked, barriers, fences and walls can easily be reinstated or rebuilt. Class, land ownership and inclusion/ exclusion still play a part across the Forest.

'Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down'⁶⁸

Much of the area in the central region of the Forest was also enclosed between 1750 and 1850 and developed either as farmland or, using the coal, clay and iron ore to be found on the Ashby Wolds, as its industrial heartland and which Arthur Young had commented upon in his 1791 *Tour of Britain* and a visit to local 'improver' Joseph Wilkes: 'Ashby Wolds [is] a tract of land absolutely waste of 2500 to 3000 acres; much of it cold land, with many rushes; some of it hilly'. The Ashby Wolds were enclosed by Act in 1800 following an application by Francis Rawdon-Hastings (1754-1826), 1st Marquis of Hastings and 2nd Earl of Moira in an

⁶⁴ Parry, J. *The National Forest; Heritage in the Making*. The National Forest Company, Moira 2006 p:68.

⁶⁵ Porter G. & Tuisanen, J. *Performing Resistance to the New Rural Order: An Unpublished Ballad Opera and the Green Song*. University of Pennsylvania Press 2006 *The Eighteenth Century*, 47(2/3), 203-232. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41468000> Accessed 22nd July 2019. Christophers, B. *The New Enclosure: The Appropriation of Public Land in Neoliberal Britain*. Verso London 2018 p: 11.

⁶⁶ Darby, W.J. *Landscape and Identity: Geographies of Nation and Class in England*. Routledge, London 2020 (introduction to chapter 4).

⁶⁷ Pers Comm. 12th November 2020. Conversation with local landowner who preferred to remain anonymous: 'Once the tender scheme funding dries up, I can close access to my land'.

⁶⁸ Frost, R. *Mending Wall. Robert Frost Selected Poems*. Penguin 1973 pp: 43- 44.

award in which he was 'entitled to the soil and minerals on or within the Common or Waste Ground'.⁶⁹ This enclosure too was not without its controversy and confrontation, with vandalism and attacks on the Earl's mining interests being recorded. Exploitation of the mineral wealth of the area went ahead and for nearly 200 years the landscape was a mixture of the farmland and woodland that had been the norm for the last 2,000 years giving way to opencast and deep mined mineral extraction industries, alongside their associated slag heaps, headstocks, factories and kilns. The woodland was in most cases felled for timber with only a remnant of the ancient woodland surviving, and that not intact, timber was harvested there too but allowed to regrow, the value of the woods forming part of an internecine squabble amongst the Gresley family during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁷⁰ As the twentieth century drew to a close, the woods around what would become the Heart of the Forest were decimated, the industry that had been the lifeblood of the people there had collapsed as the mines and pipeyards closed and the future was uncertain. Economic and environmental regeneration of despoiled the landscapes of North West Leicestershire and South Derbyshire were an urgent consideration for the various councils in the area. Coincidentally, and unbeknownst to each other, these regenerative plans chimed with an outline of a plan that was being formulated in the Cheltenham headquarters of the Countryside Commission. It was in this context that the concept of a national forest was developed, and it is this process which is examined in this thesis.

In order to analyse this, we need to understand the reasons why such a scheme of afforestation in the English lowlands was conceived and planned and how plans were altered as it developed. We need to appreciate how much this was encouraged by growing (and changing) environmental concerns and campaigning. The realisation grew that large-scale afforestation was (and remains) an essential response to combatting the unfolding environmental disaster and climate emergency. The rise in international environmental concerns is evident from participation in the first of the 'Earth Summits' and growth in public awareness of the pillaging of the natural world in the headlong rush for more and the ever-increasing consumption of wilderness and virgin forest for industrial uses, whether mining interest or food production. Although restoration of despoiled landscapes was a large part of the Development Team and, later, the NFC's brief, the plan for the National Forest did not include any attempt to prevent continued mineral extraction throughout the remainder of the 1990s and into the early part of the 21st century, in fact the Development Team and NFC took a circumspect or equivocal stance, leaving matters of continued opencast mining development to the various planning departments in the different counties. Opencast coal mining finally ended in the Heart of the Forest in 2006 and in the area adjacent to the that, not until 2019 when Minorca Coal Mine at Measham closed. Exploitation of mineral reserves in the Forest continues with sand and gravel extraction along the Trent Valley and granite from the quarry at Bardon Hill, near Coalville.⁷¹ At this early stage neither the Development

⁶⁹ Mammatt, E. *The History and Descriptions of Ashby-de-la-Zouch with excursions in the neighbourhood*. Ashby-de-la-Zouch W&J Hextall 1852 p: 53.

⁷⁰ Levy-Peck, L. *Women of Fortune: Money, Marriage and Murder in Early Modern England*. Cambridge University Press 2018 pp: 113- 118.

⁷¹ <https://www.staffs-wildlife.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-01/TTTV%20LCAP%20.%20Understanding%20TTTV%20%285%20of%205%29.pdf> See p:99. (Accessed 4th March 2021).

Team nor the NFC could be considered to be environmentalists in the sense that Friends of the Earth or Greenpeace might, although as we shall see, by 2020 that position has evolved somewhat. Other groups and individuals were consulted and involved in the creation and development of the central area of the Forest, focussed on the Ashby Wolds, a pragmatic approach was required and taken.

The thesis examines the various bids by different Midlands authorities in chapter one to locate the new forest in their region and how and why the eventual site was chosen. The Countryside Commission were astute in their management of the proposal to Government, garnering support from a wide range of groups, authorities and countryside interest organisations and by the time word filtered out, the idea had also fired the imagination of the general public. The strongest bids are explored in detail; the popular support for the successful candidate area and the sheer strength of public backing for it, underpinned and sustained by the local press and this contributed in no small way to the eventual 'victory', as it was heralded at the time. The theme of public access is revisited here. There were two basic options for the Countryside Commission to promote, acquisition of land after the manner of the Forestry Commission, whereby land is brought into public ownership, or a preferred second model, that the Forest would be planted by private landowners but with strong government support and administered by a public body. To the chagrin and consternation of the Rambler's Association, the Countryside Commission took the second option. To date, and although not without significant difficulties along the way, this option has been relatively successful, although the policy will be examined in detail throughout; public access to afforested land has significantly increased across the Forest area, although not without problems from time to time as we shall see, with scepticism up to ministerial level not the least of those.⁷² The publication of *This Common Inheritance* by Government in 1990 secured political commitment to the lowlands forestry project, the Commission now needed to make it a reality, although the work would fall to other parties.

Examination of the realities and scale of the commitment is undertaken in chapter two. The Forest area now had to be defined; the area of search was far broader than the eventual boundary, including a much larger area of Staffordshire and down to the Leicestershire county boundary with Staffordshire beyond the A5; there were areas that had suffered similar despoilment to the central region of the coalfield area of what became the National Forest and they had much in common that might also be addressed through landscape change on a huge scale. A Development Team was appointed, with Susan Bell as Director, with Sir Derek Barber (later Lord Barber of Tewkesbury) as Chair of an advisory board appointed by the Countryside Commission. The work of the Development Team guided and advised by the Board was as much political as it was concerned with planting, and the planning and inception of a new forest against a backdrop of economic downturn, political intransigence and occasionally scepticism was an onerous task. The breadth of work the team undertook by the time seems enormous with hindsight and occasionally as much instinctive, pragmatic and initiative as it was planned. The business plan was carefully planned though, with thought given to a wide range of requirements and activities, not least of which was active community participation on a number of levels and across a broad spectrum. The chapter considers community support and involvement alongside the work that went into persuading

⁷² See chapters 1 and 2 for further examination of these problems and debates.

landowners of the long-term benefits of tree-planting and the administration of a new tender scheme to ensure that landowners came forward in sufficient numbers to persuade politicians and government ministers of the support for the forest on the ground. Bell and her team had to overcome significant reluctance from farmers and landowners to persuade them to diversify. This included reassurance that there would be no automatic access or right-to-roam on private land, although they were encouraged to give permissive access to newly planted woodlands. The eventual launch of the Forest Strategy following a long period of public consultation was a significant step forward in confirming the Forest's future. It was never a *fait accompli*, and although this stage was successfully negotiated, there was still a long and rocky road to traverse. Part of this was the difficulty the Development Team had in pacifying the genuine environmental concerns of groups like the CPRE whilst supporting the continued exploitation of the area for its mineral assets. By September 1994 Government commitment was still vague and sporadic, with a constant battle to secure funding, and a public relations spearhead was launched by the Development Team with the aim of ensuring a positive commitment from Government, whilst not alienating the very people they needed to curry favour with. The chapter ends with the confirmation of Government commitment and support, and the announcement of a new company to drive forward the creation of the Forest.

After April 1995 the task of planting a vast new forest fell to the newly formed National Forest Company, the Development Team handed over the reins and became defunct. In fact, the new Company was made up of members of the former team, with a Board of directors to assist in the task. This continuity was viewed as vital by the Countryside Commission to be able to function properly and to administer the by now oversubscribed bids to the new National Forest Tender Scheme. The Company realised that it would need to purchase *some* land to be able to create forest as quickly as possible, although it was keen to be seen not to be forcing landowners to sell or have land compulsorily purchased, the fledgling forest needed farmers and landowners to understand that the Tender Schemes were not a coercive or underhand buy-out through secretive means. Connections to the Country Landowners' Association (CLA) through the new CEO, and the chairman of the Board of Directors helped enable them to do this, and this connection was significant in securing confidence with landowners and farmers in the initial stages of the development of the Forest. Close organisational links between landowners and government and governmental departments are nothing new of course, as demonstrated by Charles Watkins' examination of the Forest Parks and National Parks movements of the 1920s to 1950s in his *Trees Woods and Forests: A Social and Cultural History*, and neither is lobbying government, which the CLA declare as one of their key objectives on their website.⁷³

The Forest needed a focal point beyond new woodland plantations, the first coming through South Derbyshire District Council and Forestry Commission with the purchase of a farm at Rosliston in South Derbyshire. SDDC developed the area around the farm buildings as a visitor centre whilst the Forestry Commission planted woodland on the wider farmland. A new visitor centre at the former site of National Coal Board land in Moira saw the first visitor centre in Leicestershire, followed by a much larger development adjacent to it at what

⁷³ Watkins, C. *Trees, Woods and Forests; a Social and Cultural History*. Reaktion Books, London 2014 pp: 234-237. CLA website information: <https://www.cla.org.uk> (Accessed 6th June 2020).

became the Conkers visitor centre, owned by the Heart of the National Forest Foundation (later the National Forest Charitable Trust) and run on their behalf by a private management company, in an effort to encourage visitor numbers. Numbers of another kind began to dog the new company, those of planting targets. It quickly became clear that early forecasts for the numbers of trees planted per annum had been overly optimistic by around twice the number that could be achieved, and that these targets would be missed, year on year. Susan Bell argued for the reduction of these numbers as publicly as she could. The press were not kind and a number of quite negative articles had to be fought and argued against by Bell and the team and the credibility of the entire project was under threat.

The idea that the NFC could eventually become a charitable organisation instead of an NDPB was again put forward and held in abeyance for the future. The Heart of the Forest Charitable Trust was formed to manage the development of a forest park around the former sites of coal and clay mines at Moira and the Ashby Wolds in 1997 in what was to become the Heart of the Forest. An Implementation Plan for the continued planting and development of the Forest was keen to involve local people as 'key players' and a new forum was formed based around the development of the Ashby Wolds. The Wolds was an area still mined for its mineral deposits, coal and clay, and after 1990 all of this was in the form of opencast mining. The Ashby Wolds Regeneration Forum was formed in 1992 and by 1995 had published a regeneration strategy for the Wolds. The strategy was pragmatic, recognising the requirements for landscape restoration and regeneration alongside the need for economic and social regeneration following the collapse of the area's employment base. The successes of the Forum were eventually recognised at national Government level and by the award of the 2001 Silver Jubilee Award from the Royal Town Planning Institute. The Forum wound down its activities in 2010 and transitioned to a new forum based on requirements for the future and that action and the resulting partnerships are considered, with arguments and recommendations for future partnership working.

The Forest contains a number of towns, deliberately so, the linking of east and west naturally takes them in, but the largest town, Burton upon Trent, might easily have been avoided so the decision to include that is dwelt on. Burton includes some very deprived areas and despite the success of the Forest as an economic multiplier, these have remained, and space is given over to a discussion on this subject; how the failure of the bid for an urban forest put back the inclusivity of Burton within the Forest proper dramatically and of the plans for Burton's future by bringing the Forest into the heart of the town using the Trent Washlands, a wide floodplain to the east of the town proper. This space has been used as a recreation ground since the later nineteenth century and through an examination of Burton's green spaces since the mid-Victorian period we will see just how important the Washlands are to the availability of public open space within the town.

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Figure 11. Map showing the Transforming the Trent Valley Project.⁷⁴

Flooding has long been a feature of Burton life and the Trent Washlands Project, itself part of a larger Transforming the Trent Valley project, a £4.7 million project covering a stretch of the Trent and short sections of its tributary rivers the Tame and the Dove, from Rugeley to Castle Donnington. According to the *Transforming the Trent Valley* website: 'Transforming the Trent Valley is a partnership project of 18 organisations working together to restore and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the Trent Valley, with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust at the helm'.⁷⁵ The project lead is with the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, and the introduction of beavers by the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust at its site at Willington falls within the project area. I argue that the Trent Washlands Project could be the catalyst for the integration of Burton on Trent into the Forest. Support and advertisement of the project will be required, and eventually Burton might take on the mantle of 'Capital of the National Forest' that it has long pretended to. The funding bid that could have integrated Burton upon Trent properly into the Forest failed in 1996 and the consequences of this have been long-lasting, and I argue that subsequently the town has rarely felt or seen itself as part of the wider forest. Swadlincote, by contrast, did have a successful bid and went on to create a successfully integrated urban forest. Consideration of the proposals in the Trent Valley Project will address the failure of the later 1990s and bring the Forest into the heart of the town, and

⁷⁴ <https://www.thetrentvalley.org.uk/area.php> (Accessed 9th November 2020).

⁷⁵ <https://www.thetrentvalley.org.uk/index.php> (Accessed 9th November 2020).

recommendations for better-planned integrations in other landscape-scale projects in the future are argued for.

Swadlincote planned and planted its own urban forest, *Swadlincote Woodlands*, on a former industrial wasteland quite early in the Forests' development and is now reaping the benefits. Swadlincote woodlands integrates housing and woodland plantation with open green spaces, all-weather footpaths and a childrens' play area. Once the financing of the management came to an end, a biodiversity study was undertaken to help give direction for The Conservation Volunteers to plug the gap using local volunteers on conservation action days to try and upkeep the site. Community involvement had been intended and planned for but to date has never been successfully achieved.

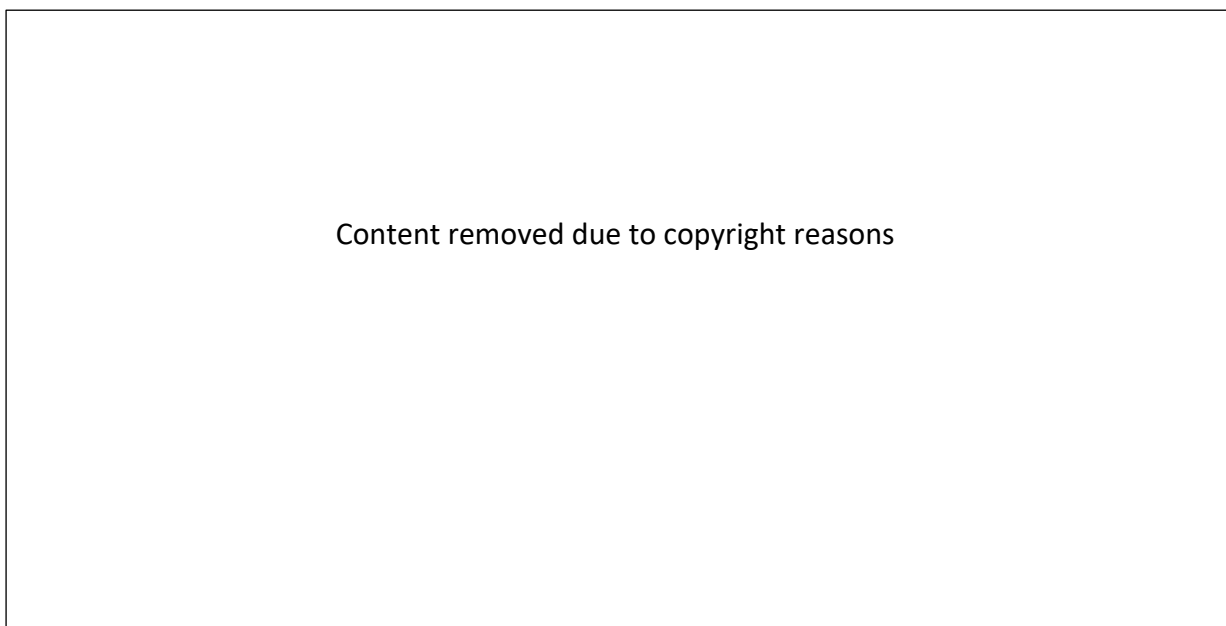


Figure 12. Swadlincote Woodlands in 2020. Photo credit: Andrew Richards.

Coalville too has its own late Victorian formal park and modern urban forest of some 7.7 hectares, approximately half of which is under tree canopy, with the other half comprising mixed grass and wetlands, which is considered to have made a significant difference to the area, connecting it through a series of green linkages to the wider Forest. Coalville borders Charnwood and this is readily accessed from the east of the town. The benefits and difficulties of including urban areas within a forest weaves itself through the story of the Forest, along with the different approaches to integration with the Forest taken by civic leaders.

Susan Bell had been part of the Forest's planning and development since its inception and had created a successful team, battling her way through political difficulties as well as practical ones in the creation and planting of the Forest. She had forged successful partnerships with the chairs of the governing board and created a strategy laying out the foundations for the following decade. Her replacement was Dr Sophie Churchill, who came to the company from her position as CEO of a regeneration project in the West Midlands. The focus of the first part of her tenure was on sustainable development, a broad-sweep phrase

that revolved around developing a sound economic base for the area through focussing on the contribution of the various strands of the Forest strategy to the United Kingdom Sustainable Development Strategy, and reporting that through *The National Forest: An Exemplar of Sustainable Development* in 2007. 2008 saw a world economic crash, the subsequent 2009 recession began to bite in the UK and in 2010 a new coalition government called the very existence of the National Forest Company into question. Reduced funding meant that staffing levels, already tight, had to be reviewed in the company. Planting continued across the Forest, targets continued to be difficult to achieve, and these problems and others that Churchill and the team faced are considered. Working with partners and the public had always been the planned *modus operandi* of the NFC, and the small-scale staff levels reflected this, consultation of 2008 was directed at both the general public and corporate and local authority partners. The glowing response to the consultation resulted in the Delivery Plan of 2009, a mid-term strategy review that energised the planting strategies foreseen by Churchill and her colleagues at the NFC and assisted in the political difficulties that came after. Political problems were not the least of the concerns, tree diseases began to appear in the UK from the continent and have begun to take their toll in the Forest. The strategy of experimentation in tree types resistant to climate change begun in the 1990s may well also help the Forest's survival in the face of diseases too. A further change of leadership of the NFC and the creation of Churchill's open-ended 2014-2024 Strategy for the Forest, is taken up in the concluding chapter.

The effect of linking the remnant ancient forests of Needwood and Charnwood through the post-industrial coalfield areas and farmland in between, including a small number of towns and urban areas, was to have consequences beyond landscape change, not the least of these being the change to the identity of the various people of the Forest area. Identity itself and identity change is considered, alongside how trees are a catalyst for that change. The connection between humans and the natural world is a fundamental one so changes to the landscape, whether that be on a vast scale or as small as change to street trees in an urban setting can have dramatic effects, as is noted through the discussion on the activities of HS2 contractors and the actions of Sheffield City Council in their *Streets Ahead* project and the repercussions of both. That HS2 is allowed to destroy or carve through ancient woodland is an incredible state of affairs, whichever side of the argument for or against its creation one stands, 'the loss of even the smallest scrap of ancient woodland should be counted as a national tragedy'.⁷⁶

The National Forest has been overwhelmingly positively received by locals and time is spent considering the reasons for this and the ramifications of this effect on how trees and tree places are used in the creation of the various identities across the Forest. The recent understanding of how woods and forests are utterly interconnected, so much so as to start to think about how a forest may be viewed as an entity in itself rather than as a group of individual trees gives pause to preconceptions about the natural world and how non-human entities have agency to act upon and within it. Nature connectedness has benefits that have recently begun to be recognised, along with the positive medical outcomes associated with pro-environmental behaviours. Ecocritical approaches to the natural world are discussed,

⁷⁶ Fiennes, P. *Oak and Ash and Thorn: The Ancient Woods and New Forests of Britain*. Simon & Schuster London 2017 p:14.

and links considered between environmental studies and the world's religions and the rise in western cultures of eco-spirituality and how they are connected (or otherwise) to beliefs of indigenous cultures from around the world.

Local new and resurrected 'traditions' connected to the Forest's development and growth have begun to emerge over the last decade or so and these are examined as the trees mature into a discernible Forest or variety of connected tree-places. The LCAs described above contained distinct identities within them, some have begun to be lost or subsumed within a newer, emerging Forest identity; others have strong local associations that continue to thrive. The difficulty the National Forest Company has with its own identity and connection to the Forest is also scrutinised; the NFC has had difficulty at times letting go and allowing the inhabitants of the Forest to be just that, people with a Forest identity, and themselves are confused over whether the Forest is a geographical area or whether the NFC as an institution *is* the forest. The NFC do acknowledge their position and recognise that locals must feel they are part of the Forest and can influence decisions and its creation. The Greenprint created for the vision of the future addresses these concerns.

The final chapter draws together the threads woven throughout the preceding chapters and summarises what the National Forest has come to stand for. It argues that it demonstrates how care for the environment and environmental restoration can be achieved after generations of exploitation of the natural world. The National Forest shows how landscape change on a vast scale can work given the political will, how multi-purpose forestry with widespread public access is a viable and desirable objective, and that sustainable development can and does work. This case study of the Forest's development demonstrates how people everywhere – regardless of their political affiliations – can adapt and change identity to a new and more environmentally aware one as demonstrated in the scramble for the 'green' vote at the last general election. The case study shows how other considerations for the future become essential to keep in mind: what happens if we do not change our behaviours? How can we begin to link forestry across the Midlands and beyond? The NFC either cannot or will not contemplate extending the National Forest boundary for reasons discussed in the chapter but green linkages can serve to connect it to the wider realities of the requirements of combatting the climate crisis and recognising and using *edgelands* may help to serve this purpose. Attracting ever greater number of tourists to the Forest brings its own problems too. It is intended by the NFC that the Heart of the Forest will become 'an established and sustainable visitor destination, serving both residents and visitors, set within maturing woodlands'. To this end a competition was announced on January 2020 for a design team to create a masterplan to this end, which will be 'based on the *Greenprint* themes of creating a low-carbon and sustainable economy, forming an environment resilient to climate change and the creation of a National Forest sense of place'.⁷⁷ Although a sense of déjà-vu seems pervasive here, in actuality this position is the continuation of a key strand of the company's mission from the outset, to create a new economic base through a tourism economy that reflects the requirements of sustainable development and environmental balance. The company has always been focussed on more than tree planting and the *Greenprint* makes that very clear, it really is a bold statement of how to achieve or make the

⁷⁷ <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/competitions/competition-heart-of-the-forest-masterplan> (Accessed 7th November 2020).

attempt to achieve a carbon neutral future. The link to the wider world is vital here. The NFC must needs focus on its charge but it cannot do so in isolation. The connection to the wider world and the continued creation of a leisure industry give pause for thought on how those tourism pound notes (and feet) ought to arrive in the area and how that is managed. Further integration of, for example, the National Memorial Arboretum as a tourist destination, or Burton-upon-Trent as a key town in the Forest are surely desirable, even vital requirements in the future of the Forest. Micro-plastics have become recognised as an invidious problem worldwide and a case study of the result of using plastic tree guards in their millions to protect saplings as they grow is examined and critiqued. It is unfair to criticise the NFC and partner organisations when they were acting in good faith and with the information available at the time; now we begin to understand the depth of the problem then new plans must be made to remove those millions of tree guards from the environment and to reflect and readjust policy in light of this. Recommendations from this thesis for future projects of this and greater scale are presented.

Having witnessed landscape change on such a large scale and to a degree that is remarkable by any standards, it seems uncharitable to criticise the motives and actions of the National Forest Company and its partners in the creation of the Forest. Former CEO Sophie Churchill was right, however, to recommend keeping oneself at arms' length so as to be able to write a history that is as objective and non-partisan as possible, at least as far as the National Forest Company itself is concerned.⁷⁸ In writing a history of the creation of a project of this scale and national importance, a non-partisan outlook has, in reality, not been entirely possible, nor entirely desirable. The NFC does not always get everything right, but it is always willing to learn from past mistakes; the calibre of its employees is high, their number is small, and keen to get the job done. The NFC breeds an ethos of commitment. Many of the people there have gone out of their way to help in the writing of this history, some have become personal friends along the way. The individuals at the NFC, the NFCT and partners in the local authorities and beyond, volunteers in the community, or just those who have travelled from afar to plant a tree, are dedicated and willing participants in a project that few of us alive today, in reality *none* of us alive today, will live to see in its full, majestic, arboreal glory.

Importantly though, we were there at the beginning, 'taking the road less travelled, and that has made all the difference'.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Pers. Comm. Conversation with Sophie Churchill in November 2012 discussing the possibility of a research support grant from the NFC.

⁷⁹ To paraphrase Robert Frost in *The Road Not Taken*. 1916. Hamilton, I. (ed). Frost, R. *Selected Poems*. Penguin, London 1973 p: 77.

1. The Midlands Forest: a concept for a new relationship with the environment.

This chapter considers the background to the creation of the National Forest from its conception in the offices of the Countryside Commission in Cheltenham in the mid 1980s to the announcement of the new Forest and Government commitment in 1990. The chapter also argues that against the backdrop of economic change under a right-wing government the early history of environmentalism as a concept and as an international movement, informed, encouraged and persuaded the Countryside Commission in their endeavours to persuade the Government to make sweeping changes to forestry policy, and how at times they walked a fine line between conservation and environmentalism. Conservationism and environmentalism are not one and the same and are not necessarily mutually conducive, either politically or environmentally; in broad terms conservation tends towards preservation and enhancement of the natural world, whereas environmentalism seeks to reverse the effects of ecological destruction of the biosphere wrought by increased industrialisation and therefore has political concerns.⁸⁰ The politics of environmentalism often lead to actively pursuing the creation of a just and equitable society that balances human needs with those of the natural world. As such, clashes with capitalist doctrine are inevitable, although moves towards principles of sustainable development during the 1980s and beyond seem to provide a possible middle way. By combining the requirements of fair, objective and egalitarian environmental policies with the requirements for energy use and continued development by consumerist and capitalist societies, the principle of sustainable development was conceived and defined in the Brundtland Report of 1987.⁸¹ Environmentalism has grown to become an international concern and international environmental groups have developed to counter unfettered consumption of the natural environment and to promote the political agendas of the green movement. Environmentalism often clashes directly with agribusiness and politics, in both free-market economies and closed markets of right- and left-wing ideologies.⁸²

In the early to mid 1980s the Countryside Commission were at the vanguard of the environmental considerations in the UK with some 'very good policy thinkers' who were leading the way in developing a response to the growing environmental movements' call for a radical shift in approach to the environment, both nationally and internationally.⁸³ There had been a gradual shift in the wider public opinion throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, away from the post-war policy of maximisation of food production at any cost. This approach to food production had been a necessity during the lean years of food rationing during the Second World War and immediately following the cessation of hostilities in Europe in 1945 but the forecast for continually increasing food surpluses in the 1970s, with regular newspaper stories highlighting the excesses of the then European Economic Community's (EEC) 'butter-mountains and wine-lakes', often juxtaposed against images of starving children

⁸⁰ Curt Meine quoted in the *Irish Times*: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/environmentalist-conservationist-what-s-the-difference-1.2608917> (accessed 26th April 2020).

⁸¹ Hinrichsen, D. *Our Common Future: A Reader's Guide - The 'Brundtland Report' Explained*. Routledge, London 1992.

⁸² Thomas Bernauer *et al* 2012 *Environ. Res. Lett.* **7** 015601 See: <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/7/1/015601/pdf>

⁸³ Pers comm; interview with Simon Evans, Director of Operations at the National Forest Company 23rd June 2017.

in sub-Saharan Africa.⁸⁴ The sea-change in public opinion in the early 1980s against modern agricultural farming practice altered the atmosphere in which rural affairs were discussed and a gradual acceptance of the notion that the traditional English landscape was under threat from a group who had hitherto been regarded as its protectors- the farmers- came to be regarded as received wisdom.⁸⁵ A growing public awareness of environmental change and of global warming at this time fed into a movement towards the necessity for environmental protection and gave momentum to the possibility of the plantation of a new forest in England on a scale not previously imagined.⁸⁶

The Countryside Commission was formed in 1968 as an advisory civil service body to the Department of the Environment, replacing the National Parks Commission which had itself been created under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949.⁸⁷ The Countryside Commission's status as a civil service function (until 1982) had partially undermined its role in rural debates, alongside its limited statutory and legislative powers. It had still not been entirely successful by 1985 because of its over-reliance on the personalities of its field officers but it had begun the process of changing its policy formulation towards an increase in public participation.⁸⁸ The Countryside Commission had attempted to demonstrate throughout the early 1980s that it embraced change and new ideas in the countryside and were at the vanguard of stimulating regeneration and woodland related activities, focussed on the possibilities of reusing derelict coalfields and other industrial and opencast sites.⁸⁹ Elements on the right of the Government were stigmatising many professions and institutions for a supposed reactionary stance and opposition to change and it was considered vital by the Commission to show a clear positive and welcoming attitude to new concepts for their brief.⁹⁰ The right-wing of the Thatcherite government first advocated and then influenced policy to withdraw state support from all private industry, and the Thatcherite administration's avowed ideological opposition to central government support for private industry encouraged it to consider abolishing the Countryside Commission altogether by 1985, even though many farmers and landowners were natural supporters of both the Conservative Party and the Countryside Commission. This position was of great concern for many, especially conservationists, environmentalists, and parties with vested interests in maintaining the *status quo* in the countryside.⁹¹

Despite this background of potential disbandment, the vision of the plantation of a very large new forest in the English lowlands began to take shape within the Cheltenham offices of the

⁸⁴ Corner, M. *The European Union: An Introduction*. I.B. Taurus Ltd. London 2014 p:126.

⁸⁵ Shoard, M. Quoted in Muir, R. *Approaches to Landscape*. Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan 1988 p: 280.

⁸⁶ Philander, S.G. (ed) *Encyclopaedia of Global Warming and Climate Change*. 2nd edition. Sage, London 2012 p:1152. Green, B. *Countryside Conservation: Land Ecology, Planning and Management*. London E & F.N. Spon 1996 pp: 118-9.

⁸⁷ Open University with the Countryside Commission. *The Countryside Handbook*. Beckenham, Open University and Crook Helm 1985 p:32. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/12-13-14/97/introduction> (Accessed 12th April 2020).

⁸⁸ Open University with the Countryside Commission *the Countryside Handbook*. Beckenham, Open University and Crook Helm 1985 p: 32.

⁸⁹ Pers comm; interview with Simon Evans, Director of Operations at the National Forest Company 23rd June 2017.

⁹⁰ Sheail, J. in Wade, P.M, Sheail, J. & Child, L. *The East Midland Geographer; The National Forest: from vision to reality*. Volume 21 part1. University of Nottingham 1998 p:13.

⁹¹ Sheail, J. et al. *The National Forest: from vision to reality*. p:14.

Countryside Commission around this time, when in December 1986 a series of questions were formulated as a development of an experimental programme by the head of its Conservation Branch: Could a new forest the size of, say, the New Forest or the Forest of Dean evolve under private ownership? Would a new body be required to provide overall direction and to raise funds? How might the Forest capture and hold public interest? At a brainstorming meeting in January 1987 consensus was reached that a feasibility study should be undertaken to understand the requirements of establishing a public open space of some 40,000 to 50,000 hectares, largely under trees and near a major centre of population. In terms of the English countryside this was a massive venture and would fail unless both highly ambitious and vast. The scale required would be needed in accommodating a topographical variety and mix of woodland types and it needed to capture the imagination of the general public and corporate enterprise. It was essential that agriculture could continue inside such a forest and that commercial timber production could develop over a longer timescale, partially as a source of funding.⁹² After some fifty-odd internal meetings the proposal had grown to a point where by July 1987 a project appraisal was requested of Roderick M. Hewitt, to report back by the late summer of that year.⁹³ Hewitt was influential and well-respected in all quarters, having recently retired from his position as Conservator at the Forestry Commission, and worked throughout August and September of 1987 to sound out the opinion of landowners on the potential forest, despite a difficult political background with, as yet, no consensus of opinion.⁹⁴ There was a growing outlook that the interwar plantation of vast swathes of single species coniferous forests by the Forestry Commission, although well-intentioned, were very far from most of the main population centres of England and were not necessarily ecologically useful or particularly helpful in their bio-diversity. Nor were these single- species woods and forests especially attractive to the leisure industry which was beginning to establish itself; a new lowland forest could help address a number of agendas.⁹⁵

The EEC subsidy of 'set-aside' farming, a supply control measure whereby producers could retire 15% or more of their land from arable rotation for a period of five years in return for an annual payment, gave rise to the idea that there could be a better use of unproductive farm land and diversification in farming practice.⁹⁶ Against this mixed political and cultural background, in 1987 the Countryside Commission published the policy statement *Forestry in the Countryside*, with the aim of demonstrating that a large scale forest could be created in lowland Britain, blending commercial forestry with ecological, landscape, and public benefit.⁹⁷ The report also included an acknowledgement that the twentieth century had witnessed an accelerated estrangement between the British population and forests.⁹⁸ The Commission went further: it proposed a vision of planting the new forest in the English Midlands and

⁹² Sheail, J. *An Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain*. Palgrave 2002 pp:170- 171.

⁹³ Copy of letter from the Countryside Commission to RM Hewitt in the National Forest Company archive, dated July 1987. NFC reference FOR 210, accessed 17th May 2012.

⁹⁴ See for example the discussion on forestry in the House of Lords debate of April 1988: <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1988/apr/13/forestry> (Accessed 12th April 2020)

⁹⁵ Pers comm; interview with Simon Evans, Director of Operations at the National Forest Company 23rd June 2017.

⁹⁶ OECD (2011) *Evaluation of Agricultural Policy Reforms in the European Union* OECD Publishing. p:123 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264112124-en> (accessed 23rd June 2017). Pers comm; interview with Simon Evans, Director of Operations at the National Forest Company 23rd June 2017.

⁹⁷ http://www.nationalforest.org/forest/whatis/how_it_began.php (Accessed 11th April 2020).

⁹⁸ Parry, J. *The National Forest; Heritage in the Making*. Moira. The National Forest Company 2006 p:149.

described it as ‘an extensive area (40,000 hectares) of multi- purpose lowland forest as a resource for the nation in the 21st and later centuries. It would be a major recreational and tourism resource. It would be a means of withdrawing a significant amount of farmland from agricultural production. It would generate linked commercial developments. It would enhance the landscape and wildlife interest in the area. In due course, it would contribute to the national timber supply’.⁹⁹

Resistance to large scale plantation came from a direction initially unsuspected by the Commission, that of the archaeologists, who were concerned about the rapid plantation of swathes of countryside and the potential destruction of sites. In the event, concern about forest creation on potentially sensitive historic and pre-historic sites took many years to fully allay, and it was with careful cooperative planning and understanding of the extended timescales involved that allowed the formulation of schemes to incorporate long term archaeological conservation strategies.¹⁰⁰ In 1987 though, that was still many years in the future.

The Countryside Commission were also eager to promote the greening of cities; there had been rising concern and awareness regarding the general health of the urban population along with consideration over town and city dwellers’ access to green spaces – woodland and forests in particular – but perhaps with the creation of increased access to public parks, urban forestry (which was new terminology at this time) and the greening of routes into cities that would take the first steps in allaying health concerns.¹⁰¹ News of Hewitt’s report prompted swift responses from Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire County Councils. The Director of Planning for Nottinghamshire County Council requested a meeting to discuss a joint experiment in ‘landscape restructuring’ centred on Sherwood Forest, and his counterpart in Leicestershire described their Countryside Action Programme and specifically the concept of a Leicestershire Forest, with an integrated package of environmental measure already underway in North West Leicestershire with finances and staff already committed. Sherwood Forest already had a leisure and tourism infrastructure in place and Leicestershire had Charnwood Forest, with increasing pressure of numbers on Bradgate Park, not far from Leicester city. Both counties immediately saw the potential and the opportunities offered by the Countryside Commission’s proposal and Leicestershire noted that the Programme offered ‘a dramatic opportunity to achieve regeneration’ in the failing Leicestershire coalfield on the border with South Derbyshire.¹⁰²

Published in December 1987, *Forestry in the Countryside* was the Countryside Commission’s policy document, the outcome of internal discussion which mooted the idea of a showcase national multi-purpose forest, which approved the reference to it being sited in the East Midlands, along with ten community forests located in and around some of the largest towns and cities in England. This was a considerable evolution of forestry policy in the United

⁹⁹ Countryside Commission. *Forestry in the Countryside*. Cheltenham 1987.

¹⁰⁰ Grenville, J. *Managing the Historic Rural Landscape*. Routledge, London 1999 p:107.

¹⁰¹ Pers comm; interview with Simon Evans, Director of Operations at the National Forest Company 23rd June 2017.

¹⁰² Sheail, J. *An Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain*. Palgrave 2002 p:171.

Kingdom¹⁰³ and was intended to bring people closer to forests generally and to have a showcase forest as a national exemplar, demonstrating the United Kingdom's commitment to rising environmental concerns.¹⁰⁴ A consortium of landscape consultants, economists and planners was appointed in October 1988 and its report hailed the Forest as 'a creative opportunity to establish a new landscape which future generations will come to love and revere, as they do other great national landscapes, such as the Lake District and the New Forest'.¹⁰⁵

With the publication of the policy document by the Countryside Commission, and appointment of consultants, local authority interest intensified. Leicestershire and Derbyshire had a problem on their shared boundary; the coalfields and extractive industries had left a scarred and damaged landscape and the County Councils of both had been attempting to find funding to deal with this. Staffordshire shared a similar problem on its border with Warwickshire in the coalfield area to the south-east of Tamworth. Preliminary discussions were held between the three County Councils of Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Staffordshire, with a view to inviting the consultants to consider a Forest that might extend from the Charnwood Forest in north-west Leicestershire, across through South Derbyshire and into South Staffordshire, thus addressing the problem of the despoiled landscapes and also with the wider public concerns around the general ongoing damage to the environment.¹⁰⁶

Awareness of these same environmental concerns and the recognition of a requirement for sustainable economic development fed into the *Brundtland Report*, also of 1987. *The Brundtland Report, or Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future*, also known in brief as *Our Common Future*, was produced by an international group of politicians, civil servants and experts on the environment and development on behalf of the United Nations and focused primarily on the needs and interests of humans.¹⁰⁷ It was also concerned with securing a global equity for future generations by redistributing resources towards poorer nations to encourage their economic growth. It was the wish of the Report that all human beings should be able to achieve their basic needs.¹⁰⁸ The Report encouraged further awareness of environmental concern and supported growing discourse around the sustainability of human intercourse with the environment in general. *The Brundtland Report* coined the phrase *Sustainable Development*; Resolution 42/187 of the United Nations General Assembly defined sustainable development as 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.¹⁰⁹ Building on this principle, the United Kingdom Government

¹⁰³ van Veenhuizen, R. (ed) *Cities Farming for the Future: Urban Agriculture for Green and Productive Cities*. International Development Research Centre, Ottawa 2009 p:439.

¹⁰⁴ Pers comm; interview with Simon Evans, Director of Operations at the National Forest Company 23rd June 2017.

¹⁰⁵ Sheail, *Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain*. pp: 171- 172.

¹⁰⁶ Sheail, *Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain*. p:172.

¹⁰⁷ Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: *Our Common Future*: See also Hinrichsen, D. *Our Common Future: A Reader's Guide - The 'Brundtland Report' Explained*. Routledge, London 1992.

¹⁰⁸ http://www.sustainable-environment.org.uk/Action/Brundtland_Report.php (Accessed 24th June 2017).

¹⁰⁹ United Nations, General Assembly, *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*, 1987.

devised its own strategy for sustainable development in 2005, *The UK Sustainable Development Strategy: Securing the Future* set out five 'guiding principles' of sustainable development:

- Living within the planet's environmental limits.
- Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society.
- Achieving a sustainable economy.
- Promoting good governance; and
- Using sound science responsibly.

To guide planners in the use of sustainable development and ensure a comprehensive strategy for England, the government created the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. The whole of the NPPF constitutes the Government's view of what sustainable development in England means in practice for the planning system. The NPPF states the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across the different objectives). Firstly, an Economic Objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity, and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure. Secondly, a Social Objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being. Finally, an Environmental Objective – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment, including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change; including moving to a low carbon economy.¹¹⁰

The continuing inclusion and importance placed on environmental objectives in the planning framework marked an ongoing change of approach to development and an awareness of environmental concerns in the United Kingdom. The history of environmentalism stretches back through the conservation movement at least into the 19th century, perhaps as a basic human response to rapid industrialisation, and the first recognisably modern conservationist was American nature writer Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862), who himself inspired Scottish born conservationist and naturalist John Muir (1838–1914). The two came to be the main sources of inspiration for conservation and preservation through their writing and through Muir's founding and first presidency of the Sierra Club. The Sierra Club led directly to the creation and then expansion of the American National Parks through pressure to strengthen national forestry policies and an increase in the number of parks for the preservation of areas

¹¹⁰ Department for Communities and Local Government, *The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)*, 2019, quoted in North West Leicestershire District Council *Local Plan Substantive Review: Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating Equality Impact Assessment and Health Impact Assessment) Revised Scoping Report* January 2020 pp:2- 3.

of outstanding natural beauty.¹¹¹ Muir persuaded American President Theodore Roosevelt of the need to create National Parks when the two were on a camping trip in the Yosemite Valley in California. Roosevelt went on to create sixteen wildlife monuments, fifty-one wildlife refuges and doubled the number of national parks.¹¹² Muir and Roosevelt were to clash badly over the planned building of a dam in the Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite, which inevitably ended with the creation of the dam. The president was concerned with conservation and the careful use of natural resources, Muir and the Sierra club were early environmentalists (although they would not have used the description themselves; the first recorded use as a term advocating the protection and improvement of the natural environment and especially as a movement to control pollution was not until 1922) and were concerned with preservation for the salving of the human soul through deep connection with nature.¹¹³ As will be seen, contention over land use and ownership is a common theme running through both the history of environmentalism generally, and this includes the National Forest. The National Forest Company has had to balance similar concerns at a local level within the National Forest; the decades old story of environmental concerns versus economics and conservation and the relatively new concept of what has become known as sustainable development; this approach attempts to negotiate the difficult dichotomy of economy versus environment trade-offs.¹¹⁴

British National Parks were somewhat behind the American lead, with the first being created in 1951, the Peak District National Park in Derbyshire. The creation of this first National Park was partly encouraged by the 1932 'mass trespass' on Kinder Scout, Derbyshire, as well as general campaigning by rambler's groups, the Council for the Preservation (later Protection) of Rural England, and other organisations. This mass trespass was described, on its 75th anniversary, as 'the most successful act of direct action in British history' by Lord Roy Hattersley, former Deputy Leader of the Labour Party and it was legislation passed by the Labour Government in 1949 that designated the Peak District as the first of Britain's series of National Parks.¹¹⁵ It also led to the formation of the *Ramblers Association*, who, amongst other activities are also a pressure group, or at least try to use their influence to bring about increasing rights of access to the general public in the countryside. The Ramblers Association involved itself in the National Forest from its inception, agitating for increased access to the Forest. The concept for British National Parks along the American model had been first proposed by the *Forestry Commission* in 1935, who opened their first Forest Park in Argyllshire in 1936, with others following that decade in Snowdonia and the Forest of Dean, which had hostels, campsites, information centres and forest trails. The Forestry Commission had been established in 1919 after the First World War to manage public forestry and replace stocks depleted by war and an accretion of general forest and woodland decline since the middle ages, they themselves replacing the nineteenth century *Commission of Woods, Forests*

¹¹¹ Information from a visit to John Muir's Birthplace Museum, Dunbar, Scotland. Visit date 28th September 2015. See also <http://www.jmbt.org.uk> (Accessed 2nd July 2017).

¹¹² Schneirov, R. & Fernandez, G.A. *Democracy as a Way of Life in America, a History*. Routledge, Abingdon. 2014 p: 166.

¹¹³ Schneirov & Fernandez *Democracy as a Way of Life in America*, p: 166 www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/environmentalism. (Accessed 2nd July 2017).

¹¹⁴ Paehlke, R.C. (ed). *Conservation and Environmentalism: An Encyclopedia*. Routledge, London 1995

¹¹⁵ Shephard, R.J. *An Illustrated History of Health and Fitness, from Pre-History to our Post-Modern World*. Springer, New York 2015 p:876.

and Land Revenues, who were, alongside other duties, overseers of the Crown's forest interests, which were still extensive at the time of their own formation in 1811.¹¹⁶

The fledgling Forestry Commission acquired hundreds of thousands of hectares of land during the 1930s, reaching a peak by the 1950s of circa 1.6 million hectares, falling to around 900,000 hectares by 2016.¹¹⁷ In 1968 the Commission appointed a Landscape Consultant, Dame Sylvia Crowe, and the public were given a 'Right to Roam' in Commission forests. Following further recommendations, conservation became a special responsibility, although still not yet developed into environmentalism as it is perceived today. The Commission's management policies came in for heavy criticism during the 1980s, with mixed messages coming from the Thatcher government; support and encouragement was given on the one hand, but public funds were cut, and forestry operations were specifically restricted on the other.¹¹⁸ The Commission had been at the forefront of international forestry experimentation and are highly regarded experts in the field today. It has been the policy of the Forestry Commission to give the general public access to its land, with the express intent of offering free and unlimited public access to large areas of land where people might enjoy walking over wide stretches of countryside.¹¹⁹

The concept of National Parks, most of which included woodland, was brought about by a number of factors. They had already been introduced in America and Africa in the late nineteenth century and the growing popularity of rambling, along with the recognition of increasing threats to amenity and wildlife stimulated further interest.¹²⁰ In 1928 Lord Bledisloe had written to the Prime Minister stressing the opinion that the Forest of Dean would be a valuable national asset if it were to attain national park status, and the following year the Council for the Protection of Rural England wrote to the new Prime Minister requesting an enquiry into the need for a series of national parks in Britain.¹²¹ A committee, the Addison Committee, was created and began work in 1929 to examine the proposed creation of national parks, completing its report in 1931 by advocating the establishment of a series of parks with three objectives; safeguarding areas of exceptional natural interest, improving access for pedestrians to areas of natural beauty, and promoting measures for the protection of flora and fauna. Leisure activities and health benefits were presented to the Addison Committee as additional reasons for establishing national parks, along with promoting the idea as stratagem for protecting wilder landscapes against development, whether against urban sprawl or the effects of continued industrialisation through quarrying.¹²² This notion of multi-purpose forestry was one that was to reappear again with the proposals for the creation of the National Forest, and again later throughout the strategies for the relevance and continuity of the Forest.

¹¹⁶ Evans, D, *A History of Nature Conservation in Britain*, second edition. Routledge. London. 1997, p: 57; <https://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/CMON-4UUM6R> Accessed 30th June 2017. Author not credited. *Common and Common Fields*. CUP 1887 p: 161.

¹¹⁷ <https://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/inf9-9ccc78> (Accessed 1st July 2017).

¹¹⁸ <https://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/inf9-9ccc78> (Accessed 1st July 2017).

¹¹⁹ Richards, E.G. *British Forestry in the 20th Century*; p:105. The word 'National' was removed from the Forest Parks when the National Parks as such were established in the 1950s.

¹²⁰ Sheail, J. *Nature in Trust. The History of Nature Conservation in Britain*. Blackie, Glasgow 1976 p:71.

¹²¹ Sheail, J. *Nature in Trust* p:72.

¹²² Sheail, J. *Nature in Trust* p:72.

The policy of public access and its contestation has a centuries-long history, fought by many people and organisations for a variety of reasons. Examples of these are legion, and include the anti-enclosures ‘rioters’ of the 16th century, the *Diggers* of the 17th century, the National Trust since the late 19th century, through to the CPRE and Ramblers of the 20th and 21st centuries. Established in 1895, the National Trust had grown out of the 19th century concern with social welfare and it was the belief of Octavia Hill, one of the Trust’s founders, that the urban poor should have access to the beauty of nature; following her involvement with the Commons Preservation Society and its successful defence of Epping Forest and Berkhamstead Common she wanted to provide ‘open air sitting rooms for the poor’.¹²³ Similarities can also be drawn between late 20th century forest schemes such as those proposed for a national forest and community forests within towns and cities and the 1919 *Forests, Woods and Trees in Relation to Hygiene* by the respected horticulturist Augustine Henry. Henry proposed the planting of urban forests to improve the health of urban dwellers, taking Birmingham as an example of a city that would benefit from the close proximity of trees, specifically to improve physical and mental health and wellbeing, alongside much needed improvements in the quality of water supplies.¹²⁴ Fledgling environmental awareness had grown throughout the 19th century following land enclosures and the development of the use of land for rearing game for hunting and the rise in shooting vast numbers of purpose-reared game birds and other animals either regarded as pests or vermin. This development was given impetus by the development of the double-barrelled, breech-loading shotgun along with central fire percussive cartridges, which made the killing of very large numbers of birds and mammals possible.¹²⁵

The late 19th and early 20th century saw increasing pressure on the countryside; more people had access through the rise in bicycle and motor car use and at the same time land development for housing and industrial uses through urban sprawl meant that conflict was inevitable. Five separate bills were put before parliament between 1884 and 1931 to attempt to secure access to mountains and moorland, and at the same time attempts to secure and establish long-distance footpaths across the country were made. Increasing numbers of people were spending more and more time in the countryside; following its formation in 1905 the Federation of Rambling Clubs could boast 40,000 members by 1931.¹²⁶ This was one of many associations and clubs in existence by this time and it was set to continue to increase. Representation of this multiplicity of different user groups was fragmentary and the notion that a single representative body began to be mooted, partly to represent the concerns of ramblers and others, partly to represent what was yet to become known as environmental concerns. The National Trust was unable to take on the task; despite the expectation by many, including its founders, that it should represent and fight battles to protect amenity, wildlife and important buildings, it was already overstretched, and resources were not able to be diverted to the task.

¹²³ Hayes, N. *The Book of Trespass: Crossing the Lines That Divide Us*. Bloomsbury, London 2020 pp: 276-7. Cowell, B. (2002). The Commons Preservation Society and the Campaign for Berkhamsted Common, 1866–70. *Rural History*, 13(2), 145-161. doi:10.1017/S0956793302000080. Waterson, M. The National Trust, the first hundred years. BBC Books. London 1994 pp:30-31.

¹²⁴ Henry, A. *Forests, Woods and Trees in Relation to Hygiene*. Constable & Co. Ltd. London 1919 (Digitised Google download).

¹²⁵ Sheail, J. *Nature in Trust* p:3.

¹²⁶ Sheail, J. *Nature in Trust* pp:68-69.

In 1926 the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE) was formed to represent the interests of those involved in protecting and preserving the countryside. It was initially formed by twenty-two constituent bodies, a larger number of affiliated bodies, and funds were raised (as most of the membership bodies and associates did not have a ready flow of cash) by allowing associate membership of private persons. How large a part was played by the National Trust in the formation of the CPRE is unknown but there was a tradition within the Trust that dates back at least to the 1940s, that the CPRE was virtually a creation of the Trust; there had been a push for a combined council of societies since 1898.¹²⁷ When Professor R.S.T. Chorley was appointed as the Trust's representative on the CPRE, of which he later became Honorary Secretary, a secure and lively link was formed between the two, with Chorley working for the two bodies at the same time.¹²⁸ Whatever its origins, the CPRE immediately began to pressure Ramsay MacDonald's government to create a series of national parks across Britain, resulting in the creation of the Addison committee mentioned above, and the 1931 report that was broadly in support, advocating the establishment of a number of national parks.¹²⁹ The Town and Country Planning Act of 1932 did very little preserve any potential parks from damage, its scope simply wasn't wide enough to afford the required protection.¹³⁰ Partly for political and economic reasons, and partly for lack of agreement on the function of national parks the recommendations of Addison report were not implemented in 1931 and the debate continued for the next decade.¹³¹ This conflict of purpose was a direct precedent for considerations of what purposes the National Forest would be put to and led directly to the development of the idea of a multi-purpose semi-natural environment with multiple requirements demanded of it.

A piecemeal collective of bodies became responsible for the preservation of the countryside throughout the 1930s, with the Forestry Commission the only official body that actually advanced the provision for outdoor pursuits through the creation of National Forest Parks. This diffused responsibility meant that the initiative had again to be taken by the voluntary bodies, notably the CPRE and its contemporary bodies in Wales and Scotland (the Council for the Protection of Rural Wales, and the Association for the Preservation of Rural Scotland) who continued to agitate, promote and seize every opportunity to press the government to implement a bill to set up a national parks authority; the task was an uphill one, the world economy had crashed and the government were focussed elsewhere for much of the early 1930s.¹³² The inertia of the politicians was the focus of the organised 'trespass hikes' such as the Kinder Scout mass trespass mentioned above, where police and landowners found themselves skirmishing on the high moors with determined hikers and walkers and a concerted push to have the parks established during George V's jubilee year of 1935. Following a negative response to this request the CPRE found itself at the forefront of the formation of the creation of a joint Standing Committee on National Parks in 1936. By 1938 the Committee published and circulated widely its report *The Case for National Parks in Great Britain*, demonstrating just how far behind other countries Britain was in the establishment

¹²⁷ Gaze, J. *Figures in a Landscape. A History of The National Trust*. Barrie & Jenkins 1998 p:61.

¹²⁸ Gaze, *Figures in a Landscape*. p:62 & 113-4.

¹²⁹ Sheail, *Nature in Trust* pp:70-72.

¹³⁰ Evans, D. *A History of Nature Conservation in Britain*. Routledge, London 1992 p:67.

¹³¹ Evans, *History of Nature Conservation in Britain*. pp:65-66.

¹³² Sheail, *Nature in Trust* pp:78-79.

of such parks. The government proposed an Access to Mountains Act in 1939 which suited no-one, and it was withdrawn.¹³³ Although the work of the CPRE, the National Trust, The Forestry Commission and the multitude of other bodies continued, the outbreak of war in 1939 and the consequences of that meant that much of government focus throughout the latter half of the 1940s and into the 1950s was on economic strategy and house building. The Forestry Commission continued operations as close to normality as possible in the build up to and throughout the war, with its new Forest Parks in The Forest of Dean (1939) and Snowdonia (1940), adding further weight to the pressure on the government to act.¹³⁴ The provision of availability of overnight stays in the Argyllshire forest park was an 'immediate success' with numbers of overnight stays rising from 20,419 in 1937 to 30,870 in 1938.¹³⁵ Government plans for economic growth focussed on raw material supply and considerations over conservation concerns were limited, with little objective thought given to countering rapidly increasing pollution or destruction of the countryside. Despite this, and following continued lobbying by the Standing Committee on National Parks and pressure from voluntary bodies and expectation of the general public, as part of the post-war reconstruction the newly elected Labour government produced a White Paper on National Parks in 1945 and in 1949 passed an Act of Parliament to establish national parks to preserve and enhance their natural beauty and provide recreational opportunities for the public, based largely around three official studies, the Scott Committee in 1942, the Dower Report of 1945, and the Hobhouse Report of 1947.¹³⁶ Lewis Silkin, Minister for Town and Country Planning, described it as '... the most exciting Act of the post-war Parliament.'¹³⁷ Be that as it may, the legislation did not go as far as adopting all of the Hobhouse Report recommendations, the proposed fundamental change to access to the countryside, to include a full right to roam over all uncultivated land in England was not adopted.

The first National Park was opened in the Peak District in 1951 and by the end of the decade the total had increased to ten across Britain, broadly satisfying the conservation movement, and the new National Parks authority involved itself in managing the conflict between conservation and large visitor numbers. The focus had not yet shifted from conservation to environmentalism, and pollution and conservation were a reduced priority for the government and with little or no interest shown by the press. The Ministry of Land and Natural Resources, though with a title suggesting environmental interests, in fact concerned itself with providing land for public housing. The Ministry was closed in 1967 and its activities passed to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, with little change of scope in its activities.¹³⁸ The gradual shift in public concern in the United Kingdom was influenced by the development of environmentalism in America, with increasing public disquiet about the development of nuclear weapons and testing, oil spills, chemical insecticides and legalised unscrupulous pollution on a vast scale in the Great Lakes causing fires on the waters' surface that generated outrage and widespread condemnation.¹³⁹

¹³³ Evans, *History of Nature Conservation in Britain*. p:63.

¹³⁴ Sheail, J. *An Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain*. Palgrave Basingstoke 2002 p:98.

¹³⁵ Sheail, *Environmental History* p: 98.

¹³⁶ Ward, S.V. *Planning and Urban Change*. Sage, London 2004 Second Edition p:103.

¹³⁷ <http://www.nationalparks.gov.uk/students/whatisanationalpark/history> (Accessed 13th November 2017).

¹³⁸ Clapp. B.W. *An Environmental History of Britain Since the Industrial Revolution*. Longman, London 1994 p:8.

¹³⁹ Finkelman, P, Alexander, R.S. (eds). *Justice and Legal Change on the Shores of Lake Erie: A History of the United States District Court for the State of Ohio*. Ohio University Press 2012 p:221.

In the United States, the publication of *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson, a naturalist and Editor in Chief of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, was a wake-up call to the growing environmentalist movement there. (Wildlife was being poisoned, Carson stated. The insect life was dying- and not just the pest species- which meant no food for the birds. No birds, no bird song equates to a *silent spring*).¹⁴⁰ It attacked the use of pesticides and demonstrated that a weakened ecosystem through the use of these pesticides would cause dangerous problems from invasive species grown immune to their use. Ever stronger poisons would be needed. The book contained four chapters demonstrating that there was a direct causation of cancer and other disease in humans from the use of pesticides. *Silent Spring* caught the American 1960s *zeitgeist* and despite sustained attacks on Carson and her book from the chemical companies and agri-business, the mood of the American people, weary of technological progress at any cost and aware of the health impact of radioactive fallout from above ground nuclear testing, had changed. The 1962 discovery of carcinogenic pesticides on supermarket-sold blueberries across the United States contributed to a sea change in public opinion. By the end of the decade five hundred thousand Americans had joined a growing number of environmental groups as part of what could now be demonstrably shown to be an international movement.¹⁴¹

From its inception, the European Economic Community had not developed a coordinated environmental policy and it reflected the dominant concerns of post-war Europe; economic reconstruction, modernisation and improved living standards, with a core agenda centred on creating a free trade area and bolstering the economic growth of member states. The first genuine environmental policy came in 1972 with the Paris summit of that year making the declaration that 'economic expression is not an end in itself... it should result in an improvement in the quality of life as well as standards of living... particular attention will be given to intangible values and to protecting the environment so that progress may really be put to the service of mankind'.¹⁴² The international environmental pressure groups *Friends of the Earth* (FoE) and *Greenpeace* were both established in 1971, and 1972 saw what is latterly considered to be the primary defining event of international environmentalism, the first of the decennial United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, otherwise known as *Earth Summits*. The conference created an Action Plan for the Human Environment, an Environment Fund, and perhaps most significantly for the future of the environmental movements- the 26 principles of the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. The conference also produced the United Nations Environment Programme, which has subsequently coordinated the Earth Summits.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ www.channel4.com/science/microsites/S/science/nature/environment.html (Accessed 15th September 2017).

¹⁴¹ Schneirov, R. & Fernandez, G.A. *Democracy as a Way of Life in America, a History*. Routledge, Abingdon. 2014 pp: 166-7.

¹⁴² Lowe, P. & Ward, S. (eds) *British Environmental Policy and Europe: Politics and Policy in Transition*. Routledge, London 1998 p:10.

¹⁴³ www.channel4.com/science/microsites/S/science/nature/environment.html (Accessed 15th September 2017).

The early 1970s demonstrated that a cohesive and environmentally focused strategies were required.¹⁴⁴ The activities of the environmental groups ranged from applying pressure through the process of lobbying governments and political parties, to holding rallies demonstrating the strength of feeling to those in positions of power, to direct action. Environmental direct action began in Britain in May 1971 when FoE organised a bottle dump at the offices of Cadbury-Schweppes, who had recently announced a cancellation of their bottle return policy. Press coverage ensured that although no change in policy was forced upon Cadbury-Schweppes, FoE membership soared across the country. Greenpeace began a daring policy of direct action on the high seas with their protest activities which ranged from attempting to highlight the culling of seals in Newfoundland, to confronting whaling fleets, to protesting against US nuclear tests in Alaska. FoE have attempted to always constrain themselves to acting within the law, Greenpeace have adopted a policy, where they deem it necessary, of deliberately flouting the law to bring to the attention of the public those activities which they regard as environmentally dangerous.¹⁴⁵ This has led to confrontation with governments and authority across the world.¹⁴⁶ The idea of ecological restoration began to gain ground during the 1980s and this is the point in time that the awareness that destruction of the environment by human action, and that ecosystems evolved over millennia were being rapidly degraded would require systematic action to prevent further destruction.¹⁴⁷ The disquiet over the growing effect of humanity on the natural world that had been growing since the end of the Second World War moved towards active participation in intervening in the prevention of the continued plunder of resources, and these actions serve to highlight the differences between conservationism on the one hand and environmentalism on the other; the one seeks to *preserve* what is already there, the other to take action to *restore* what has been damaged.

Across Britain throughout the 1970s, intense concern was growing in specialist circles over the impact of new agricultural practices on archaeological sites, wildlife habitats and recreation areas, which spilled over into the public domain following the publication of two books at the end of that decade; *The Common Ground* by naturalist Richard Mabey, and *The Theft of the Countryside* by Marion Shoard.¹⁴⁸ The media response generated by these two books helped to change the discussion of how the countryside was viewed from one of considerations over Britain's membership of the then Common Market towards a more holistic one about the entirety of British environmental policy. The 1978 Countryside Bill had passed through parliament virtually unchallenged; the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Bill had 2,300 amendments; the 'battle for the countryside' as it was known, was on. The FoE, and the Ramblers Association, along with many broadsheet newspapers, began to push for planning control in the countryside, which had been deficient to the point of non-existence

¹⁴⁴ Seel, B. Paterson, M. Doherty, B. (eds) *Direct Action in British Environmentalism*. Routledge, London 2000 p.103.

¹⁴⁵ Seel, Paterson, & Doherty, (eds) *Direct Action in British Environmentalism*. pp.5-6.

¹⁴⁶ The policy of non-violent direct action as adopted by these 1970s environmental groups has been seen recently in the protests in Sheffield over the removal of thousands of veteran trees, and in Lancashire over the arrest and detention (and subsequent release, in part due to public pressure over the 'excessive and extraordinary sentences') of fracking protesters. See here, for example: www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/17/court-quashes-excessive-sentences-of-fracking-protesters (Accessed 3rd January 2019).

¹⁴⁷ Ashmole, M., & Ashmole, P. *The Carrifran Wildwood Story*. Borders Forest Trust, Jedburgh 2009 p: 9.

¹⁴⁸ Shoard, M. *This Land is Our Land; the Struggle for Britain's Countryside*. Paladin, London 1987 p: 550.

up until that point. With the backing of the public and the media, they began a sustained push for tighter planning control of agricultural and forestry policy.¹⁴⁹ Shoard continued the pressure with *The Theft of the Countryside* in 1987, which questioned the legitimacy of land ownership being held in the possession of a very small number of wealthy families.¹⁵⁰ Mabey became a trustee of *Common Ground*, an organisation founded in 1983 that encourages people to engage with their (local) natural surroundings through a number of different projects and imaginative ideas.¹⁵¹

This then, what we might consider to be the rise in public awareness and the growth of an environmental consciousness, was the backdrop to the meetings in the Cheltenham offices of the Countryside Commission in the mid 1980s and goes some way to understanding the desire and vision to create a large-scale lowland forest in England. The commission fought a careful campaign, promoting the environmental benefits of a lowland forest and creating political consensus across broad political boundaries, convincing sceptics on all sides that it might be possible to plant a large-scale forest at limited cost to the public purse, especially when compared to the benefits. Despite reservations from some quarters within government, the Commission continued to gain ground throughout the late 1980s. Hewitt's 1987 project appraisal was well received, the Commission was given support to push the project forward.



Figure 13. Map of possible locations for the new National Forest. Countryside Commission 1989. (Author's photograph)¹⁵²

Five solid candidate sites were eventually shortlisted from across the midlands. These sites were Rockingham Forest (Northamptonshire), the Forest of Arden (Warwickshire), Sherwood

¹⁴⁹ Shoard, *This Land is Our Land*; pp: 550-552.

¹⁵⁰ Shoard's 1999 book *A Right to Roam* influenced and articulated the argument for, and the passing of, a new law creating greater access (although still limited) to the outdoors through the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000*. Shoard remains a writer and environmentalist, continuing to press for access to the countryside and the right to roam, increased controls of planning laws to protect the countryside and what she terms 'older people's affairs'. See: <http://www.marionshoard.co.uk/About-Marion-Shoard.php> (Accessed 4th September 2019).

¹⁵¹ www.commonground.org.uk (Accessed 4th January 2019).

¹⁵² *A New National Forest in the Midlands. A consultation document*. Countryside Commission. Cheltenham 1989.

Forest (Nottinghamshire), the Severn Valley-Wyre Forest (Worcestershire) and Charnwood-Needwood (which linked Leicestershire's Charnwood with Staffordshire's Needwood, crossing parts of South Derbyshire, and including former mines and derelict industrial land).¹⁵³ Many of these candidates put together very strong arguments for the forest to come to their area. The strongest two bidders emerged as the Charnwood-Needwood region (with the most striking high cost/ high return challenge) and the Sherwood Forest bid (with the highest proportion of land afforested and an established tourism in place). Both demonstrated a good return on investment for the government's commitment to the environment in very different ways.

A consortium of planning consultants was appointed in 1988 which developed the rationale that would guide the forest even before the final location was decided, and which indicated that the proposed forest was indeed likely to be a success.¹⁵⁴ It suggested that it would be possible to create a multi-textured landscape that could reverse wildlife loss, provide a response to considerable reaction against habitat destruction and rebuild a rich rural landscape in the midlands in an area that had suffered post-industrial dereliction.¹⁵⁵

The final site for the proposed new National Forest was already being debated and argued for in Parliament by January 1989, a debate which continued through the following year. The Countryside Commission prepared a consultation document *A New National Forest in the Midlands* (CCP 278) supported by the Secretary of State for the Environment, the Right Honourable Chris Patten MP, in the introduction to which he stated that 'What the Countryside Commission described in its consultation paper as a bold and far-reaching proposal to create a new forest in the English Midlands [...] could bring important benefits for landscape, wildlife and recreation, as well as the local economy... [and that] ...such a project would be a clear demonstration of this generation's commitment to improving our environment, and would represent a local, national and international asset for centuries to come'.¹⁵⁶ The consultation document sets out the *raison d'être* for a new forest, a map with the approximate location of the five candidate sites, and a specific request for comments on:

- The extent to which it is appropriate to expect public money to be invested in the project to achieve its goals.
- Whether or how private sector funds could be channelled into the project without prejudicing the wider objectives of the forest.
- How national and local public support can be channelled into the raising of funds.

A management body was also envisaged, and the Commission also requested a response on how the new forest might be managed and how the kinds or organisations that administered and implemented the forest might be envisaged:

¹⁵³ Parry, J. *The National Forest, Heritage in the Making*. Moira. The National Forest Company, 2006 pp:148-9.

¹⁵⁴ Sheail, J. *The New National Forest*. The Town Planning Review Volume 68 No.3 Liverpool University Press 1997 p: 309.

¹⁵⁵ Sheail, *The New National Forest*. pp: 309-310.

¹⁵⁶ <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/search/%22National+Forest%22?page=15&sort=date> (Accessed 3rd July 2017). *A New National Forest in the Midlands. A consultation document*. Countryside Commission. Cheltenham 1989.

- A private company that represented private and public interests with an entrepreneurial approach that blended public and private sector funding, although it was recognised that commercial activities might compromise the forest's wider environmental and social objectives.
- A public sector body that would be fully publicly accountable, with statutory recognition, which could establish an active role in the statutory planning process- although this type of organisation would have very limited entrepreneurial ability and depend entirely on public funding.
- A voluntary organisation with charitable status, which had the benefit of being seen to be impartial- although its charitable status might limit its ability to raise the substantial sums of funding money required for a project of this scale.¹⁵⁷

The Commission were careful to make clear in the consultation document that it was *not* their intention that land should be purchased compulsorily and that it may be beneficial for land to be acquired for key strategic forest areas on the open market.

The CPRE responded in February 1990 with a somewhat brief six page document broadly supporting the 'bold and far reaching proposal' in principle, but with a number of reservations; namely that it should be created in the Charnwood/ Needwood area, a clear forest boundary be provided, that woodland never exceed 50% of the total area cover by trees, that the forest must be governed and administrated by some form of governmental or public body authority that was clearly publicly accountable and remained staunchly against entrepreneurial or private company to oversee the forest creation, and for the proper provision of funding from the public purse. Somewhat surprisingly, without the detail of how the above commitments were to be met, the CPRE refused to endorse the proposal and requested that the Countryside Commission work closely with the Forestry Commission and the Department for the Environment to prepare a firm proposal for further public consultation.¹⁵⁸

The submission, *A New National Forest in the Midlands*, from the Needwood Forest/ North West Leicestershire/ Charnwood Forest area in February 1990 was a joint one and included a number of partners. It was published jointly by the three County Councils, Derbyshire CC, North West Leicestershire CC and Staffordshire CC. The participating local authorities (besides the above named) were Charnwood Borough Council, East Staffordshire District Council, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, Lichfield District Council, and North Warwickshire Borough Council and a much broader area of search for the forest was considered than that eventually realised, with a core area which more or less corresponds to the eventual National Forest Boundary.

¹⁵⁷ *A New National Forest in the Midlands. A consultation document.* Countryside Commission. Cheltenham 1989.

¹⁵⁸ *A New National Forest in the Midlands. A CPRE Response.* Council for the Protection of Rural England, Warwick House London 1990.

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Figure 14. Proposed forest boundary as submitted to the Countryside Commission in 1990¹⁵⁹

There were some key initial differences though; the possibility of a much larger area boundary included Tamworth but excluded Burton upon Trent, it included an area of Warwickshire around Baddesley Ensor and Grendon, straddling the Staffordshire/ Warwickshire border, which had similar problems to the area of North West Leicestershire and South Derbyshire in that they all had a history of deep coal mining and a visible landscape problem with colliery slag heaps, denuded landscapes and disused mineral workings, and was considered in the submission to be a logical extension if the larger forest boundary were to be considered, with the same problems contributing to a natural affinity with the central belt of the core area. The core area also included a much larger extension into Needwood Forest in the west.¹⁶⁰ How the forest area was arrived at, linking Charnwood with Needwood and restoring denigrated landscapes in the centre seems obvious at first, but email correspondence with Councillor David Bill MBE gives a glimpse into how the initial plan was arrived at:

‘I was very much involved at the time as the Liberal Environment Spokesman as at that time we had three party control and were closely engaged in the decision making process. Looking back, it is remarkable how much was achieved by starting out with a map and drawing on it what was thought desirable by the initial use of felt tipped pens. The original concept of what is now the National Forest was thus the product of a competition won by the imaginative use of a felt tipped pen’.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ A new National Forest in the Midlands. The Needwood Forest, North West Leicestershire Charnwood Forest Submission to the Countryside Commission. Derbyshire County Council, Leicestershire County Council, Staffordshire County Council. 1990 pp:5- 6.

¹⁶⁰ A new National Forest in the Midlands. The Needwood Forest, North West Leicestershire Charnwood Forest Submission to the Countryside Commission. Derbyshire County Council, Leicestershire County Council, Staffordshire County Council. 1990 p:12.

¹⁶¹ Pers Comm; email from Cllr David Bill MBE received 19th May 2020.

Councillor Bill's wry comments are, no doubt, accurate from a certain perspective – an initial draft of a proposal had to be made on a map at some stage after all – but understate the fact that they knew just how very high the stakes were. This is borne out by the level of financial commitment and the quality of the submission that eventually won the Countryside Commission over.

The difficulties of denuded landscape and apparent lack of tree cover over most of the area that the Needwood-Charnwood submission faced were addressed in the twelve-page publication and turned to the submission's advantage as far as possible. The discussion on the development for a regional economy recognised the importance of the contribution to a new forest-based economy through environmental enhancement and image enhancement, especially in those areas of denuded landscapes due to former despoilment from extractive industries that were then also starting to see high levels of unemployment; mining decline had seen the end of many hundreds of traditional jobs in the mining industry.¹⁶²

One of the core strengths of the Needwood-Charnwood submission had always been the very enthusiastic support of the general public in that area, with the *Leicester Mercury* as the most vocal of cheerleaders. The newspaper ran a continued campaign of support for the project before and during the submission, and again following the successful award in fundraising and raising awareness of the forest afterwards. Although difficult to quantify, the newspaper and ultimately public support weighed heavily and significantly in favour of the successful bid.¹⁶³ The importance of the *Leicester Mercury's* passionate campaign of support for the forest is still recognised.¹⁶⁴ Under the headline 'Trees to cover scars caused by man's exploitation' the *Leicester Mercury* continued to press for the Forest's creation in the Needwood-Charnwood location, with the Assistant Director for Environmental Planning for Leicestershire County Council, Roger Hockney quoted as stating 'The beauty of our bid is that much of our area is already eligible for Government grants to restore derelict sites'.¹⁶⁵ Anticipating the activities of British Coal's plans to opencast large areas of the Forest and recognising that the area was to also be a 'working Forest' (see chapter two), he also commented that 'Many existing or proposed mineral workings could be restored to woodland [and] the proposal would bring a recreational facility to the heart of the Midlands [...] and with a decline in traditional industries like mining the huge forest would bring much needed employment to the region.' Mr Hockney also mentioned two items that will be expanded further in the final chapter, namely that Lichfield (along with Coalville, Ashby and Swadlincote), would become a forest town and that there would be a return of the railway (here referring to the *Ivanhoe Line*).¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² The Case for Rural Development Commission assistance for the North-West Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Rural Coalfield Area, 1989, Constituent Local Authorities. Quoted in A new National Forest in the Midlands. The Needwood Forest, North-West Leicestershire Charnwood Forest Submission to the Countryside Commission. Derbyshire County Council, Leicestershire County Council, Staffordshire County Council. 1990 p:12.

¹⁶³ Pers comm; interview with Simon Evans, Director of Operations at the National Forest Company 23rd June 2017.

¹⁶⁴ <https://www.nationalforest.org/about/our-history> (Accessed 18th May 2020).

¹⁶⁵ *Leicester Mercury* Monday January 11th, 1993, special edition with highlights from the newspaper's own campaign of 1990. Author's copy.

¹⁶⁶ *Leicester Mercury* January 11th 1993 p:3.

Close account had been taken by the Countryside Commission of both availability of land for the forest and of enthusiasm and public support, with a survey by the National Opinion Poll (NOP) to 250 households within each of the five candidate areas at the end of 1989. The *Leicester Mercury* conducted a telephone poll over a 48-hour period with 10,513 respondents, of which only 115 were hostile to the concept, a favourable response of almost 99 per cent.¹⁶⁷ Enthusiastic public support and the concerted and assertive campaign by the *Leicester Mercury* and the LCC team was noted by John Sheail as one of the key factors in the eventual choice of location by the Commission, alongside the developmental rather than protectionist elements of the Charnwood-Needwood proposal.¹⁶⁸

In response to the Countryside Commission's consultation document, the Rambler's Association had presented an enthusiastic response but with a strong recommendation that the draft strategy be modified to accommodate land in the forest being brought into public ownership to ensure permanent right of access, and wherever grant aid was given that permanent right of access be obtained. This is a very understandable reaction from an association that had its very inception in the concept of right to roam, and free unlimited access to the countryside. After all, ultimately the majority of the funding for the project would come from taxpayer's pockets, whether that funding was through direct government funded subsidies or channelled through the EEC. The response from the Countryside Commission's Development Team was an unequivocal and very firm rejection to the pressure from the Rambler's Association and that the land was not to be purchased, compulsorily or otherwise.¹⁶⁹ That policy is still one followed today, land holdings were limited to 300 hectares until 2014 when the upper limit was removed but it remains the policy of the National Forest Company not to purchase land as the preferred method of forest expansion, as the company's Land Management Officer, Simon Greenhouse, explained; 'Land acquisition and ownership is just one of the mechanisms to create the forest, but not necessarily the preferred one'. Even with the upper limit on land holding by the company removed in 2014, on March 31st, 2020 the company owned just 365.41 hectares.¹⁷⁰

The local authorities were also clear about implementation of the forest not being entirely reliant on new funding from central government and were keen to stress that. The proposal for implementation suggested a Charitable Trust with a management board composed of public authorities, landowners, private sector and community groups, and with funding from two main sources: agricultural diversification initiatives such as the *Set-Aside Scheme*, administered by the Ministry of Agricultural Fisheries and Food; and Derelict Land Grant assistance administered by the Department of the Environment. The proposal therefore cleverly proposed to use monies already allocated for the purpose and not an entirely 'new' budget. Leicestershire and Derbyshire County Councils had already very recently secured additional financial support from the Rural Development Commission which had also received confirmation of additional funding from the European Commission through European

¹⁶⁷ Sheail, *Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain* p:173.

¹⁶⁸ Redevelopment of industrially derelict land was a key element of the Charnwood-Needwood proposal. Sheail, J. *An Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain*. Palgrave 2002 p:172.

¹⁶⁹ Copy of consultation responses dated February 1990 held by South Derbyshire District Council in their archives, lent to the author by the Environmental Officer, Kate Allies. See also Sheail, *Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain*. pp:175-6.

¹⁷⁰ Pers Comm. Email exchange with Simon Greenhouse dated 23rd April 2020.

Regional Development Funding as part of the *RECHAR* project focussing on former Coalfield Communities, a potentially substantial source of finance for the establishment of the forest.¹⁷¹ Although they were not to know at the time, there were significant difficulties later with *RECHAR* funding through unintended restrictions on spending due to how *RECHAR* funds were allowed to be spent under European Commission rules.¹⁷² *RECHAR* was an EEC acronym for the provision of funding for the reconversion and redevelopment of coal mining areas, the main objectives being to provide occupational training for redundant workers and economic diversification in areas severely affected by the effective closure of the coal industry. It ran from 1989 until 1994 and funding did eventually find its way into the central area of what became the National Forest.¹⁷³

The Sherwood Forest submission *Sherwood Reborn* was the closest contender, and the Nottinghamshire bid had been one of the two strongest, alongside the Charnwood-Needwood submission.¹⁷⁴ Sherwood had much going for it; there was an already established tourist economy, approximately half of the population of England lived within a 2½ hour drive of it and further development would undoubtedly reduce pressure on the Peak District National Park through a drop in visitor numbers there.¹⁷⁵ Equally importantly, it had a name to conjure with: *Sherwood*. Sherwood, the ancient home of Robin Hood, Little John, Maid Marion *et al*, with stories told about it for hundreds of years and beloved by Hollywood surely resonates across the English-speaking world. In short, it had a centuries old identity that was known in England and beyond that already drew visitors and had a long established and fully functioning tourism economy, these were major concerns for the other contenders that would need to be addressed in any new Forest creation, and a stumbling block for potential challengers to Sherwood's dominant position. The problem of identity and location did indeed become a recurring problem and has certainly dogged the National Forest. In centre spread article for the *Times Magazine* in February 1996 a helpful map of England was added so that readers might more easily picture the National Forest's location, it went on to comment on the difficulty of finding the area on a map, its blank anonymity and in fact quoted one local politician as 'frankly admitting the area has a negative image'.¹⁷⁶

The white paper *This Common Inheritance* was unveiled by the then Secretary of State for the Environment, Chris Patten, on the 29th of September 1990, as the United Kingdom's response to the considerations of the day: the felling of vast swathes of the Brazilian rainforest, the awareness in the rise of carbon emissions causing increasing holes in the ozone layer, particularly over the north and south poles, and of global warming- these gave rise to *Britain's*

¹⁷¹ A new National Forest in the Midlands. The Needwood Forest, North West Leicestershire Charnwood Forest Submission to the Countryside Commission. Derbyshire County Council, Leicestershire County Council, Staffordshire County Council. 1990 p:10.

¹⁷² <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/378/european-commission-rechar-programme> (Accessed 19th May 2020).

¹⁷³ McGowan, L. & Phinnemore, D. *A Dictionary of the European Union*. Routledge, Oxford 2015. The author benefitted both from the retraining scheme and additional financial redundancy settlements through *RECHAR*.

¹⁷⁴ Pers comm; interview with Simon Evans, Director of Operations at the National Forest Company 23rd June 2017.

¹⁷⁵ Sheail, *Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain*. p:173.

¹⁷⁶ North, R.D. *The Greening of Middle England* in *The Times Magazine*, 10th February 1996.

Environmental Strategy.¹⁷⁷ With the publication of *This Common Inheritance* the creation of a National Forest became, if not a certainty then a definite probability at the least, and was part of the policy document.¹⁷⁸ The failure to announce the implementation of the National Forest in *This Common Inheritance* demonstrated the lack of Ministerial confidence in their ability to convince the Treasury that the cost and the mechanism by which the Forest could be made manifest was achievable.¹⁷⁹ The decision by the Countryside Commission was quickly announced on their choice of final location, fuelled in part by the apparent lack of momentum in *This Common Inheritance*, and partly by concern over their choice of candidate area leaking out, the announcement on October 5th 1990 coming one week after the publication of the White Paper.¹⁸⁰

The day before, October 4th 1990, the Countryside Commission sent out its News Release NR/90/30/26PR not for publication before 0001 hours on Friday 5th October, the following day. Under the headline 'COMMISSION CHOOSES SITE FOR A NEW NATIONAL FOREST' the Needwood-Charnwood submission was announced as the winning contender; 'the Countryside Commission is recommending to the Government that a new national forest should be created in the Midlands between Leicester and Burton upon Trent'. It went on to quote Sir Derek Barber, the Commission's chairman: 'The creation of a new national forest would be one of the most ambitious and imaginative countryside initiatives of this century and the next. It would provide an important national asset that will benefit the landscape, wildlife and recreation. It would assist tourism, create jobs, and offer new uses for agricultural land. Not least, this great mass of trees would help to clean air and form part of the nation's contribution to combatting global warming. The recent Environment White Paper has indicated the Government's interest in the project. Now we are looking to them for financial support to get the work started'.¹⁸¹ The mention of the National Forest contributing to a national combatting of global warming was a recurring theme for some 25 years, after which it seems to have been quietly dropped and a focus on more general environmental issues developed. The News Release went on to push for 'active involvement by the private sector' to make the project a success.

Leicestershire County Council were 'delighted by the announcement' in their press release of 5th October 1990 and pressed the government 'to respond quickly and positively' to the announcement.¹⁸² The *Leicester Mercury* led with a single word headline on its front page: **Victory!** alongside an image of the cartoon character 'Woody Tree', that the newspaper had used as part of its promotional campaign.

¹⁷⁷ Lowe, P. & Ward, S. (eds) *British Environmental Policy and Europe: Politics and Policy in Transition*. Routledge, London 1998 p:21.

¹⁷⁸ Pers comm; interview with Simon Evans, Director of Operations at the National Forest Company 23rd June 2017.

¹⁷⁹ Sheail, J. *The New National Forest: from Idea to Achievement*. in *The Town Planning Review*, Vol. 68, No. 3 July 1997 pp: 312- 313.

¹⁸⁰ http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1990/oct/10/countryside-initiatives#S5LV0522P0_19901010_LWA_8 (Accessed 5th July 2017).

¹⁸¹ Countryside Commission News Release NR/90/30/26PR dated 4th October 1990. Copy held by South Derbyshire District Council in their archives, lent to the author by the Environmental Development Manager, Kate Allies.

¹⁸² Leicestershire County Council News Release dated 5th October 1990. Copy held by South Derbyshire District Council in their archives, lent to the author by the Environmental Officer, Kate Allies.

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Figure 15. The *Leicester Mercury* announcing the news of the forest. Author's photograph

'Woody Tree' went on to feature heavily in the *Leicester Mercury's* promotional and fundraising campaigns for the new forest. The Leicestershire County Council news release went on to quote Sir Derek Barber in his letter to them announcing the successful bid: 'The joint County Council submission indicated a heartening level of enthusiasm for and commitment to the project. We were also impressed by the degree of support the project gained from political representatives of all parties in Leicestershire, from the business community, and not least from the general public. But most of all, my Commission felt that this particular site offers an outstanding opportunity to create a new landscape of immense environmental, economic and social benefit to future generations. This is an opportunity that we can all now work together to see realised'.¹⁸³ The Charnwood-Needwood submission indeed offered the greatest challenge to implement- but also enormous potential to make a real, lasting and permanent change with the greatest rewards.

The announcement of the new national forest was warmly welcomed across the political and environmental spectrum, and set against the release the week before of the Environment White Paper, which although seen as a belated step in the right direction by environmentalists, was immediately criticised heavily by the green movement and opposition parties for its brevity and its appearance as a mere situation report where a more radical and farsighted approach was required.¹⁸⁴ All was not well within Government though, and despite making the right noises in public, and taking full opportunity to be seen to be supporting the Forest's creation by planting the first tree on a new forty- acre site in the Forest (and taking advantage of the publicity and photo- opportunity) the Secretary of State for the Environment, Michael Heseltine, had serious misgivings as to the association of the Government with the endeavour. At a 'robust and lively meeting' with the Countryside Commission in the February of 1991 he expressed scepticism of likelihood of farmers taking up the opportunity to diversify into woodland creation as they had shown little interest in existing forms of grant aid for planting farm woodlands. He advised against the Commission

¹⁸³ Leicestershire County Council News Release dated 5th October 1990. Copy held by South Derbyshire District Council in their archives.

¹⁸⁴ [https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters.com/7-100-7035?sd=plc&__lrTS=20170507083220527&transitionType=Default&contextData=\(sc.Default\)&firstPage=true&bhcp=1](https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters.com/7-100-7035?sd=plc&__lrTS=20170507083220527&transitionType=Default&contextData=(sc.Default)&firstPage=true&bhcp=1) (Accessed 2nd July 2017) or see: <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1990/oct/29/our-common-inheritance> (Accessed 2nd July 2017).

expecting to receive assistance from the Exchequer to bridge the gap in funding and instead they should involve the private sector more closely with in developing the Forest Strategy.

When Heseltine visited the area in July 1991, Susan Bell, the then recently appointed Director of the National Forest Development Team recalled the visit in an article in *Countryside* magazine in 1995 and said that

...Mr Heseltine was relentless in his questioning as to how this great venture was going to be achieved. Clearly the task was not simple [...and the Development Team was...] wholly reliant on co-operation by a host of executive bodies and the goodwill of potential participants. Of course, we could not answer him as it was just those questions we were there to explore. He departed, a declared enthusiast but also a sceptic. I realised then- if I had not already been aware- just how important were the politics of this exercise.¹⁸⁵

The Commission were of course, very concerned, any sign of the Government distancing itself from the project at this critical stage would effectively crush the likelihood of the private and voluntary support they had planned to count in in the Forest's creation.¹⁸⁶ The *zeitgeist*, and foresight, were with the Commission though, and the cumulative effect of the growing worldwide green movement and an international perspective throughout the 1980s allowed the growth of the germ of the idea of a national forest to grow, and the publication of *This Common Inheritance* secured the political commitment to environmentalism through the planting of millions of trees and a genuinely new forest.¹⁸⁷ British environmentalism and especially forest creation had come of age under a right-wing Conservative government and the National Forest would not be seriously threatened again until some twenty years later under a very different Conservative Party as part of the Coalition Government formed in 2010.

The National Forest was now more than a promise, it was now an obligation created by the government for itself and would soon become a living reality on many levels. The next chapter will discuss the beginning of the forest itself through the creation of a new development team and the establishment of the National Forest Company, a new body and government quango designed to bring the vision of a lowland forest to fruition.

¹⁸⁵ *Countryside* magazine March/ April 1995 issue. Article entitled *Birth of a Forest for the Nation, From Politics to Tree Planting*. p: 4 Partial copy kept in the SDDC Archive at Rosliston Forestry Centre in one of the several Newspaper clippings files. Lent to the author by Environmental Development Manager Kate Allies August 2020. *Countryside* magazine is produced monthly by the National Farmers' Union. In the article Bell went on to relate an anecdote about the tree that Heseltine was very enthusiastic to plant on some soon-to-be-acquired land for the Forest; the tree had to be temporarily removed immediately after his visit as the sale of the land had not been completed and the farmer's cattle were released into the field to graze and would have eaten the young tree.

¹⁸⁶ Sheail, J. *The New National Forest: from Idea to Achievement*. pp: 312- 313.

¹⁸⁷ Pers comm; interview with Simon Evans, Director of Operations (now retired) at the National Forest Company 23rd June 2017.

2. New Roots in an Ancient Landscape

How this National Forest was to be achieved now had to be planned in detail and the Countryside Commission decided to create a new, focussed and dedicated team of knowledgeable, focussed, motivated and experienced individuals. This team would, of necessity, be small and able to deliver swift results, its size and focus meaning it could react rapidly as necessity dictated, not something that could be delivered by the Countryside Commission directly. This team would have several pressing objectives: defining a boundary within the broader area of search already considered by the Countryside Commission and its partners, defining what woodland already existed within that area and considering ways to create an appearance of continuity, linkage and coherence for a future forest, maintaining the current levels of enthusiasm for the project and expanding public awareness, and finding ways to encourage landowners to plant woodland instead of arable crops. Despite the publishing of the Environmental White Paper, there were significant and influential MPs and ministers within Government who remained sceptical, and the team had the onerous task of persuading these and other sceptics of the validity and permanence of the project.

This chapter reviews the activities of the period 1990-1995 and how the new forest was designed and planned, how sometimes wavering government support was bolstered and how a new company to manage the future of the forest was planned. Following its creation, members of the New National Forest Development Team, as it was initially known, were often frustrated by the apparent lack of Government support and commitment and organised different methods of persuasion to keep the project on course. The Team's director, Susan Bell, was as often immersed in the politics of the Forest as she was the planting. Public support had been vital in reaching this stage and a public relations strategy was created and updated using a consultancy firm in an attempt to create a groundswell of public opinion that Ministers could not afford to ignore. As we will see, through utilising this public opinion and through sheer hard work, the Team exceeded the expectations of even its harshest of critics and paved the way for the formation of a new company to oversee the Forest's establishment.

Planning the Forest

With the publication of *This Common Inheritance*, the government announcement of the creation of a large new regional forest was an obligation that the Countryside Commission now had to make happen. Support for the venture was widespread and enthusiastic. In December 1990 at the Annual Dinner of the Wood Processors' Association the Director-General of the Forestry Commission spoke of how the proposed Midlands Forest had caught the public's imagination.¹⁸⁸ With the intention of keeping momentum rolling Leicestershire County Council had set aside £35,000 for practical work including land purchase and planting of its existing properties in the assumption that government finances would be slow to appear. The first trees had been planted in the late autumn of 1990 as a symbol of what was to come and as a declaration of intent by government minister George Young, the Chairman of the Countryside Commission Sir Derek Barber, local dignitaries, and a party of local

¹⁸⁸ Sheail, *Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain*. p:175.

schoolchildren.¹⁸⁹ To rapidly progress with the forest scheme, the Countryside Commission decided to create a separate, small team that could focus entirely on the task at hand, and the winter of 1990 into 1991 saw the creation of the National Forest Development Team, which moved into Stanleigh House, Donisthorpe, near to the geographical centre of the forest.¹⁹⁰ This team was a branch of the Countryside Commission and headed by Susan Bell as Development Team Director. She was joined in July and August 1991 by new appointees Simon Evans, responsible for preparing a strategy for implementing the Forest's actual creation, Norman Starks was to prepare the Forest's Business Plan and Caron Thompson, who was responsible for enlisting public support. The team also appointed a Public Relations specialist on a two-day week contract.¹⁹¹ The Development Team was assisted in its work by an advisory board from the Countryside Commission chaired by Sir Derek Barber.¹⁹² Bell later discussed Sir Derek and the advisory board in an article in *Countryside* magazine: '...The star of this Board was undoubtedly its Chairman, Sir Derek, now Lord Barber of Tewkesbury... [he was] well known and highly respected throughout the rural politics world, he brought an exceptional authority and independence of thought to the Board. In a task that had as much to do with politics as tree planting, this strong and independent board has been vital'.¹⁹³ Sir Derek's influence in rural politics and Government and ministerial circles was of utmost importance throughout the early years of the Forest's establishment, from concept to creation, and Bell recognised it as such.

The team had several immediate objectives; to define the forest area itself, (which was still only an outline plan to join the remnant Needwood and Charnwood forests across the former industrial areas); then to create an ambitious vision for a forest that was supported by a deliverable structure for the diverse objectives of environmental, social, and economic benefits; they would need to understand what would be the opportunities and constraints within the area; and finally to create a strategic business plan, the Forest Strategy.¹⁹⁴

One of the first acts of the development team was to rough out the boundary of the forest on a map, building on the basic plan from the winning submission. The team had been joined by Simon Evans, who had worked with the Countryside Commission through his position with Warwickshire County Council to develop a method of analysing landscape character and using his experience the team was able to create a character assessment of the entire forest area. It was this document which informed and enabled the team as they included certain areas whilst deliberately excluding others. For example, Repton, in Derbyshire, was excluded due to the amount of type two farmland that would become afforested. (Type two farmland has a mosaic of low intensity agriculture and natural and structural elements, such as field margins, hedgerows, stone walls, patches of woodland or scrub and small rivers, for example,

¹⁸⁹ Parry, *The National Forest, Heritage in the Making*. p: 150.

¹⁹⁰ Pers comm; interview with Simon Evans, Director of Operations (now retired) at the National Forest Company 23rd June 2017.

¹⁹¹ *Countryside* magazine March/ April 1995 issue. Article entitled *Birth of a Forest for the Nation, From Politics to Tree Planting*. p: 4 Partial copy kept in the SDDC Archive at Rosliston Forestry Centre in one of the several Newspaper clippings files. Lent to the author by Environmental Development Manager Kate Allies August 2020.

¹⁹² The New National Forest Newsletter December 1991.

¹⁹³ *Countryside* magazine March/ April 1995 issue. Article entitled *Birth of a Forest for the Nation, From Politics to Tree Planting*. p: 4.

¹⁹⁴ Parry, J. *The National Forest, Heritage in the Making*. p:150.

mixed with extensively used arable fields).¹⁹⁵ The outline concept by the three-county partnership application in the competition for National Forest had gone much further into Needwood but in the eventuality the majority of Needwood, to the west of the National Forest, was deliberately excluded because it had retained some of its ancient tree cover, the area of Needwood eventually included in the National Forest boundary was that which had been virtually clear felled during the early 19th century after parliamentary enclosure.¹⁹⁶ Charnwood, by comparison, was included in its entirety because deforestation and been near complete immediately following parliamentary enclosure in 1800.

In this way, the forest area was gradually defined and reduced from its more general initial boundary. The southerly extension that had included the possibility of including Tamworth in the Needwood-Charnwood submission was scaled back, leaving a much-reduced area of Staffordshire within the forest. The December 1991 Newsletter produced by the Development Team stated that 'The boundary follows easily recognisable features such as roads and rivers. It has been narrowed down from a much larger area of search. Although many people may be disappointed that they are no longer living inside the area, the Forest's Development Team is convinced that a strong association of the Forest with its neighbours will continue'.¹⁹⁷ In the event, the early years saw some confusion from those living on the borders as to the actual Forest boundary as it occasionally cut through parish and other civil boundaries, leaving parts of communities within the boundary and parts outside it. The boundary situation is unchanged to this day and informal conversation with those people living on the Forests' margins can occasionally reveal a somewhat vague knowledge as to whether they are within the Forest boundary.¹⁹⁸ Perhaps the Development Team considered the boundary to be porous, certainly there has never been an attempt to clarify the boundary further.

Landscape character assessment (LCA) was very much in its infancy in the late 1980s and early '90s and the ground-breaking work performed by the Development Team has gone on to inform national planning policies. Although the initial LCAs had a specific utilitarian purpose, which was to create a new kind of landscape map of the National Forest area, they continue to be used by the National Forest Company for planting plans and as the Forest has developed have begun to define not only the physical areas, but also the people in those different zones.¹⁹⁹ The UK government website broadly defines LCA as 'the process of identifying and describing variation in character of the landscape, and LCA documents identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features that make landscapes distinctive by mapping and describing character types and areas. They also show how the landscape is

¹⁹⁵ Hartel, T. & Pileninger, T (eds). *European Wood-pastures in Transition: A Social-ecological Approach*. Routledge, London 2014 p: 47.

¹⁹⁶ Pers comm; interview with Simon Evans, Director of Operations (at the National Forest Company now retired) 23rd June 2017.

¹⁹⁷ The National Forest Development Team, *The New National Forest Newsletter* December 1991

¹⁹⁸ Informal conversation over a long period of time between the author and members of Burton Folk Club on the north west boundary and between the author and members of Roots Folk Choir based at Newbold/Coleorton on the north eastern fringe. Members of both come from either side of the boundary and are somewhat vague as to whether they live in the Forest or not.

¹⁹⁹ Pers comm; interview with Simon Evans, Director of Operations (now retired) at the National Forest Company 23rd June 2017.

perceived, experienced and valued by people'.²⁰⁰ This last sentence hides a complex series of intangible difficulties that the Team had to navigate; deconstructing just how different the people of say, the Trent Valley zone identify as coming from that area compared to Charnwood or the Melbourne Parklands was not an easy task. Some areas had a distinct identity prior to the formation of the National Forest, whereas others seem to have been more malleable and less localised. Despite the county boundary dividing them (itself part of the construct of identity), the people of Swadlincote and Coalville have far more in common with each other than with the townsfolk of Ashby which lies roughly equidistant between the two. LCA assessments can be created at national down to local levels and be put to a variety of uses by many differing bodies or individuals, as borne out by the list of possibilities on the UK Government website (see note 193) and the National Forest LCA has been used for most of them since its creation by the team, but notably in planning policies and decisions, landscape and visual impact assessments, and of course in place making. In using the LCAs to manage and define the landscape, the Development Team were making a bold statement: the National Forest was going to be a new *place* with a new, different character.

Sizeable urban populations were deliberately included in the final draft of the Forest border, a matter of expediency due to the linking of the remnant forests of Charnwood and Needwood in the east and west of the Forest area, and were integral to the overall plan although the cities of Derby and Leicester were specifically excluded despite their close proximity to the final boundary; there were ten urban forests (eventually twelve) to be created across the country and the National Forest, although part of the same white paper, needed to keep a separation from those to ensure it created and established a very firm and clear identity of its own.²⁰¹ The towns of Coalville and Swadlincote, although geographically separate from each other, had much in common; both had become industrial towns during the nineteenth century. Coalville was, in fact, one of the towns created by the sinking of mines and the building of terraces of houses to home the swelling workforce,²⁰² Swadlincote had developed from a small village at the same time for similar reasons. Both had large areas of redundant, ex-industrial land within the town boundaries and were surrounded by waste from the mineral extraction industries. Ashby de la Zouch, by contrast, had developed as a market town around its medieval castle, the seat of the Hastings family, and its ancient school. Melbourne was a small town, or large village with a semi-urban core thriving on its agricultural and market gardening past, but which had developed a more diverse economic base. Burton on Trent was the largest town in the national forest area, its history linked to its development as the most important brewing centre in Britain and whilst arguably the boundary could have been drawn to exclude it, the challenge to keep as diverse a range of town and countryside within the forest boundary, to include a large population centre from the Staffordshire division of the three counties, and to include a passenger railway station within the forest boundary was deemed vital.²⁰³ Thus the industrial towns, although each having a distinct

²⁰⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/landscape-and-seascape-character-assessments> (Accessed 23rd May 2019)

²⁰¹ Countryside Commission. *The National Forest Strategy: Draft for Consultation*. Cheltenham 1993 p:6

²⁰² Baker, D.W., Clamp, C., Duckworth, S. *Coalville*. Tempus 1998.

²⁰³ Parry, J. *The National Forest, Heritage in the Making*. p:106. Pers comm; interview with Simon Evans, Director of Operations at the National Forest Company 23rd June 2017.

character of its own had much in common with each other that the more rural towns did not, but these in turn shared similar character traits.²⁰⁴

The National Forest LCA was published by the Development Team in 1992, mapped and defined in six distinct character zones. The LCA map of the Forest area continues to be used, updated and refined to inform planting strategy by the National Forest Company.

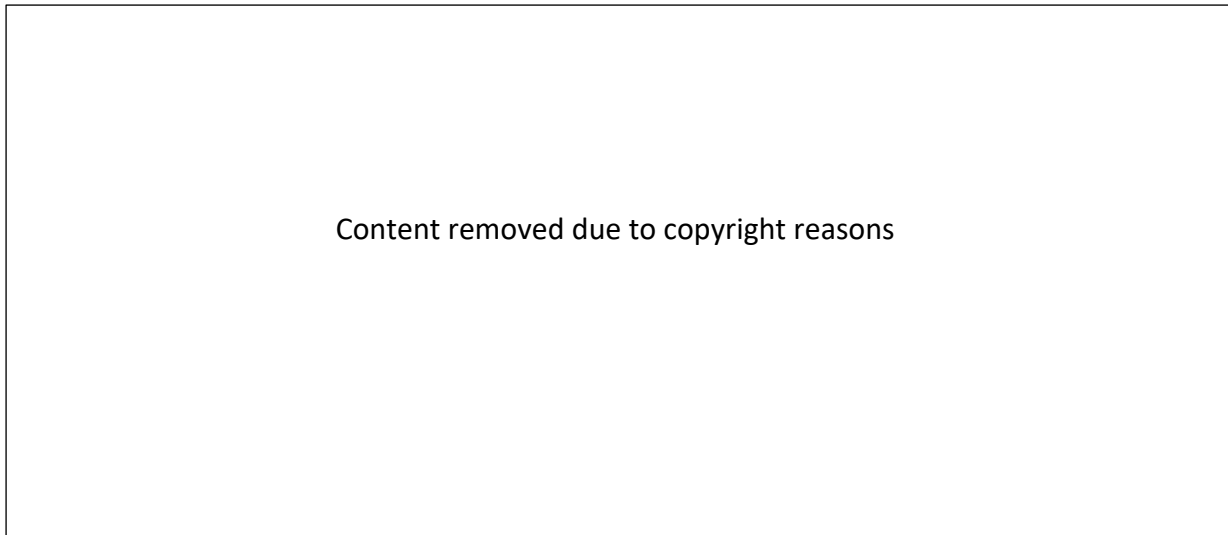


Figure 16. Map of the forest zones in 1992.²⁰⁵

The Aims and Objectives set out by the Development Team were these:

‘The overall aim of the Forest proposal is to create and demonstrate a modern, truly multi-purpose forest that meets multiple environmental and economic objectives:

- To enhance and create a diverse landscape and wildlife habitat.
- To create a major recreation and tourism resource.
- To provide an alternative productive use for agricultural land in a manner that meets environmental objectives.
- To contribute to the national timber supply.
- To stimulate economic enterprise and create jobs.
- To stimulate community involvement and educational use of the Forest.
- To contribute to wider environmental objectives such as a reduction in carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.’²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ The passenger railway service from Burton to Leicester envisaged in the Needwood- Charnwood submission through the re-opening to passengers of what became known as *The Ivanhoe Line* is discussed in the final chapter.

²⁰⁵ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Strategy Audit 1994 – 2002* p: 19.

²⁰⁶ <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmselect/cmenvfru/432/1120502.htm> (Accessed 16th July 2017).

The Development Team mapped the forest for preferred planting areas, based on a survey which identified these, alongside unsuitable land (mainly built-up areas— towns and villages upon which it was decided early on not to impinge on with dense tree cover), main existing woodlands and sensitive areas, those which had existing landscape or other features, on which new planting might be limited, but not excluded by:- river floodplains, archaeological sites, historic parklands, areas of ecological value and geological interest.²⁰⁷ Agricultural land had been identified as crucial to increasing the area of tree planting, along with fringe planting along main arterial routes connecting and passing through the forest, to give maximum impression of forest cover in the shortest space of time.²⁰⁸

To start the process of creating an apparent unity and continuity to the forest, alongside fringe planting, signage declaring the forest boundaries along road routes into the forest and new signs for all of the settlements within the forest boundary stating '[name of settlement] in the National Forest' were erected. This aspiration behind this strategy was twofold; to declare to the visitor to the forest that they were in fact within the new forest boundary and also to promote and bolster a forest identity in the people of the region. The fringe planting plan extended to waterways too, specifically the river Trent which was anticipated then as becoming a vital leisure resource.²⁰⁹ (This is still the case; the Trent is anticipated to be one of the main leisure features developing in the forest of the next decade.) In the 2010 *Much More than Trees* report one of the potential barriers identified was that urban parts of the forest are 'not pretty' and perhaps more problematically that towns 'tend to be less well engaged than rural communities'.²¹⁰ Identity and its creation is the subject of a separate chapter (see chapter six). The urban fringe was specifically identified as a target for plantation, creating a green framework for the built environment. Options suggested included community woods, forest parks, development related planting, conservation woodlands, short rotation coppice and urban forestry schemes.²¹¹ Implementation of this plan has proved to be successful, especially in Swadlincote where large areas of former spoil heaps have been converted to public woodlands and leisure facilities, an artificial ski slope amongst them.

This outline strategy for continuity of woodland meant that the Development Team planned to create what they termed 'linkage planting'; new plantation of woodland that not only expanded current tree cover but specifically linked older plantations to each other. This would create a swift visual impression of continuous woodland and also create wildlife corridors, replacing the intermittent woodland and stands of trees that are more difficult for wildlife to move between. This approach to linkage of woodland was commended in 2004 at the conference of the International Association for Landscape Ecology, where during a case study of the National Forest in landscape-scale change it was recognised that 'the National Forest jigsaw is well and truly coming together... notably the National Forest Tender Scheme

²⁰⁷ <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmselect/cmenvfru/432/1120502.htm> (Accessed 16th July 2017).

²⁰⁸ Pers comm; interview with Simon Evans, Director of Operations (since retired) at the National Forest Company 23rd June 2017.

²⁰⁹ Pers comm; interview with Simon Evans, Director of Operations (since retired) at the National Forest Company 23rd June 2017.

²¹⁰ DC Research. *Much More Than Trees 3. The Socio-Economic Impact of the National Forest- Final Report*. Leicester 2010 p:58.

²¹¹ The National Forest Company. *The Strategy 2004-2014*. The National Forest Company, Moira. 2004 p:15.

[and] land acquisition by the NFC, Forestry Commission, the Woodland Trust, local authorities and Wildlife Trusts'.²¹²

The National Forest Tender Scheme was developed from a concept proposed by the original Development Team and was a method of attracting landowners to consider converting large areas of farmland to woodland through offering financial incentives to plant trees. The scheme was offered as a ten year income support scheme, whereby landowners received cash payments to plant and maintain trees, it being considered that after ten years the trees would no longer require grass mowing or other assistance and would be able to compete for resources with other flora, namely grasses, which often provide drought conditions for young trees by depleting the topsoil of water and nutrients. Once the roots of the young are established the competition for water and nutrients reduces as trees have deeper absolute rooting depths, although a grass sward is 'very efficient at withdrawing nutrients from the soil and grass competition for water and nutrients needs to be compensated for'.²¹³ The Tender Scheme proved to be an effective means by which landowners were able to diversify their assets, opening up not only future revenue possibilities from timber production but also otherwise difficult to exploit opportunities in leisure and tourism.²¹⁴ The Tender Scheme became the Changing Landscapes Scheme in 2014, this scheme pays for the full cost of plantation and allows for income to be generated.²¹⁵

Local provenance seed stock was one of the early considerations of the Development Team and was a policy adopted by the NFC, and considerable effort was made in sourcing and providing seed from trees with a local provenance. The 2004 Forest Strategy stated that: 'The National Forest has an exemplary role to play in raising the profile of using local provenance tree stock. The NFC operates a local provenance policy that promotes the use of broadleaf stock from within the Forest area or other UK sources. Effective links need to be maintained between seed sources, tree nurseries and planting partners.'²¹⁶ This policy has recently changed, with consideration now being given to climate change and new diseases in trees, with a wake-up call from the Chalara (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*), or Ash dieback disease. Ash dieback was first reported in Europe in Poland in 1992 and arrived in Britain in 2012. It spread rapidly and was reported in the National Forest in 2013. Ash dieback is windborne locally but may have been imported to the UK through the movement of logs or unsawn timber.²¹⁷ As ash makes up around 20% of the total number of trees in the National Forest, the implications might be very serious. Experiments with non-local seed types and with non-native tree species have been ongoing as a reaction to both the potential for disease and for forward planning against changes in local ecology due to climate change.²¹⁸

²¹² Smithers, R. *Landscape Ecology of Trees and Forests: Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual IALE (UK) Conference*. IALE (UK) 2004 p: 276.

²¹³ Jackson, J.E. *The Biology of Apples and Pears*. Cambridge University Press 2003 p:405.

²¹⁴ Parry, J. *The National Forest, Heritage in the Making*. p:154.

²¹⁵ National Forest Company Changing Landscapes Scheme pamphlet, see also: <http://www.nationalforest.org/woodlands/woodlandcreation/cls/> (Accessed 14th July 2017).

²¹⁶ The National Forest Company. *The Strategy 2004-2014*. The National Forest Company, Moira. 2004 p:17

²¹⁷ <https://www.forestry.gov.uk/ashdieback> (Accessed 15th July 2017).

²¹⁸ Pers comm; interview with Simon Evans, Director of Operations (now retired) at the National Forest Company 23rd June 2017.

The Development Team created a business plan to inform government of the indicative costs involved in the forest's creation, to be able to release funds to start to engender community participation in planting, thereby beginning to foster a fledgling forest identity. Alongside this, the *Leicester Mercury* ran a successful fundraising campaign with the tagline 'Stump up for Woody Tree', which encouraged the public to donate to a tree planting fund. This was well received and supported by the public, creating a feedback loop which bolstered the positive groundswell of public opinion and the positive opinion by government that this was the correct course of action. The *Stump Up* scheme was never intended to provide significant enough finances to fund the Forest in a large way but it did provide a mechanism for the general public to contribute and feel they were involved and making a difference. For the Development Team also helped maintain a useful presence in the media. Supported by the National Forest Development Team, The Woodland Trust, The National Westminster Bank and Leicestershire County and Leicester City Councils, the *Leicester Mercury* ran regular updates on how the *Stump Up* funds were spent. 50,000 trees were funded by the campaign in its first year alone, planted over three sites in the Leicestershire countryside, transforming many acres and which the *Mercury* hailed as an 'environmental miracle'- which in a way it was, the public helped directly to transform several derelict sites over the course of the campaign.²¹⁹

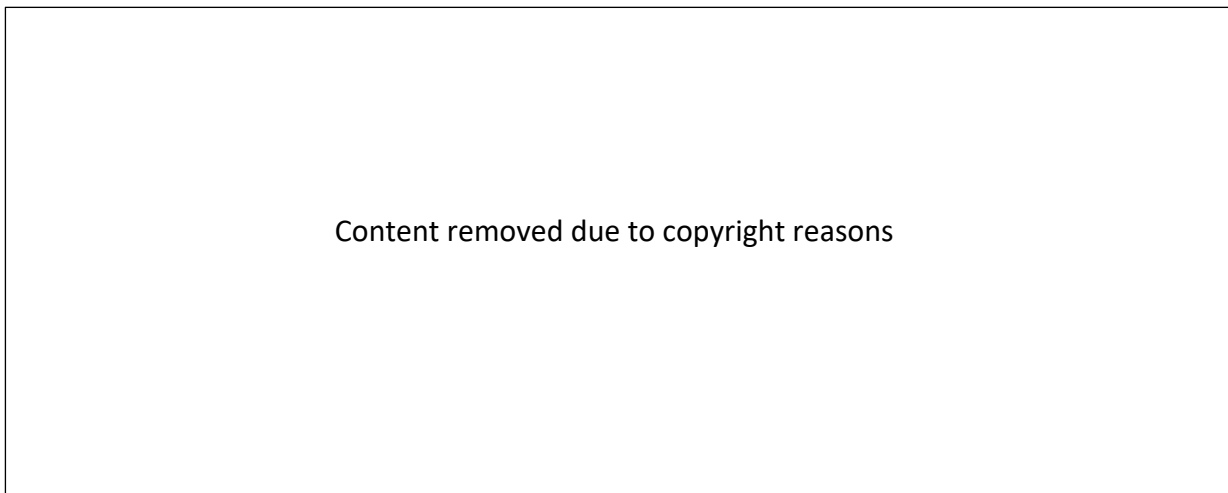


Figure 17. The *Leicester Mercury*'s Stump Up for Woody Tree Campaign.²²⁰

The only fly in the ointment was the tardiness of the government machine, causing the director of the Development Team to warn ministers that 'the forest has to happen quickly, or people are going to lose faith'.²²¹ They needed the formation of the National Forest Company to kick-start the forest planting.

²¹⁹ *Leicester Mercury*, November 5th, 1991, November 8th, 1991, for example, and on many more occasions

²²⁰ From the *Leicester Mercury*, November 5th, 1991.

²²¹ Quoted in a special issue of the *East Midlands Geographer*. Wade, P.M., Sheail, J, & Child, L. *The National Forest: from vision to reality. The East Midland Geographer*, Volume 21 Part 1. University of Nottingham, 1998 p:19.

One of the early problems considered by the Countryside Commission, along with various government ministers, the Development Team and later still the fledgling National Forest Company was that of persuading landowners to undertake a radical change in land use. The various tender schemes were (and continue to be) a vehicle to provide financial support and coverage of costs and maintenance during the transition from farming to forestry, as demonstrated in further detail below.

The increase in public awareness to environmental problems and the changing requirements and practices of farming throughout the 1970s and '80s, alongside changes to farming subsidy payments through the EEC directly to farmers resulted in a change to farming methods that now allowed farmers to produce below maximum capacity; farmers could now also be conservationists. Modernisation of farming since the end of the Second World War had been so rapid as to place farming as the foremost destructive element in Britain's countryside, more so than urban development, and by the late 1970s was now the greatest threat to the appearance, wildlife and recreational value of the countryside. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment remarked that the most important thing for the countryside was 'to get the basic balance of agricultural and other land uses right, so the engine of destruction was removed'.²²² The House of Commons Environment Committee report of January 1985 noted an almost universal acknowledgement amongst witnesses of 'a climate of change in the farming world'. The Committee was greatly impressed by Sir Derek Barber's remark that 'once you get farmers hooked on conservation there is a tendency for them to be hooked for life'.²²³ The Countryside Commission had introduced an experimental funding scheme whereby farmers receiving 'Set-aside' funding could also receive additional grants for providing public access and for conservation works. This was followed in 1991 by funding for farmers through the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, which was so oversubscribed (by up to a third) that more funding had to be found.²²⁴ Conservation and farming could now be seen not as antagonistic forces, but as partners in countryside stewardship.

This did not automatically ensure that farmers would be keen to plant their land with trees; as Bell recalled in 1995: 'While public enthusiasm ran high, there were others, notably the farming community, that were deeply suspicious of the National Forest. Not only did we need to make it a financially attractive proposition, but we had a great deal of reassuring to do. We concentrated our efforts on this in the early days'.²²⁵ The Development Team were keen to pursue a partnership with the farmers within the National Forest and from early stage in their appointment began to explore potential methods of encouraging a change of use from agricultural farmland to forestry. To that end they began a campaign of reaching out directly to the landowning and farming community by appointing a National Forest Advisor, Amanda Callard, in early 1992 on secondment from the CPRE, specifically to work with that group of

²²² Sheail, *Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain*. p: 165.

²²³ Sheail, *Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain*. p: 164.

²²⁴ Sheail, *Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain*. pp:158- 169.

²²⁵ *Countryside* magazine March/ April 1995 issue. Article entitled *Birth of a Forest for the Nation, From Politics to Tree Planting*. p: 4. SDDC Archive at Rosliston Forestry Centre, one of the several Newspaper clippings files. Lent to the author by Environmental Development Manager Kate Allies August 2020.

people.²²⁶ The Team printed a series of newsletters *Farmers News* (sic) *A National Forest Newsletter* beginning in the winter of 1992/ '93 and then more or less annually but also as required. (They were undated until Number 7 in the Winter of 1996, therefore production of the specifically directed newsletter carried on well after the National Forest Company had formed, by which time the title had also been corrected). This double- sided A4 newsletter had been developed from the production of a targeted information campaign by the Development Team Grant Information for Farmers and Landowners in April 1992.

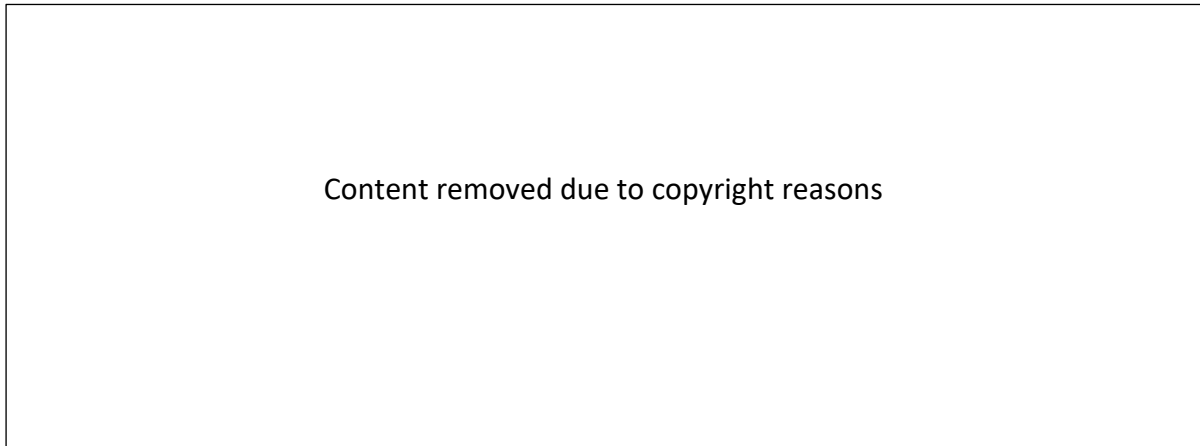


Figure 18. Promotional information leaflet. The New National Forest Grant Information for Farmers and Landowners. April 1992. Author's photograph²²⁷

This document gave detailed information on the establishment grants and annual payments available from various public bodies; grants administered and funded by the Forestry Commission (through the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme administered and funded by MAFF), grants administered and funded by the Countryside Commission (funded by the Department of the Environment), and grants administered by the three County Councils (and funded jointly by them and the Countryside Commission).

Grant conditions were listed in which it was made clear that the Forest was to be planted on landowners properties through voluntary participation, no land acquisitions were to be made compulsorily as there were no powers to do so on none would be sought, that tenants could not apply for a funding scheme without the agreement of both landlord and tenant, and that there was no obligation on farmers and landowners to provide public access to their land. The public would have no right of entry onto private land which did not already exist or was not willingly agreed by farmers and landowners.²²⁸ The Development Team, as with the Countryside Commission went to considerable lengths to ensure that landowners understood that private land remained entirely in the hands of the owners, there would be no large-scale land acquisition, compulsory or otherwise.

²²⁶ New Scientist. *Greening the Heart of England*. 24th September 1994 p: 32 (author not recorded). *Farmers News*. A National Forest Newsletter No. 4. Undated but seems to be from late summer 1994.

²²⁷ Promotional information leaflet produced by the Development Team. *The New National Forest Grant Information for Farmers and Landowners*. April 1992.

²²⁸ Promotional information leaflet. *The New National Forest Grant Information for Farmers and Landowners*. April 1992.

Access to land versus maintaining private ownership of the land has been something of an elephant in the room for the growth and management of the National Forest since its inception. The avowed stance of the Development Team, the National Forest Company- and also the Countryside Commission (and indeed the three County Council submission)- from the outset has been a policy of 'no compulsory land acquisition and therefore no automatic right of access to the public'.²²⁹ Balanced against this is the creation of a multi- purpose 'Forest for All' requirement- again an intended policy from the initial concept, and the publication of a Development Team hinted at this: 'An extensive rights of way network, including the Heart of England Way and the Staffordshire Way, will allow people to reach deep into the Forest on foot, on horseback or on bicycle'.²³⁰ A halfway house position was adopted whereby landowners are encouraged to allow permissive access for at least the length of time that grant and tender scheme funding is in place with access capable of being withdrawn by the landowner at any time. By and large this approach has worked although there are occasional difficulties recorded.²³¹

The Development Team quickly established links with the National Farmers' Union (NFU) to reassure farmers and landowners that the Forest need not be seen as a threat to agriculture and farming practice. To promote the Forest as an opportunity to diversify, the Team began a series of Farmers' Days from September 1992, where presentations were given by The Forestry Authority, The National Forest and English Woodlands to farmers within the Forest area and representatives from the NFU, MAFF Timber Growers UK and others.²³² *Farmers News* went on to provide brief updates on a variety of topics, from diversifying into conservation and hunting opportunities to discussing the political situation within the EEC relating to Set-Aside funding for tree planting and woodland creation. In essence, it was used by the Development Team and by the National Forest Advisor to keep farmers and landowners informed and promoted active involvement in forest creation. There was good reason to do so; landowners and farmers had not been as enthusiastic about diversifying as initially hoped, which given the deep economic recession the United Kingdom had entered at the very end of 1990 and throughout the entirety of the following year, was unsurprising, and the *Farmers News* and the good news stories it contained, with examples of woodland creation by farmers and landowners was part of a targeted public relations exercise calculated to increase plantation and grant and tender schemes take up.²³³ It was an uphill battle. The public relations document recommended four issues of *Farmers News* per annum with regular updated farmers' grant leaflets.

²²⁹ Undated information leaflet produced by the Development Team and Countryside Commission and published by the Countryside Commission. ISBN 0 86170 289 1. An ISBN search reveals nothing. Attempted 26th May 2020 Inferred date 1993.

²³⁰ Undated information leaflet produced by the Development Team and Countryside Commission and published by the Countryside Commission. ISBN 0 86170 289 1. An ISBN search reveals nothing. Attempted 26th May 2020 Inferred date 1993.

²³¹ Vandalism to vehicles, construction vehicles and enclosure fences were recorded in Overseal and Spring Cottage in 2013 following the fencing off and closure of previously available access land. These incidents continue at low-level. They are not uncommon when previously available access is removed.

²³² The National Forest Development Team. *Farmers News No1*. Winter 1992.

²³³ Susan Newsome Associates. *The National Forest: PR Plan of Action 1993/4*. AB/52/93 November 1992 pp:4-5.

The slowness and apparent lack of enthusiasm to embrace take up of tender scheme and grant funding by farmers and landowners was of considerable concern for the Development Team and others, as recognised again in the public relations strategy planned for 1994. The first year had been centred on planning the strategy and business plan for the Forest, encouraging farmers and landowners to take up funding opportunities to diversify and raising public awareness. The general public had been overwhelmingly enthusiastic from the outset and to keep the momentum going a more general biannual Forest newsletter began to be published from May 1992, *Forest News*. An initial newsletter had been published in December 1991, essentially this had been a brief situation report announcing the arrival of the Forest, mentioning the VIP visits to the area and presenting the plan for the following few months into the middle of 1991. This initial newsletter recognised that the Forest boundary still had to be fully defined, that the administration for the Forest had still to be decided upon, and generally promoting opportunities for landowners to take part in grant schemes and the general public to start to grow and plan to plant trees themselves- the team were keen to keep the enthusiasm for the Forest alive but (having been overwhelmed by well-meaning locals bringing trees to them) informed the public that they couldn't accept gifts of trees at the Donisthorpe Office.²³⁴

Forest News was also used as a vehicle to continually report on and stress the connection between and the direct involvement of Government in the Forest's creation. It was vital that the Development Team kept all methods of communication with Government open and press for complete commitment to the Forest from Government, especially financially, and in their Manifesto the Government had made that commitment. A steady stream of MPs and ministers was invited to the National Forest to plant trees and take photo opportunities on as many occasions as the Team could take advantage of. The Forest was a good-news story and there were plenty of opportunities to be had.

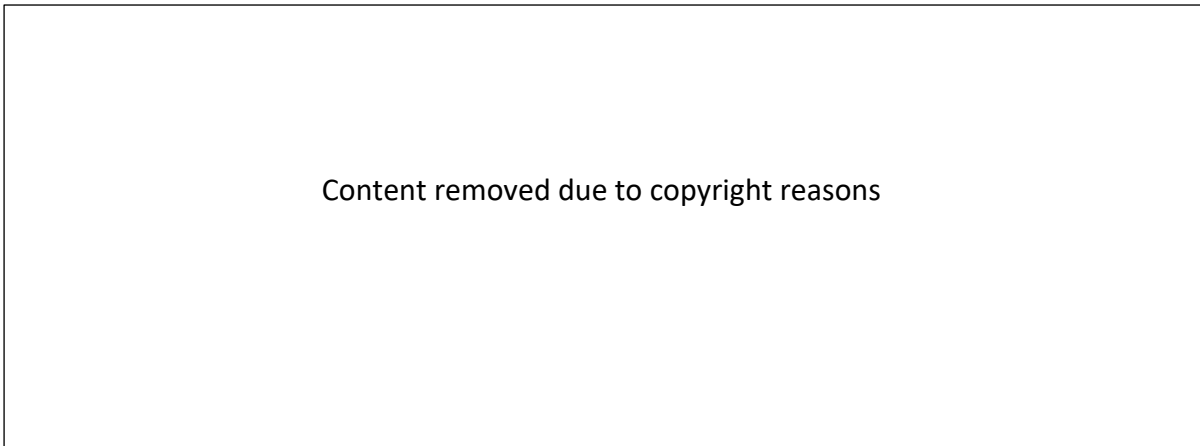


Figure 19. Reaffirmation of support for the National Forest by Government- another chance for Ministers and Forest VIPs to create a photo opportunity. L-R Tim Yeo, Minister for the Environment and Countryside; Earl Howe, The Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; Michael Dower, Director General of the Countryside Commission; Susan Bell, Director of the National Forest Development Team.²³⁵

²³⁴ Pers comm; interview with Simon Evans, Director of Operations (since retired) at the National Forest Company 23rd June 2017. Also, The National Forest Development Team, *The New National Forest Newsletter* Donisthorpe, Leicestershire December 1991.

²³⁵ *Forest News*. Number 4 October 1993. Published by the National Forest Development Team, Stanleigh House, Donisthorpe.

The problem of identity for the new Forest was partially addressed in issue 1 of *Forest News*. The Development Team recognised that creating a new forest in an area where none had been for many centuries was synonymous with the formation of a new identity and that both would be slow to grow. There had been trials with capturing the new character of the area that was under creation with imagery aimed specifically at the target market by publication- a family under trees for the general audience, a tractor aimed at the farming audience; but the Team needed a simple logo that would be immediately recognisable.

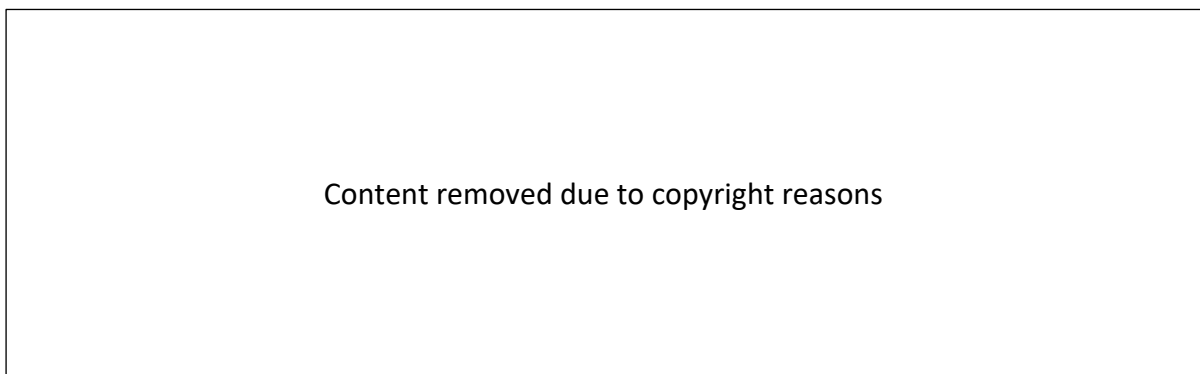


Figure 20. Initial attempts at logos for the Forest from 1991 and early 1992. Author's photographs.²³⁶

This was announced in May 1992 as the lead article in *Forest News* number 1 [...] 'a logo with which the Forest can be immediately recognised... a symbol that embodies the simple yet grand idea of a Forest for the nation. The National Forest – as it is now to be known – reflects in name and logo the nature of this unique undertaking'.²³⁷ The logo of a stylised tree within a circle was indeed symbolic of the 'simple yet grand idea' and as such was (and remains) carefully protected by copyright. The copyright covers the logo itself, along with the lettering size in proportion to the logo and the font style. Action is taken against copyright infringement by the NFC if necessary.²³⁸ Permission to use the logo and association therefore with the National Forest is free to apply for and freely granted by the NFC if deemed appropriate.

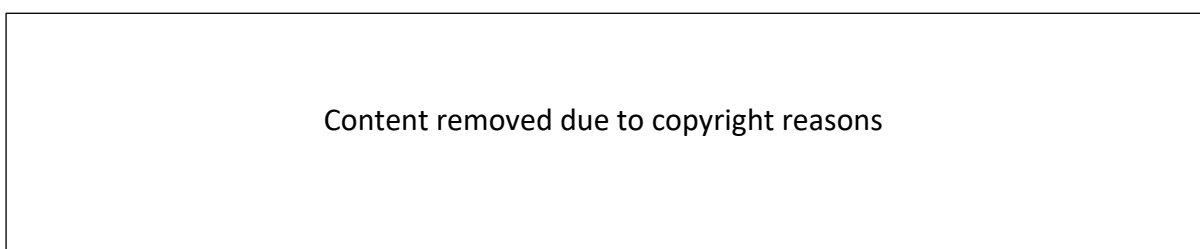


Figure 21. The new logo as produced in *Forest News* No.1. Author's photo.

²³⁶ Photographs taken from *The New National Forest Newsletter* December 1991 and *The New National Forest Grant Information for Farmers and Landowners*. April 1992.

²³⁷ The National Forest Development Team, *Forest News*. Donisthorpe, Leicestershire May 1992.

²³⁸ Pers Com. Email exchange with Sophie Churchill, the CEO of the NFC and with Sean Sheehan, Leicestershire County Councillor, and as observed personally by the author. In 2013 a local entrepreneur wished to promote his log cabin holiday chalets and re- covered both the Leicestershire County Council's own signage for the hamlet's name with his own brand but also reproduced the National Forest logo and name without permission, with the incorrect font and font to image ratio. The NFC and the Parish and County Councils were swift to act to demand the removal of both the unauthorised use of the brand name and logo and the reinstatement of the County Council signage.

The symbol has gone on to be deployed widely (whilst carefully protected) by the National Forest Company and has become synonymous with the Forest. It is deployed for a range of place-defining uses, from letterheads to village and town name signs, and of course on the gateways to the forest along arterial roads into and through the Forest area. The symbol helps generate a sense of shared locale and unity for the inhabitants of the Forest (although it is not available to use without permission) as well as creating a sense of arrival for the visitor.

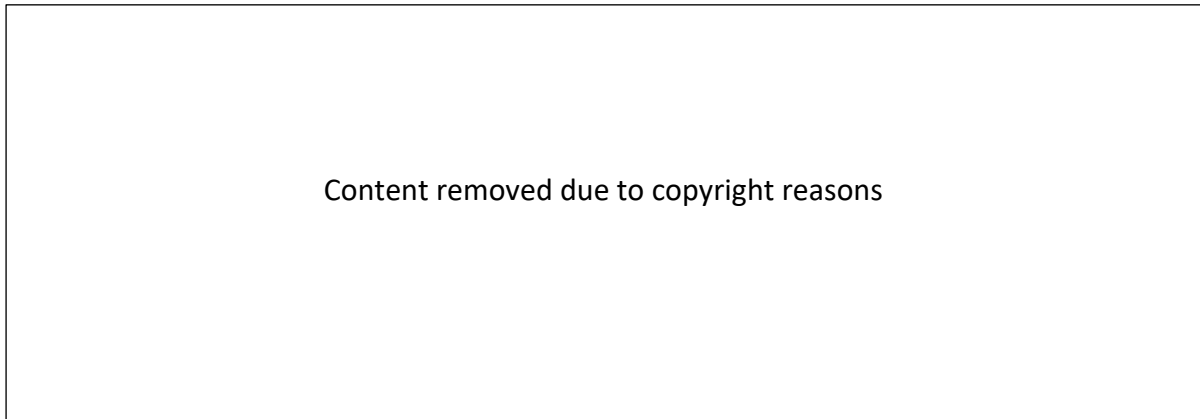


Figure 22. The National Forest logo at the roadside announcing arrival at one of the National Forest gateways. Photograph by Christopher Beech.

1992 was a difficult year for the Development Team, they were 'under great pressure' and submitted the Strategy and Business plan to the Department of Environment at the end of that year. They were then kept waiting 'for what seemed an eternity'. As Bell stated in 1995 'We could not take the Strategy out to public consultation [without ministerial approval, and] the ensuing silence, and our inability to let people know what was going on, was deeply frustrating and, in no small measure, damaging to the project'.²³⁹ After a very long wait, a consultation paper was approved and published in the late autumn of 1993, with respondent's deadline the end of the year.

This consultation paper, *It's Your Forest*, (an A4 booklet) was divided into an introduction to the outline plan for the Forest and then a series of proposals under six headline topics: Forestry; Sport, recreation and tourism; Agriculture and rural enterprise; Nature conservation and historic heritage; Development, and Minerals and derelict land. Each of the subject areas closed with a paragraph entitled 'It's Your Forest', and respondents were encouraged to write to Simon Evans as the Development Team strategist with opinions and suggestions. The Development team and the Countryside Commission's hand was strengthened when some 1,200 responses were received by the team and a remarkable 99 per cent of those endorsed the creation of the Forest.²⁴⁰ A Strategy plan could now be properly formulated from the outline one already drafted, based on the results and success of the Consultation Paper and formally presented to government. As the Public Relations Action Plan shows, the draft strategy and the consultation paper had already been privately presented to ministers prior to the formal release of those documents, demanding the requirement for a careful strategy

²³⁹ *Countryside* magazine March/ April 1995 issue. Article entitled *Birth of a Forest for the Nation, From Politics to Tree Planting*. p: 5 Partial copy kept in the SDDC Archive at Rosliston Forestry Centre.

²⁴⁰ Sheail, *An Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain*. p:175.

for any promotional and media activity before any official announcement from government.²⁴¹

Bell recalled that it had been an ‘enormous relief’ when ministerial approval had been granted for the launch of the Forest Strategy and public consultation in October 1993, and that the consultation exercise itself was ‘frenetic’. The consultation itself ran from October 12th to December 31st of that year and involved the mailing and distribution of nearly 3,000 full reports and 17,000 summary versions. Consultation was held at major local shopping centres and presentations at a series of public meetings across the Forest area. The team also had a video produced which received ‘substantial press coverage. Locally, nationally and in the specialist press’.²⁴²

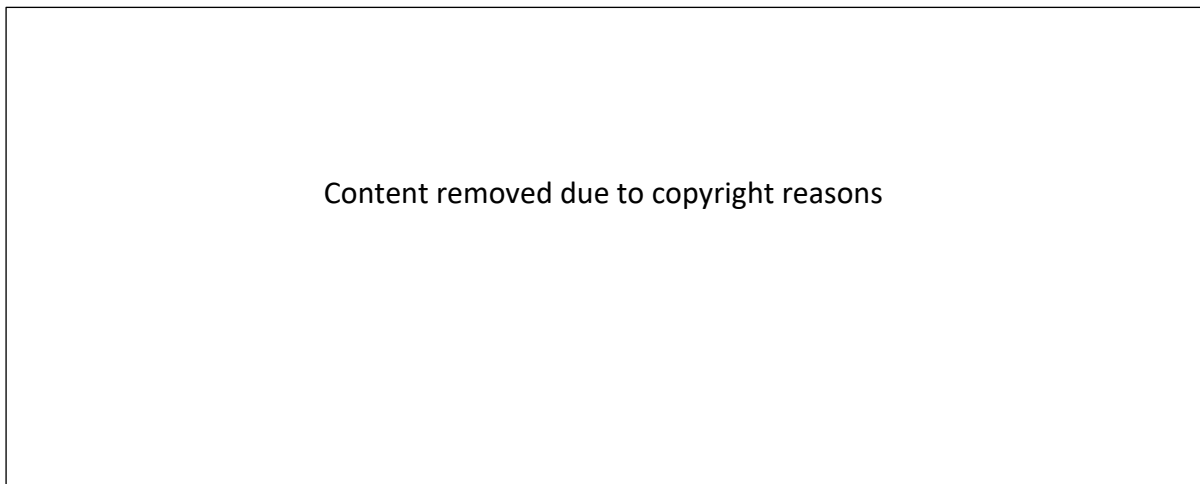


Figure 23. Public consultation. Here held in the Octagon Centre, Burton on Trent. (See note 228).

Amongst the widespread support from the consultation document for the Forest in general, there were a number of issues raised. Again, the Rambler’s Association had pushed for ‘An alternative strategy based on massive state land purchase by the Forest Enterprise offering freedom to roam throughout’. Again, they were rejected, the Team being of the firm opinion that any compulsion to provide unconditional access to land would set landowners against the project.²⁴³ Others called for definitive rights of way access with all tree planting grants; the Development Team stated that they were committed to ‘improving public access’ and that ‘incentives are needed to create new permissive access with Forest planting’. The team believed that ‘far more... [could]... be achieved through persuasion rather than compulsion’.²⁴⁴ These rejections were of a none too subtle nature, the Team knew that convincing landowners that no compulsory purchase of their land or forced conversion to forestry was around the corner and they desperately needed farmers and landowners on side to create the Forest and bring it to fruition over long timescales. A delicate balancing act was required.

²⁴¹ Susan Newsome Associates. *The National Forest: PR Plan of Action 1993/4*. AB/52/93 November 1992 p:1.

²⁴² *Countryside* magazine March/ April 1995 issue. Article entitled *Birth of a Forest for the Nation, From Politics to Tree Planting*. p: 5. Partial copy kept in the SDDC Archive at Rosliston Forestry Centre in one of the several Newspaper clippings files. Lent to the author by Environmental Development Manager Kate Allies August 2020.

²⁴³ National Forest Development Team. *It’s Your Forest*. Summary of responses 1994. Copy held in SDDC archives and lent to the author by Kate Allies.

²⁴⁴ National Forest Development Team. *It’s Your Forest*. Summary of responses 1994.

Content removed due to copyright reasons

Figure 24. The published response to the Consultation Paper of 1993. Author's photograph

The Development Team had hired a team of public relations advisors during the course of 1991, Susan Newsome Associates, based in Leamington Spa. In 1991 the Countryside Commission, with the Director of the National Forest Development Team endorsed a public relations strategy for the Forest's three-year development phase. Key themes were then selected to gain broad political, private and popular investment in the Forest concept.²⁴⁵ The first phase of the public relations strategy was agreed in November 1992, between them they had formulated a public relations plan of action for 1993 and 1994. This was a staged plan of activity to maximise the enormous public enthusiasm which itself was reflected throughout the media, using the weight and tone of the public response. Throughout the document it is stressed that a continued supply of information would be required, it being deemed essential that an informed public would be a happy one and that silence whilst awaiting government response would be interpreted in a negative way, with a corresponding decline in enthusiasm if nothing was seen to be happening. Therefore, this staged plan of activities was planned and maintained, it being one that that could create the best media opportunities balanced against a changing political background and a poor economic situation. It was of vital importance that a positive message would always be transmitted, and a driving public relations programme of messages and activities be continued to be projected from the Development Team and from the Countryside Commission. Use of news releases and

²⁴⁵ Newsome, S. *A Public Relations Strategy and Supporting Programme of Activity for 1994*. Susan Newsome Associates. Leamington Spa January 1994. Introduction.

especially television and radio would be utilised wherever possible, even a discussion of the Forest in Radio 4's daily soap opera *The Archers* was mooted.²⁴⁶

The BBC's flagship farming and countryside TV show, *Countryfile*, broadcast an episode from and about the Forest and local and national newspapers were regularly contacted with news releases, as per the public relations plan. Celebrities were recruited at every opportunity, Dave Lee Travis the Radio 1 presenter, author Frederick Forsyth and singer Cliff Richard all contributed in raising both the profile of the Forest and funds for specific woodland creation projects within the National Forest itself.²⁴⁷ The ever-enthusiastic *Leicester Mercury* produced a supplement with the history of the forest and pull out centrefold of the forest as it was created.

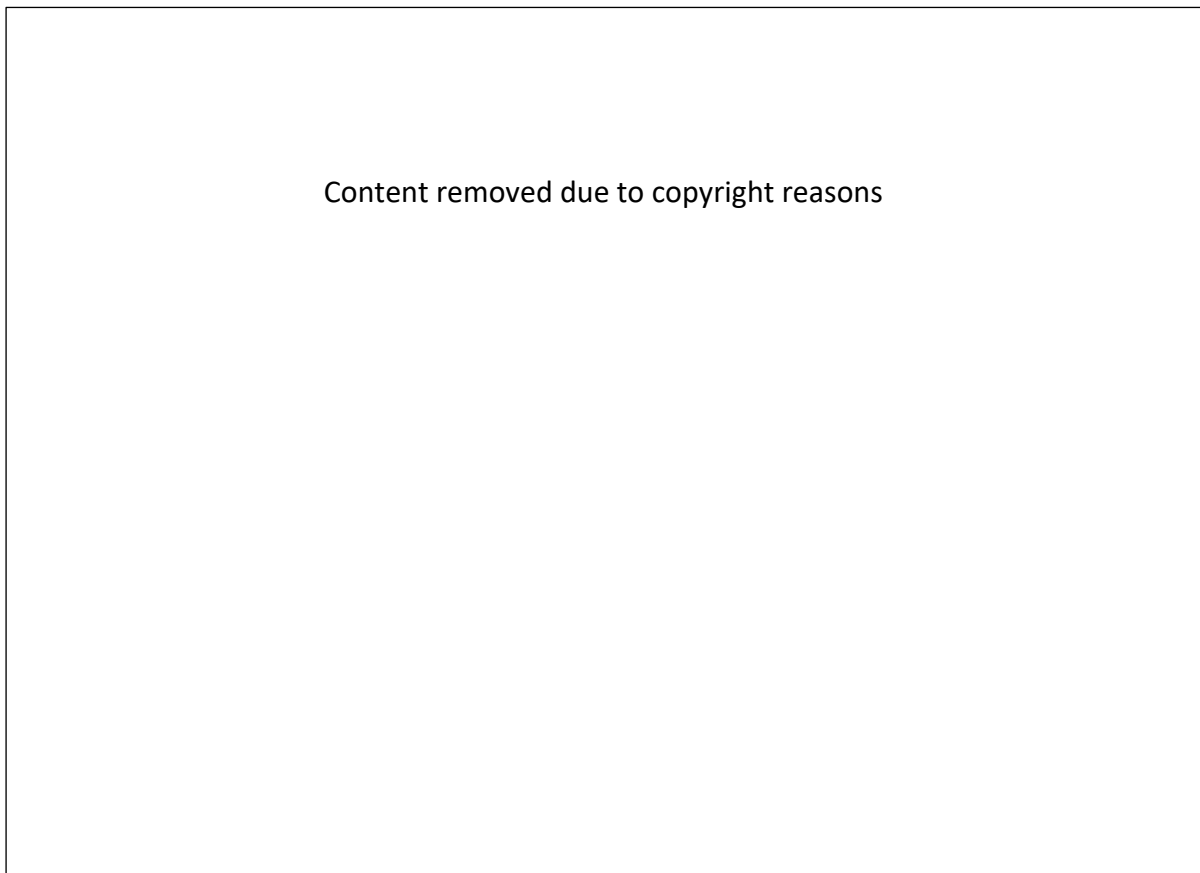


Figure 25. Woody Tree in the National Forest special edition of the *Leicester Mercury*, January 11th 1993. Author's photograph.

Public expectation was high and the Development Team had several balls in the air: encouraging landowners and farmers to diversify from their traditional role as food producers; creating a visible forest and access to woods for the general public and managing

²⁴⁶ Susan Newsome Associates. *The National Forest: PR Plan of Action 1993/4*. AB/52/93 November 1992 p:1. Newsome, S. *A Public Relations Strategy and Supporting Programme of Activity for 1994*. Susan Newsome Associates. Leamington Spa January 1994. p:13, point v.

²⁴⁷ Cliff Richard appeared on a campaign leaflet in *Forest News* Number 4 October 1993. Dave Lee Travis was featured in *Forest News* Number 1 May 1992. Frederick Forsyth appeared in a feature in *Forest News* Number 2 October 1992. Published by the National Forest Development Team, Stanleigh House, Donisthorpe.

expectations whilst maintaining the high levels of support; partial funding for a 'Heart of the Forest' Visitor Centre had been negotiated and whilst that was being administered by the *Heart of the National Forest Foundation* and, later, further funding sought through *RECHAR II* (see below) its success or failure would reflect on the Forest project as a whole; and not least in promoting the strategy plan through to approval by government ministers.²⁴⁸ The public relations plan of action was unashamedly vigorous '[...] the public relations programme must take a strong, unabashed approach in pursuing the aim of local and national public recognition for the project'.²⁴⁹ This forceful approach advocated by the public relations consultant was quickly adopted by the Development Team, and with hindsight, suited their vigorous *modus operandi* in encouraging ongoing political support.

It was through the public relations team that *Farmers News* and *Forest News*, along with a considered and continuous stream of leaflets, newsletters, newspaper updates and television and radio appearances were devised and implemented. The recognition of the time, energy and financial resources spent by local authorities was not seen to be wasted and a personal briefing in the form of a mini forum was planned in for the beginning of 1993 rather than wait until the formal response to the consultation and the official announcement and response in the spring of that year. All of the activities around the Strategy launch, from the materials available to the choice of venue and speakers, with focus on the detail of the message, was carefully stage managed. It was in this document that the dependence on ministerial reaction was noted as a timing concern, that the gateways to the Forest would require clear signage to announce the arrival of the visitor to a new 'place', that marking the planting of significant number of trees (the 250,000th, the half-millionth &c) were key milestones and small 'p' political capital could be made from it. Political support was also part of the public relations strategy, by presentation to MPs, especially those with constituencies within or partially within the Forest, political support for the project was strengthened and increased.²⁵⁰

During the course of 1993 the plantation of three Demonstration Woodlands was overseen by the team. They were established in the Forest as a joint initiative between the Department of the Environment, the Forestry Commission Research Division and the Development Team (and was later absorbed into the National Forest Company strategy) and were a project to research and monitor the planting, establishment and future management of different types of woodlands with very different site conditions- good quality agricultural land, newly restored colliery spoil and low-grade pasture. Each site had several different types of operation demonstrated including ground preparation, methods of establishment (planting and seeding), methods of maintenance and protection, species trials, different types of planting (commercial, native woodlands, game coverts) and the costs of establishing different types of woodlands in the different soil/ condition type.²⁵¹ The reports of the trials from the Forestry Commission Research Division produced in March 1996 showed successful trial results and also highlighted problematical issues. The three demonstration woodlands at

²⁴⁸ Undated *Heart of the Forest* information paper from SDDC archive. No reference number, date or publication detail. RECHAR II funded projects between 1994 to 1999. See: McGowan, L. & Phinnemore, D. A *Dictionary of the European Union*. Routledge, Oxford 2015.

²⁴⁹ Susan Newsome Associates. *The National Forest: PR Plan of Action 1993/4*. AB/52/93 November 1992 p:5.

²⁵⁰ Susan Newsome Associates. *The National Forest: PR Plan of Action 1993/4*. AB/52/93 November 1992.

²⁵¹ Letter (ref SE/LM/LO58) dated 27th November 1996 from Simon Evans to Kate Allies held in SDDC archive and lent to the author by Kate Allies.

Desford Lakes, Barton-under-Needwood and Church Gresley were useful in demonstrating planting and establishment techniques on the various soil and site conditions for landowners in the National Forest but had a broader national significance for other organisations involved in woodland creation throughout the country and beyond. The trials included native and non-native tree species.

At Desford Lakes as part of British Coal's reclamation and regeneration of the derelict former colliery site, a reclaimed colliery spoil heap was selected for the project. The non-native species were an experiment in evaluating the performance of seventeen species selected as tolerant of dry, acid compacted sites. Restored soils have fundamentally lower capacity to support tree height growth than that which the planted trees are potentially capable of: tree height growth is limited on restored sites by the capacity of restored soil to support it, caused by an inability in restored soils to retain water to the same capacity as virgin soils. Nutrient uptake is negatively affected by limited water supply and trees on restored sites can never achieve their full potential.²⁵² At Church Gresley (poor quality ex-industrial land) three experiments were conducted to investigate whether planting Corsican pine, Italian alder and green alder can aid the establishment of oak; and also whether natural colonisation can be assisted using simple ground preparation. At Barton-under-Needwood six demonstration areas were prepared to understand twelve different methods of growing trees for profit. The team wanted to understand how best to maximise financial return from environmentally sound forestry practice using careful species choice and management. The native tree species were planted as an experiment across all sites to evaluate how fifteen types of tree were influenced by site.²⁵³ These demonstration woodlands remain helpful in understanding species type growth and suitability as they grow and how non-native species may become required in the face of climate change.

British Coal, owners of what became the Desford Lakes site, was one of the major landowners in the Forest area and owned some 5,000 hectares of land within the Forest boundary, approximately 10%. In April 1991 a division of British Coal, British Coal Property, was established with the intention of capitalising on the corporation's assets by developing non-operational land and, where appropriate, working with public and private sector agencies to achieve the regeneration of sites (and buildings) affected by the decline of the industry. The Ashby Woulds area alone contained around 200 hectares of derelict land following the closure of Rawdon and Donisthorpe collieries, along with smaller areas of land, along with smaller parcels of land.²⁵⁴ It was beginning to become apparent that the Development Team and British Coal could work together to achieve mutually acceptable outcomes.

During the course of the early 1990s British Coal Opencast, another division of British Coal was in the process of coal extraction from the Nadins site, immediately adjacent to the

²⁵² MacKenzie, A.J., PhD Thesis. *The Growth of Trees and the Development of Soils on Restored Opencast Coal Plantations in Derbyshire*. 1997. Held in University of Derby archive and accessed 20th December 2012.

²⁵³ Kerr, G. (editor). *Establishment Operations Reports for Desford Lakes, Barton- Under- Needwood and Church Gresley Demonstration Woodlands*. Forestry Commission Research Division in conjunction with the Department of the Environment and the National Forest Company. March 1996.

²⁵⁴ British Coal Corporation. *Reports and Accounts*. British Coal, 1992, author not recorded. Undated brochure. *British Coal and the National Forest; a growing relationship; The Charter*. Published jointly by the National Forest, British Coal Property and British Coal Opencast. Inferred date 1992/3.

town of Swadlincote, and where 2.5 million tonnes of coal were extracted, and with further opencast mineral workings planned.

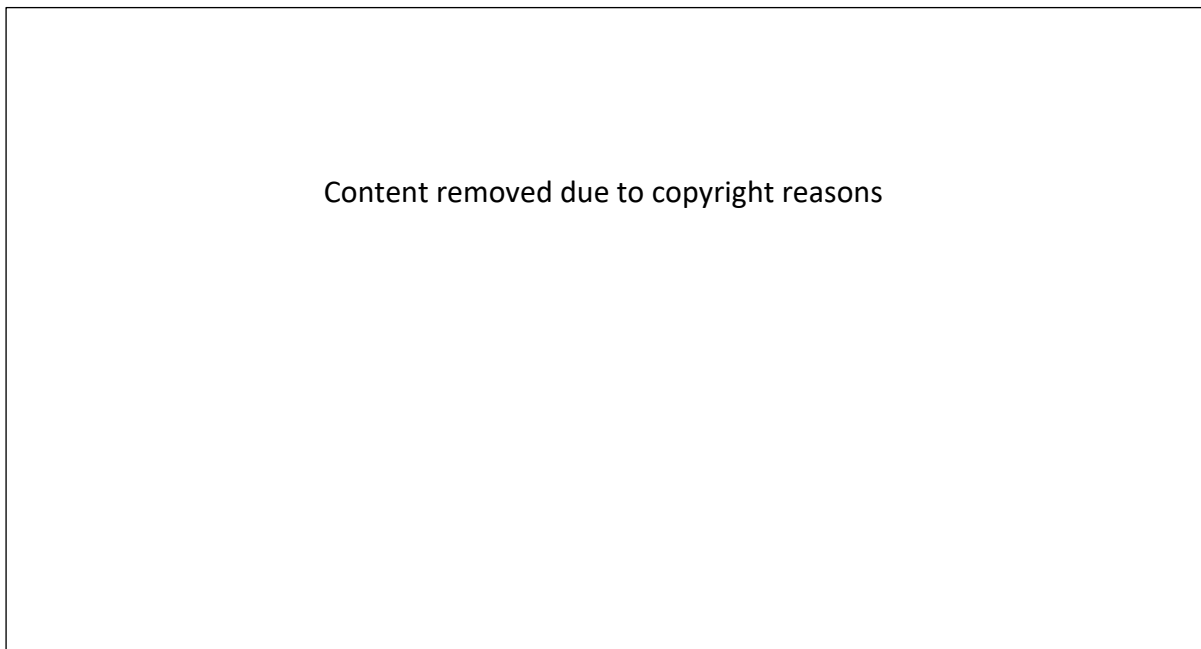


Figure 26. The Nadins opencast coal mining site, Swadlincote, 24th March 1994.²⁵⁵

(In the event these were taken up by private mining companies after British Coal was sold off by the government in January 1997, over three years after the bill to privatise the company had first been published, and two and a half years after the bill was approved by Parliament in June 1994).²⁵⁶ RJ Budge Mining bought the English part of the corporation, it being broken up into English, Welsh and Scottish sections. Some of the promised benefits of restoration after mineral extraction work never materialised, the 18-hole golf course for example, and much of the site has been developed for housing, retail and for industrial uses.

In 1993 British Coal and the National Forest Development Team announced that they had entered into a joint charter, entitled *British Coal and the National Forest; a growing relationship; The Charter*. In this document the corporation pledged support for the Forest, with the avowed intent of taking an active part in its implementation and had by then planted over 100,000 trees within the National Forest boundary. British Coal stated that 'As the biggest landowner in the area covered by the National Forest, British Coal has more than a passing interest in the creation of this new asset for the nation. Indeed, the Corporation has given its full backing to this exciting venture as part of its policy of putting surplus land back to productive use as quickly as possible'.²⁵⁷ Pledges were exchanged; for its part, the National Forest, through the Development Team, agreed to provide support for post-mineral

²⁵⁵ Wootton, D. *Opencast Images: An Informal Look at British Coal Opencast Sites*. Google Books: <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=PqqWDwAAQBAJ&pg=PT229&dq=Nadins+opencast+Swadlincote&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiyucTuzNTpAhUaM8AKHZjcAt4Q6AEILTAB#v=onepage&q=Nadins%20opencast%20Swadlincote&f=false> (Accessed 27th May 2020).

²⁵⁶ Parker, D. *The Official History of Privatisation. Volume II: Popular capitalism 1987-97*. Routledge 2012 p:427.

²⁵⁷ Undated brochure. *British Coal and the National Forest; a growing relationship; The Charter*. Published jointly by the National Forest, British Coal Property and British Coal Opencast. Inferred date 1992/3.

extraction restoration advice, derelict land reclamation, or pre-extraction screening. It agreed to provide guidance and advice on tree planting on restoration sites, including the nature and extent of tree planting, overall design and management, public access and commercial forestry potential. The National Forest pledge stated that coal extraction proposals 'are a matter for the area's local planning authorities to determine after due consultation' (in which the National Forest may or may not express a view), and that The National Forest would advise British Coal on the availability of grant aid to support tree planting, conservation and public access on land owned by British Coal.

For its part, British Coal undertook several pledges to the National Forest. Where restoration obligations were required as a condition of planning permission, British Coal's preference would be to see sites restored in accordance with the National Forest Strategy; and on land where no legal restoration was required (derelict mine workings and slag heaps in the main, which had been worked prior to planning requirements demanding restoration and of which British Coal had inherited many across the Forest's central belt) British Coal would actively seek the land's restoration in accordance with the National Forest Strategy either directly or through a suitable agency. British Coal would consult with the National Forest on all mineral development and restoration programmes with the Forest's boundary. British Coal would undertake a strategic assessment of its landholdings within the National Forest area and would assist in discussions between the National Forest and local authorities and other agencies interested in the National Forest, thus forming the basis for informed debate around how tree planting and other Forest related activities could be achieved, and finally that British Coal's preference would be to release land surplus to its own requirements in the National Forest for purposes that further the National Forest Strategy.²⁵⁸

The Charter is a quite remarkable document. Whilst not quite amounting to a pre-nuptial agreement, by entering into a charter with the National Forest (through the Development Team) the Corporation could now very effectively show that it was 'greening-up' its environmental image. It could present itself not as the enemy at the gate but as the inheritor of former problems that it was attempting to rectify whilst also assisting in providing the energy needs of the nation into the 21st century. The mineral extractive industries – and coal was at the forefront of the worst of these in size alone, if not also in its history of a vast contribution to carbon dioxide emissions – are some of the most environmentally damaging and most polluting in the world and *The Charter* went some way in an attempt at improving British Coal's image, and it could now demonstrate that it was in fact not just contributing to the nation's energy needs and requirements but that it was actively assisting in the creation of the country's single largest environmental project.

The Development Team, through the Countryside Commission (and later the National Forest Company), were a government agency, the employees were civil servants. British Coal was itself a government agency and the two were acting in accordance with the law, and within the planning framework. As an arm of the civil service the Development Team was never an environmental protest or activist organisation and whilst it may have been used for political gain by government to demonstrate a flagship environmentally friendly policy, it also

²⁵⁸ Undated brochure. *British Coal and the National Forest; a growing relationship; The Charter*. Published jointly by the National Forest, British Coal Property and British Coal Opencast. Inferred date 1992/3 author(s) not recorded.

followed planning law and simple expediency. Whatever misgivings any individual within the Development Team may have had by entering into *The Charter* with British Coal, the Forest needed the 'biggest landowner in the area covered by the National Forest' to be actively engaged in the Forest's creation to demonstrate that the Forest was working. Any credibility that the Development Team stood to lose could be readily set aside in the face of the gains it would make in both numbers of trees planted and hectares under plantation gained. The Charter launch was reported in *Forest News* in Susan Bell's words; 'The Charter's principles will be put into practice: 60,000 trees will be planted there this coming winter reshaping the area into 200 acres of new public access woodland with a series of landscaped lakes. Derelict land and mineral sites provide excellent opportunity for creating the Forest'.²⁵⁹

At a time when uptake of grant and tender schemes was worryingly low for the team, having so much land and so many hectares made available as new forest was very important indeed and the Development Team did not scruple to join with British Coal in signing up to *The Charter*. The work done so far and the proposed work for that coming winter by British Coal Property at Desford Lakes, the site of the former Desford Colliery, in reclaiming derelict colliery operational sites made the policy a demonstrably sensible one. At Desford (near Coalville), subsidence caused by former mining operations had created significant problems with road flooding and water courses, along with the visible scars of coal extraction- spoil heaps and abandoned buildings. In consultation with the National Rivers Authority a series of lakes were constructed, and the area landscaped (contoured to local authority specifications) over a two- year period prior to *The Charter*, with further restoration work underway at a significant cost of some £200,000. Plantation on reclaimed sites is not without difficulties though, restored soils have fundamentally lower capacity to support tree height growth than that which the planted trees are potentially capable of and tree height growth is limited on restored sites by the capacity of restored soil to support it, caused by an inability in restored soils to retain water to the same capacity as virgin soils; nutrient uptake is negatively affected by limited water supply and trees on restored sites can never achieve their full potential.²⁶⁰ Desford Lakes was earmarked by the Development Team as one of the sites for its Demonstration Woodlands and was part of the restoration programme.

²⁵⁹ *Forest News*. Number 4 October 1993. Published by the National Forest Development Team, Stanleigh House, Donisthorpe.

²⁶⁰ MacKenzie, A.J., PhD Thesis. *The Growth of Trees and the Development of Soils on Restored Opencast Coal Plantations in Derbyshire*. 1997. Held in University of Derby archive.

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*Figure 27. Location of Desford Lakes Demonstration Woodland.*²⁶¹

The benefits of entering into the Charter were significant for the National Forest and any potential possible loss of credibility ascribed to working with a an environmentally destructive corporation was easily outweighed and could be used to its advantage; the greening up of derelict and abandoned areas was one of the key functions of the establishment of the Forest in the area anyway. Events, however, overtook the co-signees and the Charter became defunct. British Coal was broken up and sold to private mining interests following the Coal Industry Act of 1994, with all administrative functions transferred to the Coal Authority.²⁶² Opencast coal mining in the National Forest was undertaken by a private mining company, RJB Mining, bound by legal requirements imposed on it by the planning authorities. The last opencast mining on the Ashby Woulds was complete and restoration work underway by 2006 (on both sides of the Derbyshire Leicestershire border at Overseal) and in the National Forest as a whole by 2018, with final restoration work on the Minorca Opencast site was completed in 2019.²⁶³

²⁶¹ Kerr, G. & Williams, H.V. *Woodland Creation: Experience from the National Forest*. Forestry Commission Technical Paper 27. Edinburgh 1999 p: 24.

²⁶² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1994/21/contents> (Accessed 15th April 2021).

²⁶³ Minutes of the meeting of the Minorca Opencast Quarry Liaison Committee October 9th 2018 (Accessed May 27th 2020): <https://www.meashamparishcouncil.gov.uk/uploads/181014-minutes-minroca-open-cast-quarry-liaison-committee.pdf>. Restoration is now complete.

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Figure 28. Minorca opencast coal mine at Measham, 2016. Minorca Mine is now closed and re-landscaped. Photo credit: Nick Piggott.²⁶⁴

By September 1994 the Development Team were expecting a positive announcement from government, although in other areas there were concerns. In a feature on the Forest in *New Scientist*, ‘the world’s most popular weekly science and technology magazine’²⁶⁵ Bell was portrayed as fighting a rearguard action, the magazine reported that the charter with British Coal was on hold awaiting the anticipated sale of that industrial giant to the private sector, local councils were facing reorganisation and that

Suspicious farmers wait for more planting grants and anticipate that Whitehall will persuade the European Union to allow tree planting on set-aside farmland. As a result, after three years the National Forest is little more than a line on the map. To add to the troubles, the romantic vision of creating a woodland managed for environmental benefit is under siege.²⁶⁶

The article went on to point out that less than six pages of the fifty-page review had been concerned with nature conservation or new habitat creation and had a clear focus on economic benefits rather than ecology. The magazine was also concerned with the likelihood that further opencast mining would be inevitable as part of the Forest’s creation, and quotes Bell: ‘Mining will continue to be a major activity within the Forest [...] the case for [minerals] development is certainly strengthened if the developer can show a benefit to the national forest (sic)’. The CPRE were alarmed and responded: ‘Promises to plant trees will win permission to mine that would not otherwise be given’.²⁶⁷ In the event, the CPRE were right

²⁶⁴ Piggott, N. *King Coal*. Mortons Media Group (forthcoming publication, 2021).

²⁶⁵ <https://www.newscientist.com/about/> (Accessed 27th August 2020).

²⁶⁶ *New Scientist*. *Greening the Heart of England*. 24th September 1994 p: 32. Partial copy held in the SDDC archive at Rosliston Forestry Centre.

²⁶⁷ *New Scientist*. *Greening the Heart of England*. 24th September 1994 pp: 32- 33. (Author not recorded). Partial copy held in the SDDC archive at Rosliston Forestry Centre.

and opencast mining, as mentioned above, did take place on a large scale in the heart of the Forest, well into the 21st century.

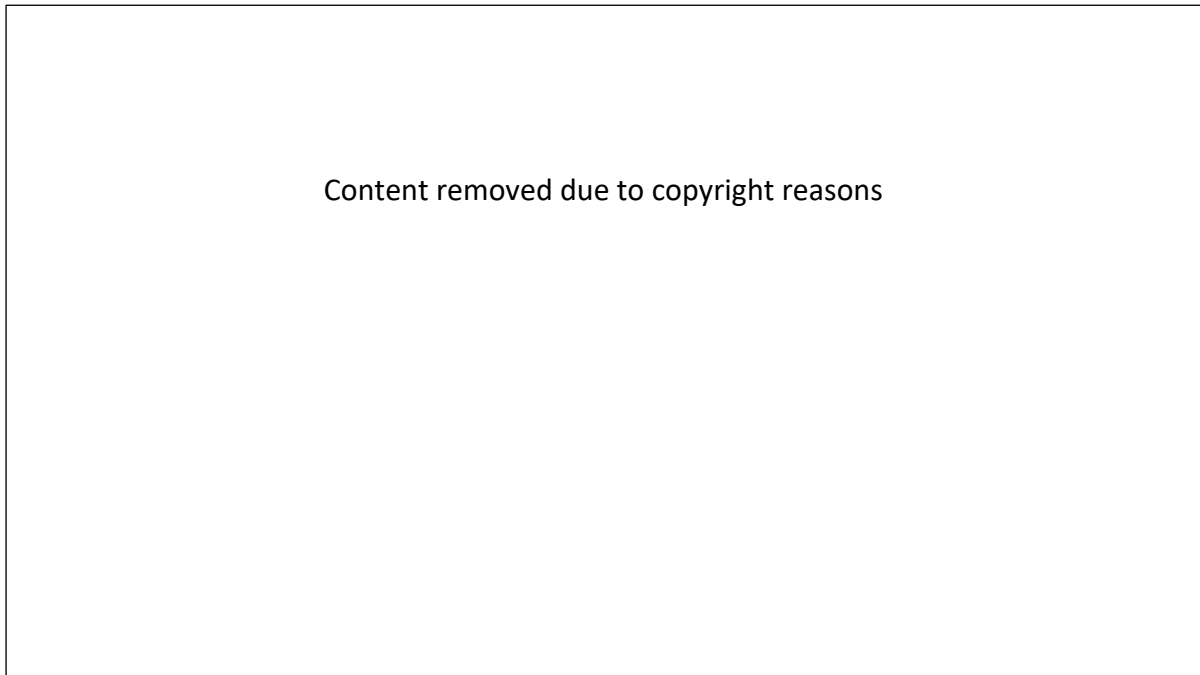


Figure 29. Opencast mining in the 1990s in the Heart of the National Forest. The *Hick's Lodge* site in the late 1990s. It is now landscaped with a visitor centre operated by the Forestry Commission, including a lake and cycle trails on the site of this former enormous opencast coal mine, itself once farmland. The woodland in the photograph was preserved and still exists. Photograph reproduced with permission of Moira Replan.

The thorny problem of ownership of the Forest was broached in the *New Scientist* with concerns raised over public access and the claim that the issue was likely to create conflict. Amanda Callard, on secondment to the Development Team trying to persuade landowners and farmers to plant trees concurred: 'The National Forest has numerous owners – most of them extremely suspicious of the Forest'. The magazine went on to get to the nub of the problem, namely government commitment and proper funding was required to make the Forest a reality,²⁶⁸ a concern with which Bell, the Development Team and the Countryside Commission were fighting.

During the course of 1993 it had become apparent that a secondary public relations strategy would be required for the following year. This was because 1994 was a crucial decision year, when the government needed to decide whether the groundwork and strenuous efforts made by the Development Team and partners would be enough to sway politicians into making very long-term funding commitments. The public relations strategy for 1993 had gone well, and the subsequent success of that could be measured in the wide public support for the National Forest and the belief that it was going to succeed. It was noted also though that there was ongoing scepticism towards the Forest and its long-term viability in some quarters, the 'silence' that the public relations strategy had attempted to fill whilst awaiting governmental decisions had not gone unnoticed. The aim of the public relations strategy then

²⁶⁸ *New Scientist*. *Greening the Heart of England*. 24th September 1994 pp: 32- 33. (Author not recorded). Partial copy held in the SDDC archive at Rosliston Forestry Centre.

was to ensure that 1994 became the year when government gave its full support, with public, private and partner backing for the National Forest, securing its future organisation and funding.

There were seven key objectives of the 1994 public relations strategy, which are summarised here:

- i. To continue a highly motivating and increasingly vigorous campaign showing the Forest as pioneering, visionary and massive new resource for the nation.
- ii. To balance a staged programme of promotional activity with an awareness of a responsiveness to political sensitivities.
- iii. To promote the transition from development to implementation as the essential next steps in creating the Forest via a targeted timetable of high- profile projects publicised at key times throughout the year.
- iv. To encourage growing partnerships in the implementation exercise where the fusion of public and private is manifest to help secure long- term support for the Forest.
- v. To establish the future independent status of the National Forest organisation as one that will ultimately achieve the Forest's creation while recognising the essential role the Countryside Commission has played as innovator in reaching this goal.
- vi. To build on and encourage public, political and business support of the Forest and to use this powerful voice in an orchestrated way in helping achieve the Forest's overall aim.
- vii. To ensure the public relations programme has built- in damage limitations both to counteract negative partner responses to key issues and to prevent any opposition to the Forest filling a 'silence vacuum'.²⁶⁹

Countering opposition to the Forest in a severe economic recession and demonstrating it was not only financially viable and justifiable but in fact offered real value for money as an investment for the future and not some environmental white elephant was the proposed strategy; to engage in a public relations 'attack'. Any negative press was to be countered with strong letters of support from selected Forest partners and supporters. Access success stories would be highlighted at every opportunity. The slow uptake of farmland planting should not hold sway over practical achievements, and success stories with private companies, schools and local authorities would be promoted. The Forest Team would focus on being seen to continue its dialogue with farmers and landowners, whilst always enforcing the message that new money would be needed to increase farmers' contribution to the Forest, and the ongoing issue with set- aside funding should not be allowed to become a diversionary tactic away from this guiding principle.

The favoured option in maintaining pressure for a positive response would be to use sectors of the community in strong advocacy roles, the examples selected by the public relations strategy were public messages of support coordinated by the two key local newspapers (the *Leicester Mercury* and the *Burton Mail*, both named specifically in the public relations proposed strategy) in a campaign fashion enforced by national support via a daily newspaper;

²⁶⁹ Newsome, S. *A Public Relations Strategy and Supporting Programme of Activity for 1994*. Susan Newsome Associates. Leamington Spa January 1994.

and private messages of support from local authorities and business leaders direct to Government and its officials.²⁷⁰

The degree to which the Countryside Commission had retained ownership of the Forest whilst encouraging the gradual handover to a new body or Forest authority had been a careful political balance. It was clear that if and when Government gave the final authority to proceed with the permanent and financially supported Forest initiative then it must also be presented as a long-anticipated goal that the Countryside Commission had worked towards, a success story on the part of the Commission's Development Team handing over to a new independent Forest organisation and in no way an orchestrated retreat. The public relations strategy also recognised there was a lack of understanding of how huge the transformation of the Forest area would be and that the dawning recognition of the size and prestige of the National Forest would present major sponsorship opportunities; the Development Team should be aware and ready to seize these as they arose. Ongoing contact was therefore required with ministers, MPs, MEPs, and Peers to help secure an early decision on the Forest's future. Any delay at this stage was seen as hazardous to the future of the National Forest project and the public relations team were at pains to highlight the critical period for the Forest over the proceeding few months. The public relations programme and the strategy for the Forest proposed by the public relations team was no less than a concentrated 'attack' (the word is used in the document itself) to secure the survival of the entire project.²⁷¹ The public relations strategy prepared by Susan Newsome for the Development Team and the Countryside Commission gives a real sense of the recognition that despite their best efforts the seemingly capricious nature of Government meant that even at this critical time, events in the wider world could conspire to prevent funding from becoming available and the entire project had entered a crucial period. It could, and might yet fail, even now; if it did it would not be for the want of effort on the part of the Forest's friends and partners.

The print run for *Forest News*, the newsletter of the National Forest was brought forward to March in a special 'action issue' in an effort to pile on the pressure, in which some of the 'remarkable achievements' of the Forest's enthusiastic supporters were reported. Under the headline 'People say yes' it was reported that there was 'massive support' for the National Forest from the consultation on the Forest strategy; 'People, locally and nationally, are backing the Forest every inch of the way and putting their full weight behind proposals for its creation'. In an effort not to alienate MPs and ministers they were gently reminded that they also supported the creation of the Forest; in endorsing the creation of the Forest those local and national supporters were 'echoing the Government's own strong support for the Forest which was reaffirmed at the start of the consultation'.²⁷²

The announcement was anticipated by the Development Team to be in May but again there was a bureaucratic delay, this time of only two months in which the Development Team, and the country were kept waiting. The Countryside Commission and Development Team, along

²⁷⁰ Newsome, S. *A Public Relations Strategy and Supporting Programme of Activity for 1994*. Susan Newsome Associates. Leamington Spa January 1994 p:4 & p: 12.

²⁷¹ Newsome, S. *A Public Relations Strategy and Supporting Programme of Activity for 1994*. Susan Newsome Associates. Leamington Spa January 1994 pp:12- 14.

²⁷² Reported in *Forest News: Action Issue*. Number 5 March 1994. Published by the National Forest Development Team, Stanleigh House, Donisthorpe.

with local MPs kept up the pressure on ministers to make a decision, and a favourable one at that. The Development Team were invited to a private lunch hosted by Patrick Cormack, the Conservative MP for South Staffordshire at the House of Commons in May at which they, Lord Barber of Tewkesbury, and Sir John Johnson Chairman of the Countryside Commission urged the MPs and Lords who also attended with some 'firm talking' to press on with the implementation of its 1992 Manifesto commitment.²⁷³ Bell recalled that 'Conscious of the dangers of another long and potentially enthusiasm-destroying long pause, a gentle reminder was arranged by way of a reception, for members of both Houses of Parliament, at the House of Commons [where] they were reminded that the achievement was a long-standing manifesto commitment and that it commanded a high degree of local and public support'.²⁷⁴ Lord Barber spoke of 'his concern at the prospect of losing much of the extraordinary and widespread support local people had given over the last three years unless Government ministers made a decision soon on the Forest's future', words which were echoed in a 'stirring closing speech' by Patrick Cormac.²⁷⁵

This crucial period was recalled by Bell in a magazine article in 1995: 'During this time, it became increasingly clear that Government was going to back the project into its implementation stage and had accepted the Strategy and the main proposals of the Business Plan. A great deal of behind-the-scenes work was undertaken with the Department of Environment to develop those into finished workable products that were in line with the results of other major reviews that had been going on in the meantime'.²⁷⁶ This quotation demonstrates the commitment of the various key parties and players in the Forest project to continue to work together to push the project forward towards a satisfactory conclusion, despite the tardiness of the government machine and encouraged by the real prospect of a successful outcome. In July 1994 the government announcement of the acceptance of the National Forest Strategy was made by John Gummer, Secretary of State. In a written reply to a parliamentary question, he caught the spirit of the creative consensus of opinion and goodwill that had continued throughout the previous eight years of hard work and discussion by numerous agencies and various bodies.

²⁷³ Reported in *Forest News*. Number 6 August 1994. Published by the National Forest Development Team, Stanleigh House, Donisthorpe.

²⁷⁴ *Countryside* magazine March/ April 1995 issue. Article entitled *Birth of a Forest for the Nation, From Politics to Tree Planting*. p: 4 Partial copy kept in the SDDC Archive at Rosliston Forestry Centre in one of the several Newspaper clippings files. Lent to the author by Environmental Development Manager Kate Allies August 2020.

²⁷⁵ Reported in *Forest News*. Number 6 August 1994. Published by the National Forest Development Team, Stanleigh House, Donisthorpe.

²⁷⁶ *Countryside* magazine March/ April 1995 issue. Article entitled *Birth of a Forest for the Nation, From Politics to Tree Planting*. p: 5 Partial copy kept in the SDDC Archive at Rosliston Forestry Centre in one of the several Newspaper clippings files. Lent to the author by Environmental Development Manager Kate Allies August 2020.

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Figure 30. The Earl of Arran, Parliamentary Under Secretary for the Environment at the announcement in July as reported in *Forest News*.²⁷⁷

Gummer described the National Forest as ‘An ambitious and imaginative environmental project to create a new forest in the heart of the country, in an area where much of the land has been despoiled by mineral working’. This was an example of sustainable development par excellence; environmental improvement was already bringing economic regeneration to an area where the closure of mining and other heavy industries had threatened large scale unemployment. The new Forest would provide a national asset for this and future generations. Targeted project funding alongside existing grant aid would ensure the establishment of new woodland by voluntary means. A new company would be created, limited by guarantee, with the Secretary of State and Minister of Agriculture as shareholders who would appoint the chairman and directors. This new company, alongside ensuring the planting of a forest, would be responsible for the development leisure and recreation, rural enterprise, habitat protection, restoration of mineral workings and community involvement.²⁷⁸

The commitment by the Government to an environmental project of this stature was an outcome that everyone could take pride in, from whatever political persuasion or background. The achievement and work of the Development Team and guidance from the Countryside Commission holds significant examples of best practice for future projects of this

²⁷⁷ Reported in *Forest News*. Number 6, August 1994. Published by the National Forest Development Team, Stanleigh House, Donisthorpe.

²⁷⁸ Sheail, *Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain*. p:176.

type and bears significance and consequence for future environmental policies. It shaped the organisational structure and policies of the National Forest Company from its formation and continues to this day. As we shall see in the final chapter, it has shaped the policies of the NFC for the next 25 years or so, to 2050, with the publication of *A Greenprint for the Nation*. The problem of the slowness of a bureaucracy designed to maintain uniformity and control was overcome through a focus on continued raising of public awareness and the development of enthusiasm for landowners to take up the change of land use through constructive dialogue and financially viable tender schemes by the Development Team. Effective public relations strategies and consultation kept the project at the forefront of public awareness and therefore in sight of ministers and government. The costs were minimal and value for money high as is demonstrated later in the *Exemplar of Sustainable Development* report of 2007, and the *Much More Than Trees* report of 2009, and by concentrating on persuading landowners to diversify through the new tender schemes the potentially controversial possibility of land acquisition for forest development through compulsory land purchases was deftly avoided. The dedicated work of a small and focussed team with a focus on partnership working had set clear possibilities and a direction for the future and resulted in a successful outcome. That there were occasional accusations of opportunism and improvisation levelled at the team should not be seen negatively, they were a small enough team to be able to grasp those opportunities when they arose and the same will be seen with a similarly dynamic team at the NFC under the leadership of the Chief Executive Officers appointed in part for those very skills.²⁷⁹ The July 1994 announcement was the confirmation that the Development Team and its partners and supporters had worked so hard for: Government support for the creation of a new Forest, a new *landscape* even, for a new millennium. The National Forest Company was about to be born – and it had work to do.

²⁷⁹ Sidaway, R. in Wade, P.M., Sheail, J. & Child, L. *The National Forest: from vision to reality*. *The East Midlands Geographer*, (Special Issue) University of Nottingham Volume 21 Pt.1 p:106.

3. From Little Acorns: The formation of the National Forest Company and the planting of a new forest

*As an oak cometh of a lytel spyr*²⁸⁰

Chapter two presented the multi-organisation and partnership working that the Development Team had fomented which resulted in the successful promise of and commitment to a new National Forest. This chapter demonstrates how that commitment was enacted by the Development Team and Countryside Commission, working alongside DEFRA and Government ministers through the formation of an independent company, how a continuity of structure, personnel and working methods established by the Development Team was pursued as the preferred option for the new company, and how the National Forest Company was formed in the spring of 1995 with political cross-party support. The policy of partnership working was one that had worked, demonstrably so, and the NFC would adopt that policy as one of its key working practices. The NFC's remit to create the 200-square mile forest that the government had committed to some five years previously was a substantial one, with multiple goals, which will be examined in detail below. This chapter argues that with the Company's formation, a milestone in the creation of the fledgeling forest had been passed. This is not to say that the decision was now irreversible, as will be seen later, but it had now become a much firmer commitment. The government announced that it would create a new, independent, public company, limited by guarantee and to be called the National Forest Company (NFC). The NFC was formed as a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) with a substantial annual sponsorship from DEFRA with a need to urgently address several goals.²⁸¹ It had many pressing targets and problems and although the first and seemingly most important task of these was to plant trees, there were also the matters of the development of a broad-based but forest-oriented economy, a clear cohesion across a divergent landscape character and not least of all continuing with and developing the groundswell of support that had been one of the decisive factors in securing the location of the National Forest in the Needwood-Charnwood area in the first place. By bringing forestry on a scale similar to that of the New Forest to the Midlands, within a commutable distance of around nine million people living in several major midlands cities and in the vast conurbation of the West Midlands, it could be genuinely multi-purpose, a new resource for tourism and recreation, creating rich new wildlife habitats, restoring damaged landscapes and offering an alternative, productive use of farmland. Woodland could also be utilised beyond its traditional limits, creating the basis for economic regeneration in an area much affected by mineral working and a recently closed coal mining industry.²⁸² As we will see, the National Forest was intended from its inception to go beyond simply planting trees, it was landscape change on a vast scale, incorporating socio-economic regeneration alongside environmental regeneration.

The Development Team and the Countryside Commission had seen that continuity was the key for a successful transition from being a Countryside Commission initiative to a new independent agency managing the implementation of the Forest and had planned for that

²⁸⁰ Chaucer, G. *Troilus and Criseyde*. 1374. See: Albritton, B., Henley, G., Trharne, E. *Medieval Manuscripts in a Digital Age*. Ebook, unpaginated. (Author's ebook copy, origin forgotten).

²⁸¹ The National Forest Company. *The Strategy 2004-2014*. The National Forest Company, Moira. 2004 p:3.

²⁸² The National Forest Company. *The Strategy 2004-2014*. p:2.

contingency from the outset. The public relations strategy too had seen continuity as vital for the success of the new National Forest Company and concerns were raised that members of the Development Team might see the transition period as an opportunity to move on in their careers and planned carefully around this eventuality; 'There is a possibility that key members of the National Forest Team may leave the project to pursue alternative employment. It will be essential that this is not seen as a break- up of the Forest unit but of a new line up of responsibilities necessary to take the Forest forward into implementation'. The public relations strategy also noted that 'New publications will [be required to] reflect this important change'.²⁸³ The National Forest Company were keen to point out though that most staff, including the Chief Executive, were appointed following competitive interview. All staff were in post by early July 1995.²⁸⁴

New publications were swiftly designed and printed to follow the creation of the new company; a helpful 'Who's Who in the National Forest Company' detailed the thirteen employees and their roles within the company, as well as the eight-strong Board of Trustees. Susan Bell, formerly the Development Team Director became the new Chief Executive of the company (as well as being appointed as a Board Director) and brought most of the Development Team with her, along with some new personnel to bolster the new team and support the creation of the Forest. The team remained in their base at Stanleigh House, Donisthorpe, although they were now beginning to outgrow it.²⁸⁵ In the retitled *The National Forest News* of August 1995, under the headline 'All go for the new Company' the company was focussing a great deal of its resources on the 'flow of high-quality bids to its Tender Scheme for woodland creation', which in fact was already oversubscribed in its first year of operation. The scheme had a planned three- year operational timeframe, and with a budget of one million pounds per annum to bring about a substantial conversion of farmland and derelict land to forestry, the company hoped to achieve some of the ambitious targets it had set itself.²⁸⁶ Of the 21 applications, 16 were eventually successful in the first round. The reason for the uptake was partially due to the success of the announcement of the previous year and the firm commitment to the future of the Forest from Government. Weighing heavily in its favour was the financial return available from the Tender Scheme; the 16 successful applications aggregated some 570 acres (230 hectares) in total, equating to an average grant of £1,740 per acre, which was almost twice that otherwise available.²⁸⁷ The

²⁸³ Newsome, S. *A Public Relations Strategy and Supporting Programme of Activity for 1994*. Susan Newsome Associates. Leamington Spa January 1994. p:5.

²⁸⁴ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Company Annual Report 1995- 1996*. Moira 1996.

Unpaginated; last page: Financial Report/ Staff. Actual numbers are not given but key players in the Development Team were involved in the transition and remained with the NFC, Bell and Evans for example.

²⁸⁵ Undated A3 folding leaflet naming the new team and the board members. Inferred date after April 1995. Published by The National Forest, Stanleigh House, Donisthorpe. The address for the National Forest Company changes on publications during the course of 1995 into 1996, therefore the inferred date of the move to the new (current) offices in Enterprise Glade, Bath Yard Moira is probably the late Spring of 1996.

²⁸⁶ *The National Forest News*. Issue 8. Unpaginated folding magazine, information from front and rear 'covers'. Published NFC, Donisthorpe, 1995.

²⁸⁷ There is some slight discrepancy between the numbers of approved bids. The *National Forest Company Annual Report 1995- 1996* mentions 14 winning bids, elsewhere *Forest News Autumn 1995* mentions 16 successful bids with two awaiting further information to take them forward, which appears to be 16 plus two but could perhaps be interpreted 16 minus two. Taking the *Annual Report* as the authoritative voice on the matter it must be 16 minus two which were therefore eventually unsuccessful in the 1995 funding round. Sheail could not have known this when he presented his paper to *The Town Planning Review* in June 1996.

Country Landowners' Association (CLA) and the National Farmers Union (NFU) urged their members to respond positively to the Tender Scheme, an endorsement that the NFC must have been pleased to see as it helped support their position through mutual bonds of trust, the CLA and NFU were then, and remain, staunch representatives of landowners and rural businesses, and their endorsement and recommendation of the Tender Scheme to their members to take up the scheme was a significant step.²⁸⁸ The Annual report for 1995-1996 recognised the new incentives of National Forest Tender Scheme for woodland creation as unique to the National Forest. It was being piloted by the Company jointly with the Forestry Authority and the Company estimated that two-thirds of the required planting over the Forest's first ten years would be achieved through the Tender Scheme incentive. Recognising that the target of converting 224 hectares of land to new Forest had been missed (the actual achieved was 181 hectares), the Company knew that the Tender Scheme was its most important means of achieving the rapid conversion of farm and derelict land to forestry.²⁸⁹

Much of the land planted had been a mixture of productive farmland, derelict and reclaimed land and the Company pointed out in the *1995-1996 Annual Report* that 79% of the newly forested sites under the Tender Scheme sites had new public access created at the same time. The hoary problem of land acquisition was also broached; the Company realised that not all planting could be done by private and corporate means and that at times it would need to acquire land for various Forest purposes and hold it for a limited period. The Company drafted a Land Acquisition Policy and submitted it to Government for approval, using an interim policy for land purchase assistance for partners on two sites.²⁹⁰

The Directors Register of Interests was created but not published with the Annual Report in 1995-1996; in 1997-1998 they were published in summary in that year's Report, where it is recorded that the Chairman, Rodney Swarbrick, was a Commissioner of the Countryside Commission. He had partnership interest and offices held in voluntary bodies not related to the National Forest Area or activities. Susan Bell, as Chief Executive and a Director had nothing to declare on the Register. In passing it is noteworthy that both had been members of the Country Landowners' Association. In fact, Swarbrick had been a former President of the CLA and Bell had formerly held the post of Economics and Land Use Advisor at the CLA.²⁹¹ The Country Landowners' Association (now The Country Landowners' and Business Association) is a membership organisation for owners of land property and business in rural England and Wales, and is a keen parliamentary lobbyist, pursuing its members interests at the highest levels and clearly promotes its activities as a parliamentary lobbyist. It has connections with those in positions of power and authority in the countryside, claiming a demonstrable leadership in shaping governmental policy thinking at significant and fundamental levels. On its website is a page dedicated to its lobbying activities, where it

²⁸⁸ Sheail, J. The new National Forest from idea to achievement. *The Town Planning Review*, Vol. 68, No. 3 July 1997 p:320.

²⁸⁹ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Company Annual Report 1995- 1996*. Moira 1996. Unpaginated; see the page entitled *Ways and means*.

²⁹⁰ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Company Annual Report 1995- 1996*. Unpaginated; see the page entitled *Ways and Means*.

²⁹¹ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Company Annual Report 1995- 1996*. Moira 1996. *The National Forest Company Annual Report 1996- 1997*. Moira 1997 & *The National Forest Company Annual Report 1997- 1998*. Moira 1998 Unpaginated; penultimate page: *Directors*.

records that the CLA lobbying activity is undertaken on behalf of its members, claiming a definite impact on a range of issues in national governments in Westminster and Cardiff.²⁹²

It seems impossible that both overlooked their former membership of the CLA in the Register of Interests and must surely have been advised that a declaration was unnecessary. Perhaps as former and not current members it did not seem relevant, and strictly speaking, perhaps that was the technically correct position. Not that this ought to have worked against either in their positions as Board Directors or as Chief Executive, and clearly, they had significant experience and brought that to bear in the early years of the Forest and in developing strategies that would make it a success, and their former positions may have helped in influencing CLA members to take up Tender Scheme opportunities; as both had held former positions of seniority within the CLA they would surely have been seen as trustworthy by its members. As an omission, whether oversight or not, it is of significance, especially as the CLA were advising members to take advantage of the Tender Scheme and although no impropriety is inferred here, the declarations made in the Register of Interests reported in the 1997-1998 Annual Report were the correct and proper course of action.

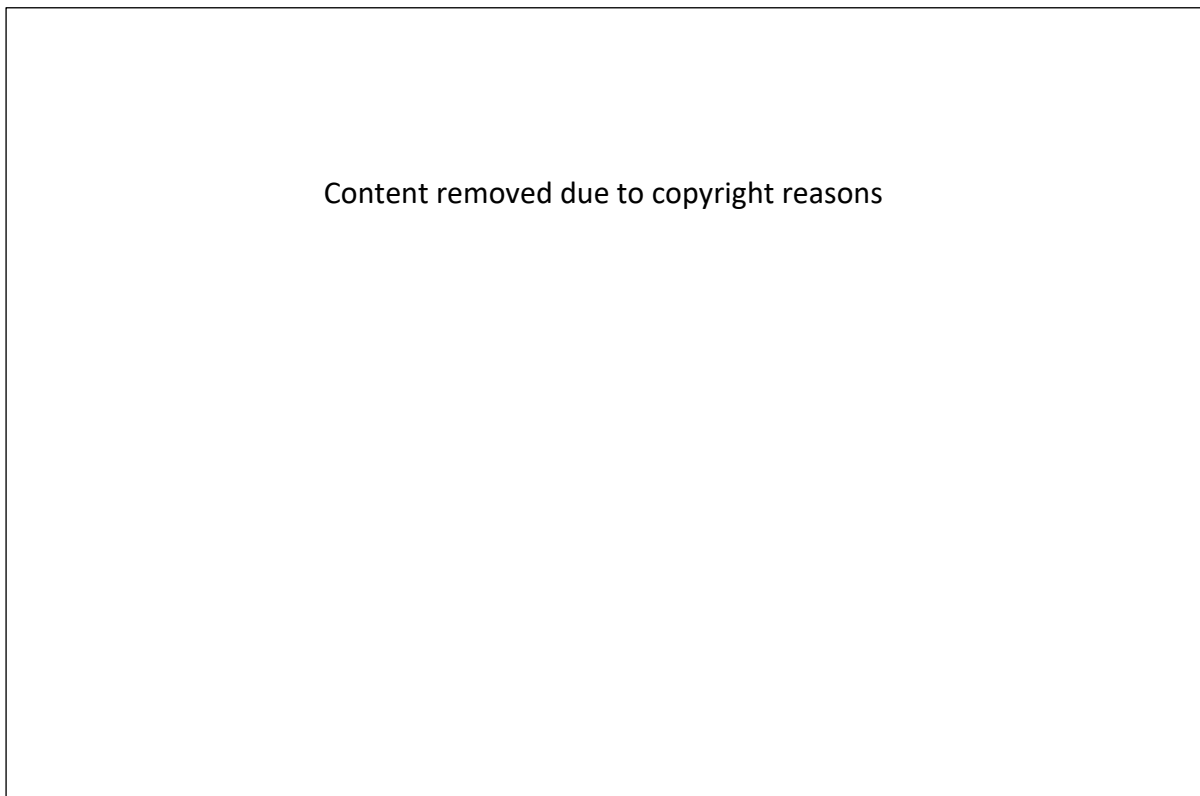


Figure 31. The NFC moves into new offices in the Heart of the Forest.²⁹³

The Company found the offices that had initially been of a suitable size for the Development Team (originally a four-strong team) had now been outgrown and it moved operational headquarters to a new purpose-built block at Bath Yard, the former site of British Coal

²⁹² Information taken from the CLA website: <https://www.cla.org.uk> (Accessed 6th June 2020).

²⁹³ The NFC, having outgrown the office space in Donisthorpe, moved into new office buildings at Bath Yard. Clipping from the *Burton Mail*, May 24th 1996. Source: SDDC archive at Rosliston Forestry Centre, courtesy Kate Allies, Development Manager.

Transport Depot connected to the then recently demolished Rawdon Colliery at Moira, Leicestershire, at the heart of the forest and at the edge of a former colliery spoil heap. The site at Bath Yard had become the focal point for the development of a new Heart of the Forest Visitor Centre (see below) and the newly built offices on the site were the ideal place for the New Company to move to for the creation and administration of the new forest.

Although the Forest had a boundary on a map there was no clearly defined visitor destination. The patchwork of new plantations had not yet had time to develop their own distinct characters as different attractive visitor destinations as Charnwood and Needwood had, with Bradgate Park and Blithfield Reservoirs standing as respective examples in each of those and there was no immediate attraction for visitors to the centre of the Forest. In 1994 the Development Team had the opportunity to convert the former transport hub for Rawdon Colliery at Bath Yard to a new Heart of the Forest Visitor Centre, so the team began to investigate the possibility and discussions began for funding for that with LCC and partners. South Derbyshire District Council (SDDC) too had recognised the problem and in the spring of 1993 had signed a partnership with the Forestry Commission and the Countryside Commission to purchase the 154-acre (some 62 hectares) Rosliston Farm, on the edge of the South Derbyshire village of Rosliston. Of that total 140 acres (57 hectares) was purchased by Forest Enterprise, the management arm of the Forestry Commission, and SDDC raised the funds for the purchase of the remaining land and buildings to develop the Forest's first forestry visitor centre.²⁹⁴

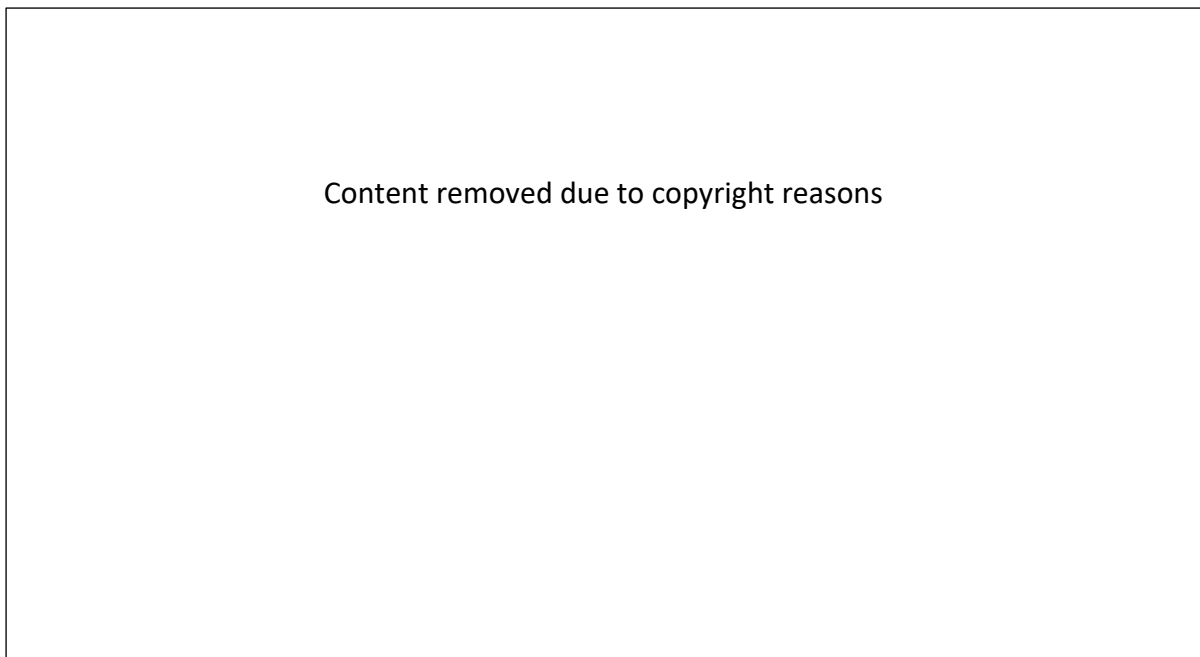


Figure 32. The Leader of the District Council, Graham Knight, plants the first tree at the new visitor centre at Rosliston.²⁹⁵

The Rosliston Forestry Centre was officially opened in December 1994 by the Member of Parliament then representing South Derbyshire, Edwina Curry, in an unusual ceremony which instead of the traditional ribbon-cutting, a wooden pole 'symbolically barring the entrance'

²⁹⁴ *Forest News*. Number 3, May 1993 'Massive land deal for Forest'. Published by the National Forest Development Team, Stanleigh House, Donisthorpe.

²⁹⁵ *Forest News*. Number 5, March 1994 'Celebrating Tree Week. Published by the National Forest Development Team, Stanleigh House, Donisthorpe.

was cut in two using a two-handed saw. Whether anyone at the time noticed the irony of an environmental project being officially opened through the medium of a piece of commodified woodland (timber) being sawn through is not recorded.²⁹⁶ Presumably they did not as the opening event was part of an open day which also included ‘demonstrations of tree felling and log moving by shire horses’, although it was noted in the local press that ‘visitors will also have the chance to plant trees’.²⁹⁷

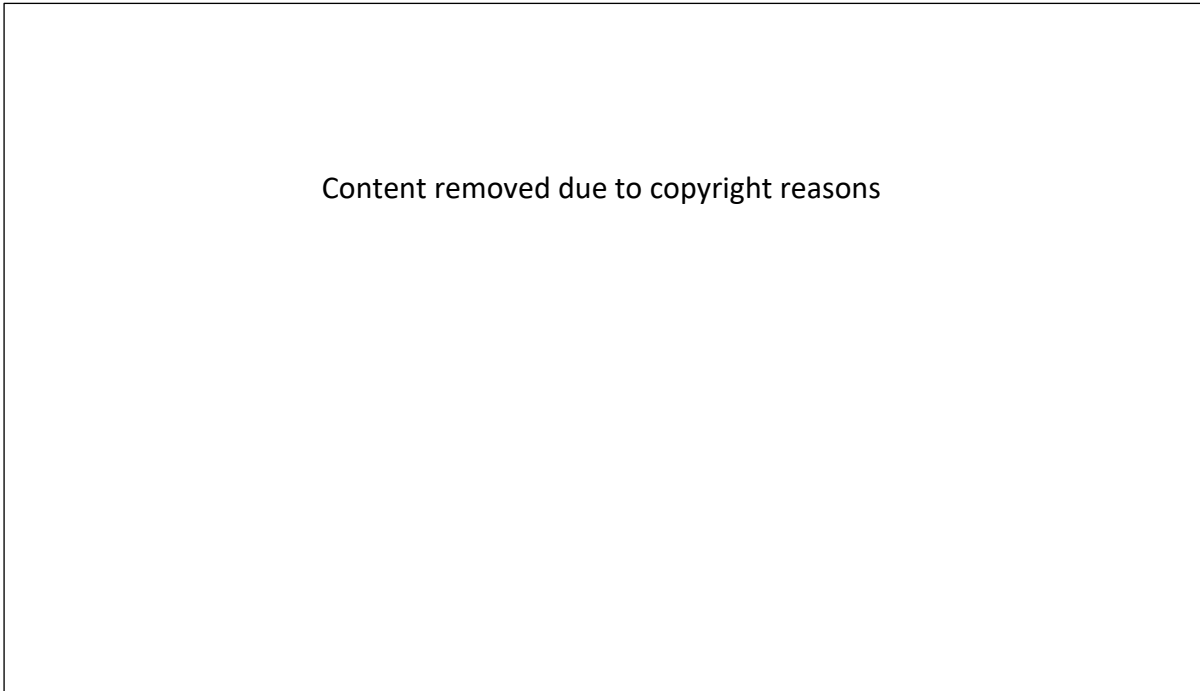


Figure 33. Press Cutting from Forestry & British Timber, December 1994, held in the SDDC archive at Rosliston Forestry Centre. See note 401 below.

The Visitor Centre is now operated on behalf of SDDC by a private company, Aurora Country Developments Ltd, although the Environmental Project is operated by the council itself. The majority of the woodland is still owned and operated by the Forestry Commission as part of the Public Forest Estate. Aurora Country developments was created on 20th July 1999 and between that date and 23rd April 2018 was based in the bungalow that had formerly been part of the farm on the site.²⁹⁸ SDDC invited new tenders for the operation of the site in 2018 and at the same time Aurora moved address to nearby Milton, although eventually going on to develop the successful bid to continue to run the Centre.²⁹⁹ Environmental education is still operated by SDDC through the Environmental Project, mainly, but not exclusively aimed at environmental education for schools and has gone on to win several awards for its work, with

²⁹⁶ Forestry & British Timber December 1994. *Edwina MP saws centre open*. Press cutting from the SDDC archive at Rosliston Forestry Centre, lent to the author by SDDC Environmental Development Manager Kate Allies, August 2020.

²⁹⁷ Reported in the *Burton Mail*, 2nd November 1994 ‘*Edwina to Saw Open Centre*’. Press cutting from the SDDC archive at Rosliston Forestry Centre, lent to the author by SDDC Environmental Development Manager Kate Allies, August 2020.

²⁹⁸ <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/03810184/filing-history> (Accessed August 20th 2020).

²⁹⁹ <https://www.staffordshire-live.co.uk/news/local-news/rosliston-forestry-centre-seeking-new-305879> (Accessed 20th August 2020).

the Environmental Development Manager, Kate Allies, who has worked at the centre since 1996 winning a lifetime achievement award for her work there.³⁰⁰

Bath Yard had itself been the site of Bath Pit, three colliery mine shafts sunk around 1812-1813 by the Earl of Hastings, and also the locus of the Earl's attempt to create a spa baths using the saline spring water found there. When the venture failed, the buildings at the Bath Yard site became the headquarters of the Moira and Gresley Collieries and the buildings associated with the headquarters became known as Bath Yard.³⁰¹ After nationalisation of the coal industry in 1947 the Moira Colliery Company became part of the National Coal Board and the industrial buildings at Bath Yard, still attached to Rawdon Colliery became used, eventually, by the transport division of British Coal.³⁰²

Although Bath Yard was sited entirely in North West Leicestershire it was close enough to the South Derbyshire boundary to have a potential economic effect on both sides of the boundary and an untitled, unpaginated report is held in the SDDC archives describes the general plan for the new visitor centre, to be built adjacent to the renovated former transport department buildings, which themselves would be used to develop local skills in restoration and site works, eventually to become craft and retraining workshops in forest related skills. The project was envisaged to develop into a major new retraining facility of regional and national significance and pointed to a 'number of studies' (unnamed) that identified the establishment of a training facility to exploit the opportunities created by the National Forest and this purpose designed training centre was targeted at retraining redundant mineworkers alongside school-leavers, those facing difficult access to employment and others. The new visitor centre would be created with an environmental education theme for all ages, alongside a celebration of the former industrial heritage of the area- the reclaiming of despoiled sites being a major theme, demonstrating how a former colliery site could be reclaimed and developed as a woodland and tourist attraction. The untitled report under a closing title 'The Vision' lists a number of points as objectives for the Heart of the Forest Project, which focussed on an approximately ten square-mile area around the Bath Yard. Amongst the report's objectives was the achieving of the policies outlined in the Rural Development Area Strategy relating to providing training and assistance to unemployed and former mineworkers, developing environmental awareness amongst visitors, demonstrating the role of trees in daily life, and becoming the focal point for visitors to the National Forest.³⁰³

The report goes on to state that *RECHAR II* funding would be required to enable the project to be appropriately financed. In some ways the report lacks the awareness of the timescales involved in growing a forest that the Development Team and Countryside Commission had, in focussing on the immediate problem of retraining ex-mineworkers in forest skills for example, skills which would only really become useful in a fully-grown forest, not a recently planted one, whilst also having the clarity of vision to look forward to the time when the

³⁰⁰ Pers. Comm. Email exchange with Kate Allies, August 2020.

³⁰¹ Steedman, Jervis, Clarke. *Bath Yard, Moira Feasibility Study, Interim Report*. Undated but inferred date 1993 or 1994 p:2 copy held in Moira Replan archive, (accessed 22nd June 2020).

³⁰² The Ashby Wouds & District Local History Group (now defunct). *The Story of Bath Yard*. Moira Replan, Moira 1998.

³⁰³ Untitled, unpaginated 4- page report which *may* have originated with Leicestershire County Council held in SDDC archives. (Accessed 3rd June 2020).

Forest would become a living reality; it focusses on the detail of the immediate problems-localised unemployment, creating forest craft workshops &c, whilst retraining in forest skills that would not be practically required for at least another decade once there was an established, or at least a growing forest that required woodland management skills. A Rural Skills Centre was to be established, which operated in association with the Rural Training and Enterprise Council, focussed on retraining rural disadvantaged groups, in particular the long-term unemployed and the young.³⁰⁴ Much of this training was eventually taken up by Moira Replan and the training took place either onsite at their base in Moira (mainly based around computer literacy skills as they had installed a computer suite specifically to run basic computer courses) and in the field for those keen to work outdoors or develop rural skills.³⁰⁵

In the event, with the assistance of the National Forest Company and partners (a substantial grant came from the North West Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Rural Development Council) the visitor centre was created, the disused and partially derelict transport buildings were renovated and turned into craft workshops and (briefly) a training centre, and the area was landscaped. When the Ashby Canal was partially restored, a lock was created to take the canal under the road (demonstrating just how badly the area had been affected by subsidence across many square miles- the original canal had no locks along the entirety of its 30-mile cutting), the terminus in the form of a small marina was created adjacent to the Visitor Centre. Funds were reallocated by the NFC under a 'Special Projects' budget: 'as a result of the projected underspend on programme expenditure, approval was given to fund four projects which could be completed by the end of the year [1996] and which would contribute significantly to the achievement of the Forest Strategy. The main project was building the amphitheatre, lake and ground modelling at the Heart of the Forest Visitor Centre'.³⁰⁶ The visitor centre itself was an entirely new building standing immediately adjacent to the redeveloped older buildings.

During the course of 1996, the NFC, along with a consortium of partners including 'influential Leicestershire business people'³⁰⁷ had submitted a major bid to the Millennium Commission to build a state-of-the-art National Forest Discovery Centre within a substantial woodland park setting and had been long-listed for consideration. This was good news for the NFC but placed significant demands on the workload of the small NFC team, they had supported the successful funding bid for the development of another visitor centre at the National Memorial Arboretum and the failed bid for the visitor centre in Burton upon Trent.³⁰⁸ Again, the economic effects would be felt on both sides of the county boundary, also including Burton upon Trent, who might expect to see visitors using the train station and possibly hotels in the town.

³⁰⁴ The Heart of the National Forest. *A Proposal to the Leicestershire and South Derbyshire RDC. Rural Challenge Bid Summer 1994*. Draft for Consultation. Copy held in the archives of Moira Replan, accessed 22nd June 2020.

³⁰⁵ Pers. Comm. Information from Graham Knight, the Project Manager at Moira Replan.

³⁰⁶ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Company Annual Report 1995- 1996*. Moira 1996. Unpaginated; last page: Financial Report/ Special Projects.

³⁰⁷ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Company Annual Report 1995- 1996*. Moira 1996. Unpaginated.

³⁰⁸ *The National Forest Company Annual Report 1996- 1997*. Unpaginated, refer to pages entitled *Investment*.

These were significant developments within the Forest, alongside the conversion of several hundred hectares of agricultural and derelict land to newly planted forest, with over 500 hectares converted to woodland in the course of the 1996-97 financial year alone.³⁰⁹ Any one of them might have taken up most of the Company's resources, so partnership working remained key to the Forest's success. In the Chief Executive's statement Susan Bell acknowledged that the National Forest continued to suffer from a lack of clear identity a recurring problem that has dogged the National Forest throughout its existence, especially outside the local area and that the NFC would expend considerable effort in raising awareness of the Forest nationally and planned to raise the Forest's profile through public relations and marketing, trumpeting the Forest's successes and achievements, of which there were many. There were failures too, or signs of potential future failures; its own ambitious planting targets were achieved that financial year, but Bell recognised that would be difficult to sustain that level of growth and limitations of the Tender Scheme in attracting landowners and investors was becoming apparent: 'Initial analysis indicates that the Tender Scheme has delivered excellent value for money and created the Forest at a speed previously thought impossible'. However, it had become apparent that the Tender Scheme was unlikely to deliver the high targets set for it, and that its effectiveness was limited to specific circumstances and with particular types of landowners. Other planting mechanisms needed be explored in the context the findings of the analysis.³¹⁰ Creating a forest was proving to be a more difficult task than the forecasts made by the Development Team.

An article in the *Guardian* newspaper of 18th January 1995 was extremely critical of the Forest project, asking what had gone wrong, commenting that the dreams of thousands of children had been tarnished and stating that 'Despite Mrs Thatcher's pledges, miserly government support is stunting the growth of the National Forest'. It claimed that in all likelihood, historians would look back on the plan to create a National Forest as 'one of the more hopelessly idealistic dreams of the 20th century, the climax of Thatcherism, born of the prime minister's 'green' period in her last years in power'. It went on to claim that the 'car-loving Conservative government' had in any case sponsored so many miles of motorway that 'the central part of the country sometimes seemed in danger of being covered in concrete', and that it had been 'oversold' by the Countryside Commission. The Rambler's Association were quick to point out their concerns in the article that there would be private woodlands without public access and that the organisation had urged the government to let the Forestry Commission run the project- a concept entirely at odds with the Conservative government's policy of pushing the Forestry Commission to sell its plantations.³¹¹ Locally though, and on the ground, there were no such concerns, with applications for Tender Scheme support outstripping availability and the local people quietly enjoying much improved access to the new plantations. The later Eftec report of 2010 presented the case that 'those involved in community and educational activities led by the National Forest Company and partners come from socially excluded groups within the Forest and from surrounding urban areas'. The Much More Than Trees report also of 2010 reported that 'In broad terms the socio-economic

³⁰⁹ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Company Annual Report 1995- 1996*. Moira 1996. Unpaginated, see the *Chairman's statement*.

³¹⁰ *The National Forest Company Annual Report 1996- 1997*. Unpaginated, refer to pages entitled *Achievement*.

³¹¹ *The Guardian* 18th January 1995, article entitled *Wooden Headed* pp: 6- 7. Partial copy kept in the SDDC Archive at Rosliston Forestry Centre in one of the several Newspaper clippings files. Lent to the author by Environmental Development Manager Kate Allies August 2020.

position of The National Forest continues to improve, building on the positive progress identified in *Much More Than Trees 2* in 2004.³¹² The process of post coalfield regeneration has continued and there is strong evidence that The National Forest continues to play an important role in the socio-economic development of the area'.³¹³ The reports over the decade demonstrated that the NFC strategies were creating the opportunities not only for landscape and environmental regeneration but also for economic revival after the collapse of much of the industrial and heavy industries of the 1990s. The *Guardian's* critical article, largely an attempt at knocking the shine off the Thatcherite years, had selected the wrong target. The Thatcher administration had backed the development of the National Forest, at times reluctantly, but it hadn't created it. That credit lies with the forward-looking Countryside Commission and the determination of the Development Team to implement the Forest's creation through sound planning and a clear strategy.

The 1994 Forest Strategy created by the Development Team envisaged new planting at a rate of around 70% of the planting target of 13,554 hectares within the first ten years. The Landscape Character Assessment had revealed that within the newly created forest boundary, the total amount of tree cover was 6%, with the heart of the forest, that most devastated by industrial despoilment at under 1% tree cover. The strategy envisaged a coverage across the forest of around 33% tree cover. This target equated to 16,566 hectares, with the 1990 cover at 3,012 hectares. This created a planting target of 27%, equalling the 13,554 hectares mentioned above. The planting rate initially planned for by the Development Team for the NFC of an increasing rate from 308 hectares in year one to 1,000 hectares in year five, with the next five years maintaining that number proved to be too ambitious and this quickly became apparent to the newly created Company, who by 1998 had revised the annual target to a more realistic and achievable 500 hectares per annum.³¹⁴

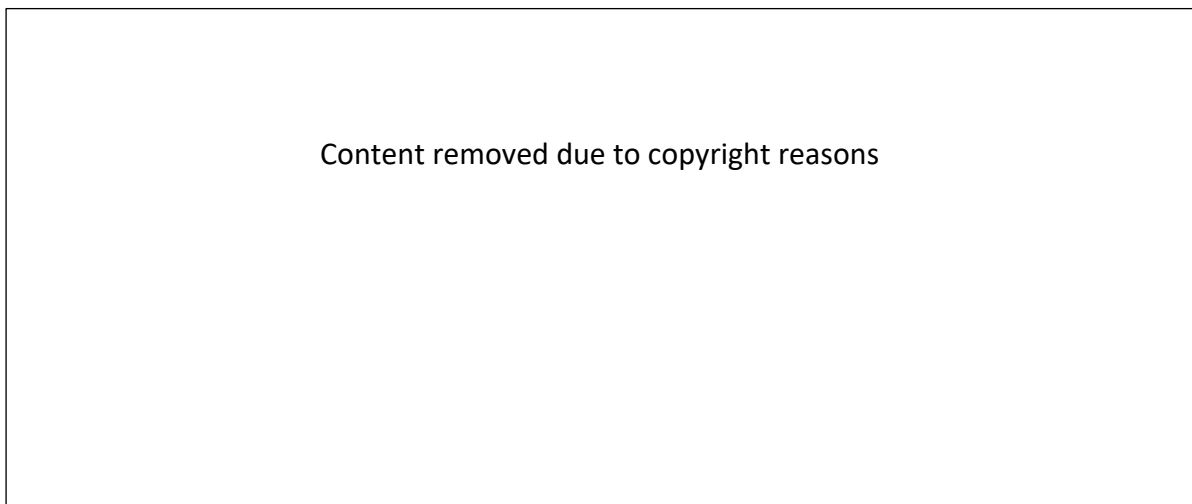


Figure 34. Forest Planting per annum.³¹⁵

³¹² Eftec (Dickie, I., & Thomson, C. *Initial Assessment of the Costs and Benefits of the National Forest*. Final Report. London 2010 p: 17.

³¹³ DC Research. *Much More Than Trees 4*. Leicester 2010 p:57.

³¹⁴ <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmselect/cmenvfru/432/1120502.htm> (Accessed 16th July 2017). The National Forest Company. *The Strategy 2004-2014*. The National Forest Company, Moira. 2004 p:7.

³¹⁵ The National Forest Company. *The Strategy 2004-2014*. The National Forest Company, Moira. 2004 p:7.

The Interim Corporate Plan recognised that ‘A massive conversion of farmland to forestry and of mineral-worked land to fledgling woodland will be essential to create the National forest’ and the National Forest Strategy stated that the aim was to achieve 70% of the entire planning of the Forest (9065 hectares) within the first ten years of the NFCs corporate life.³¹⁶ By April 2005 a total of 4421 hectares had been afforested, with a further 4,000 -5,000- hectare target now set for the period 2004 to 2014, which would then roughly achieve the total initially outlined for completion by 2005.³¹⁷ Afforestation was taking almost exactly twice the amount of time anticipated by the Development Team, despite the best efforts of the Company and its staff. The level of time and commitment from the Company in bidding for funding was demanding and a review of the level of commitment afforded to such bids for and with partners was to be examined further, with a view to the compilation of a new Business Plan for the Company.³¹⁸

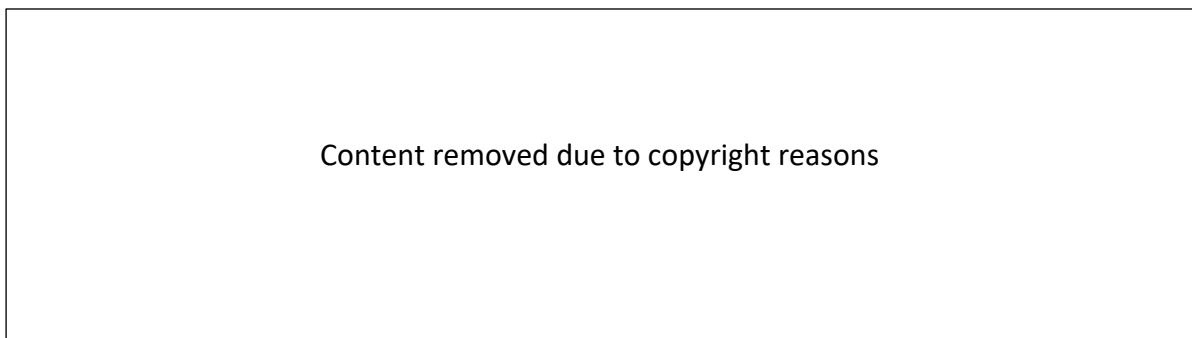


Figure 35. Planting analysis of the National Forest in hectares by year to 31st March 2005. (See note 315).

The failure of two major funding bids for the town of Burton on Trent was significant, both at the time and indeed for the future of Burton’s relationship with the wider Forest. The *Burton Urban Forestry Strategy* had been unsuccessful in its application to the Single Regeneration Budget (whereas Swadlincote had been successful in that same year) and the funding bid to the Millennium Commission to create a major new woodland and heritage centre in the town was also turned down.³¹⁹ This early failure would come to be reflected in Burton’s future relationship with the Forest and it is interesting to speculate on what might have been—perhaps Burton would have become the true ‘Capital of the National Forest’ as it claims on its own town gateways.

Bell, by 1996, was increasingly concerned that the credibility of the NFC and the wider Forest was in danger if planting forecasts were too challenging or simply unachievable, and that more realistic targets needed to be seriously considered.³²⁰ Under the headline banner ‘Of

³¹⁶ *The National Forest Company Annual Report 1995- 1996*. Unpaginated, refer to pages entitled *Trees and Woods*.

³¹⁷ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Company Annual Report 2004- 2005*. Moira 2005 p: 17 & p: 21.

³¹⁸ *The National Forest Company Annual Report 1996- 1997*. Unpaginated, refer to *Chief Executive’s statement*.

³¹⁹ *The National Forest Company Annual Report 1996- 1997*. Unpaginated, refer to pages entitled *Investment*, column two paragraph two. See also chapter 4 for further discussion on Burton on Trent’s Urban Forest plan.

³²⁰ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Company Annual Report 1995- 1996*. Moira 1996. Unpaginated, see the *Chief Executive’s statement*.

Trees and Targets' the *Forest News* autumn 1997 issue carried the story of planting achievement, 'Just two years into the National Forest Company's life a staggering 1.6 million trees have been planted as part of the Forest's creation' but goes on to sound a note of caution: 'The targets for the Forest's creation, particularly for tree planting, have always been challenging. These are set to rise steeply, and the Forest is always looking at new ways of keeping the rate of planting and site creation going in the same impressive upward direction'.³²¹ Bell was announcing to the world that the targets were over ambitious and unachievable.³²²

The planting plan as envisaged by the Development Team, although quickly recognised by the NFC as being overly ambitious, was still an overall target the NFC wished to attempt over a longer time frame, as they stated in a memorandum to the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in 2001. The Company had produced its own Business Plan which was submitted to DETR in December 1997. It concluded that at the current level of resources and mechanisms at its disposal, an estimated 4,778 ha of woodland creation would be achieved in the first ten years i.e. 53% of the ten-year target set in the original Business Plan created by the Development Team. Still convinced of the desirability of achieving the original targets, the Plan identified various ideas that might be explored to enable overall targets to be met. The successful proposals included: minor amendments to the Tender Scheme, improved ability for the NFC to acquire land, the use of Landfill Tax Credits, an increase in Grant in Aid, the requirement for greater commitment by partners (notably Forestry Commission/Forest Enterprise), and the introduction of a flat-rate Woodland Grant Supplement (Locational Supplement).

The NFC also suggested the establishment of charitable status, a proposal which had been foreseen from the outset by the Development Team (and was eventually adopted in April 2016).³²³ The success of Landfill Tax Credits was high, but translation into land conversion for forestry was not necessarily the result. Almost £3 millions of Landfill Tax was diverted to the creation of the National Forest Millennium Discovery Centre (later rebranded as the Conkers Discovery Centre) on the site of the former Rawdon - Marquis Colliery complex by the Heart of the Forest Foundation (latterly renamed the Heart of the Forest Charitable Trust), partners of which included the NFC.³²⁴

The area occupying the central belt of the forest had its own unique character, both in terms of its landscape, as identified by the Landscape Character Assessment undertaken by the Development Team, and in the character of the people there, dominated by heavy industry as they had been for almost 200 years. Large parts of North West Leicestershire and South Derbyshire had been subjected to many decades, centuries even, of industrial development, dominated by exploitation of the land by heavy industry, which left behind a disjointed area

³²¹ The National Forest Company. *Forest News* Autumn 1997 Issue 2. Copy held in SDDC archive, (accessed May 28th 2020) Front page.

³²² Note also here how 'the Forest' is used interchangeably with 'the National Forest Company'. Little wonder that identity is confused and that a Forest identity has never been properly established. For more on a Forest identity see chapters 6 & 7.

³²³ <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmselect/cmenvfru/432/1120502.htm> (Accessed 16th July 2017).

³²⁴ <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmselect/cmenvfru/432/1120502.htm> (Accessed 16th July 2017).

of derelict land caused by opencast and deep coal mining along with opencast clay mines and many millions of tons of clay stocks.³²⁵ The *Forestry in the Countryside* report had identified the need for engagement of local communities with their changing environment and the public relations strategy outlined by Susan Newcombe Associates in the winter of 1991/ 92 recognised this, stating in its conclusion that 'It will be essential in this period [the development phase of the Forest, 1992-1994 and beyond] to maximise and develop keen 'local' support for the Forest while showing that much is being done now to make the initiative succeed.'³²⁶ It had become apparent very early in the planning that a cohesive scheme involving representatives of all the relevant bodies, and specifically including local communities, would be the only way to create lasting and permanent change. The requirement in the public relations strategy and the obvious need for local and regional businesses, alongside the national corporations that had interests in the Forest, and also the local authorities and Development Team, fit together almost seamlessly.

The *Implementation Plan* drawn up by the Development Team immediately prior to the creation of the National Forest Company in 1995 echoed the sentiment of the need to continually involve local people, where they were listed as being amongst the 'Key Players' in the future of the Forest and indeed its survival: 'The continuing support and enthusiasm of local people, individually and through a host of interest groups, is crucial to the Forest's success'.³²⁷ In fact the Development Team had already been involved in establishing local groups, almost from the beginning of their own establishment. The NFC were aware of the value of continued public support and keen to let the public, especially local people, know that they were part of the Forest and able to influence its development. Company information and newsletters from the period show that the NFC were keen to keep the public informed as to the scale of the undertaking, what was happening to the Forest, what it might mean to them, how they could involve themselves and how they could be heard. The NFC continues this strand of development of public connection through an active volunteer programme to the present day. The *Implementation Plan* continues: 'A strategy for community involvement has evolved during the development phase and provides a useful basis for future work'.³²⁸ Here it seems that the Implementation Plan is referring to a number of local community groups, with perhaps the most important, and certainly the most influential being the *Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum*.

The Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum

The area known as the Ashby Woulds is a former mixed landscape of wetland, open heath and poor farmland, with a perched water table lying on top of the heavy clays which itself sat on top of the underlying coal measures, and this area formed the nexus of the derelict land created by exploitation of those very clay and coal measures, creating the legacy of despoiled

³²⁵ *Ashby Woulds Regeneration Strategy*. Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum & Leicestershire County Council, 1995.

³²⁶ Parry, J. *The National Forest; Heritage in the Making*. Moira. The National Forest Company 2006 p:149. Susan Newsome Associates. *The National Forest: PR Plan of Action 1993/4*. AB/52/93 November 1992 p:5.

³²⁷ The National Forest Development Team. *The National Forest Implementation Plan*. Donisthorpe. Undated but inferred date 1st quarter 1995 p:8.

³²⁸ The National Forest Development Team. *The National Forest Implementation Plan*. Donisthorpe. Undated but inferred date 1st quarter 1995 p:8.

landscapes at the very heart of the Forest.³²⁹ The coal measures continue south to Measham. There is a large underground fault to the east of the village of Moira which throws the coal measures very deeply down beneath Ashby de la Zouch before rising again to the east of the town to levels where they are able to be mined around Coleorton, Lount and Coalville. Exploitation of the coal resources has continued variously across the area since the thirteenth century, reaching its high-water mark in the early part of the twentieth century when it then began its long decline, until by 1990 deep mining for coal had ended.³³⁰ This was followed by significant open cast mining in the area (some of which had also been conducted in the Ashby Woulds area more or less continuously on both sides of the Derbyshire/ Leicestershire county boundary throughout the twentieth century) which lasted well into the early part of the new millennium. The later mines, especially the opencast mines, had considerable landscape restoration requirements as part of any planning permissions, and although British Coal attempted to restore much of the land under its control there were very significant areas despoiled both by coal mining and by opencast clay extraction.

In June 1992 the *Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum* was formed, following a study by consultants on behalf of Leicestershire County Council, focussing on proposals to improve the image and environment of the area, to reclaim derelict land, and to halt both population and economic decline.³³¹ The consultant's report recognised that further minerals workings might occur (in fact planning permission was already in place for that, with further planning applications to come) but 'recreational, environmental and economic benefits could arise from the location of the Ashby Woulds at the Heart of the National Forest'.³³² The inaugural meeting was held on the 10th June 1992 in Moira Replan Library and later transferred to Moira Miner's Welfare Club as the size of the forum increased. Both venues were used to hold meetings throughout the life of the Forum, Moira Replan hosted meetings of working groups, for example.³³³

The *Moira Replan Project* itself is the only surviving branch or individual unit of a national initiative which was created by the government. The *Replan* initiative was launched by the UK government nationally in 1984 with the aim of supporting innovative projects which would serve as examples of best practice and was a programme designed to promote the development of learning opportunities for unemployed adults. It was funded by the then Department of Education and Science (DES) and funding for the projects around the country was limited to a strict maximum of three years from project launch. The proposal for a Replan project in the Ashby Woulds area originated in 1986 by a coalition of organisations concerned for the area's future due to the decline of the coal mining industry, with over 1,200 jobs in the mining industry alone had been lost in the five years leading up to the launch of Moira

³²⁹ Mammatt, E. *The History and Descriptions of Ashby-de-la-Zouch with excursions in the neighbourhood*. Ashby-de-la-Zouch W&J Hextall 1852 p: 53.

³³⁰ Owen, C. *The Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfield, 1200-1900*. Moorland Publishing 1984.

³³¹ Letter dated 4th June 1992 from Peter Williams, Chief Assistant Planning Officer at Leicestershire County Council, held in Moira Replan archive, accessed 10th May 2012. See also the letter from Lesley Pendleton, Cabinet Minister for Environment & Transport in appendix 1 (held in Moira Replan archive, accessed 13th June 2012).

³³² The Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum. *Transforming the Ashby Woulds. A Progress Report*. April 2000 Copy held in Moira Replan Archive (accessed 22nd June 2020).

³³³ Minutes of the proceedings of the Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum held in Moira Replan Archive (accessed June- August 2020).

Replan, and with many more to come. Mining decline remained a prominent feature of the area until its final demise in March 1990, with the concerned of the coalition of the organisations (including Leicestershire County Council, North West Leicestershire District Council, Ashby Woulds Town Council, Coalville Technical College, Adult Basic Education, amongst others), formulating and submitting a successful application to NIACE (the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education), who oversaw the operation of Replan nationally. The project began in the summer of 1987, based in two rooms of the council office building in Moira.³³⁴

That the Replan project was brought to the Ashby Woulds area in 1986, prior to the Forest's inception, by the County and District Councils is evidence in itself that there was concern at least as high as county level that mining decline and employment levels were of major concern. With the acceptance of the Replan Project in the Ashby Woulds area, the DES, through NIACE were now also aware of potential future concerns and a red flag had been raised at national level. Moira Replan began as an adult education programme and quickly became a keen supporter and key player within the Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum and the later Heart of the Forest Forum.

The Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum evolved fairly rapidly until it eventually consisted of more than sixty representatives from the local communities; Parish, District and County Councils, community focus groups, for example local residents associations, sports clubs, and the local Miner's Welfare clubs; and importantly for the Forum to work effectively, it was joined by major land owners and industry representatives- RJB Mining (after 1997), Hepworth Building Products, British Coal (up until its sale in 1997), Coal Contractors; and then the companies and institutions- The National Forest Company (after 1995) The Council for the Protection of Rural England, Landmark North West, The Furnace Trust, the newly formed Canal trust and many others.³³⁵ The claim in 1996 by the Chairman of the NFC, Rodney Swarbrick OBE DL that 'a lively Forest Forum with some 280 participants has been held to debate progress' must be referring to one of only four mentioned by Susan Bell that occurred between 1991 and 1994 that were reserved for major announcements concerning progress in the development of Forest plans;³³⁶ the hall in which the Regeneration Forum met at the Moira Miner's Welfare Club had a maximum capacity of 200.³³⁷ The approach adopted by the Forum was a pragmatic one, especially on the part of the communities and their various representatives, and was based on a partnership for landscape change; recognising that

³³⁴ Undated draft report to the Area of Mining Decline Joint Working Party, which is also part draft for application for continuation of funding by LCC & NWLDC in July 1990 when the DES funding was due to be discontinued. Report draft held in the archives of Moira Replan (accessed June 25th 2020).

³³⁵ Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum meeting minutes September 1992, copy held at Moira Replan (accessed August 14th, 2012).

³³⁶ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Company Annual Report 1995- 1996*. Moira 1996. Unpaginated; see page entitled *Statements of the Chairman and Chief Executive*. Also, *Countryside* magazine March/ April 1995 issue. Article entitled *Birth of a Forest for the Nation, From Politics to Tree Planting*. p: 4 Partial copy kept in the SDDC Archive at Rosliston Forestry Centre in one of the several Newspaper clippings files. 2020. *Countryside* magazine is produced monthly by the National Farmers' Union.

³³⁷ Having personally been a member of the Regeneration Forum (from 2007) and also attending packed National Forest Folk Club events there I can testify that with 200 people in the hall it is very full indeed. It would not be possible to fit another 80 people in, an increase of 40% above maximum capacity. A review of the minutes of the Forum meeting held in the Moira Replan archive details a regular attendance of 40-50 members with up to 15 members giving apologies for non-attendance at any given meeting.

further mineral extraction could and would happen but that by working together then the end goal of environmental, recreational and economic benefit could be achieved across the heart of the forest.

The Forum held regular meetings chaired initially by a senior member of Leicestershire County Council and although usually productive and good natured there were those meetings that were also fractious and acrimonious. Nevertheless, the important first steps had been taken and the stage was set for the next eighteen years of partnership working between individuals and representatives of differing interests; a regeneration strategy was tentatively created that suited if not all parties all of the time, at least one that was a workable solution for the heart of the forest as a whole. The regeneration strategy took time to foment, and the Countryside Commission draft consultation paper of 1993 mentioned work that had begun prior to a final strategy agreement by all parties on the Forum.³³⁸

The strategy was published in 1995 and promoted a vision for the future and specific proposals for thirteen sites across the Woulds. It was an aspiration that recognised the opportunity not only to restore the dereliction of the 'coal and clay working that has dominated the area for many generations' but also to 'create a new landscape worthy of the heart of the National Forest'.³³⁹ This included proposals for landscape regeneration and land use proposals for economic and social regeneration with new space for industry, leisure facilities and housing.

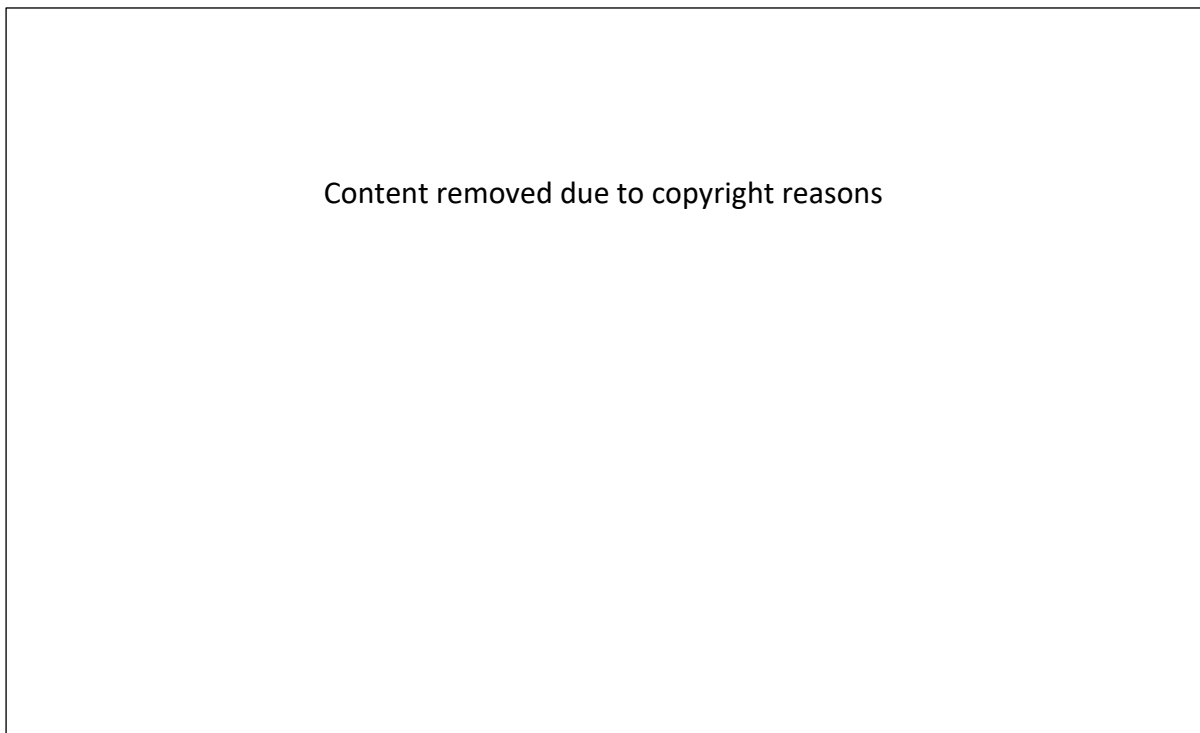


Figure 36. The Ashby Woulds Regeneration Strategy (see note 339). Author's photograph.

³³⁸ *The National Forest Strategy- draft for consultation*. Countryside Commission. Cheltenham. 1993 p: 64.

³³⁹ Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum. Ashby Woulds Regeneration Strategy. Published by North West Leicestershire District Council. Published date Spring 1995, but first draft circulated with a letter from NWLDC Economic Development department 23rd September 1994 (letter ref MC/JEC/A485/11mc.37). A copy of both is held in Moira Replan Archive (accessed June 22nd, 2020).

Funding for each of the proposals varied depending on the landowner, for example, the ten-hectare derelict site at Albert Village was redeveloped as a sports area with community buildings and new football stadium linked by woodland planting and funded by Section 106 housing development along with a proportion of grant aid. The Moira Furnace, a very early 19th century iron smelting furnace building and associated lime kilns were repaired and opened as a visitor attraction with workshops and tea rooms, funded by a working party consisting of the Moira Furnace Trust, Leicestershire and Derbyshire County and District Councils, and English Partnerships. The former Rawdon Colliery site was redeveloped not only as a site for industrial units but for the National Forest Discovery Centre (later Conkers Visitor Centre).

By the spring of 2000 the changes initiated by the Forum and its partners were already visible in the landscape with 86 hectares of land reclaimed, almost a quarter of a million trees planted, over ten kilometres of public access all-weather trails created, nine hectares of land developed for new employment and a reduction in local unemployment levels from 3.8% to 3.1%. The Forum recognised that even with these achievements there was still a significant workload and constant funding was sought for projects, much of which was either provided or other funding sources identified by the East Midlands Development Agency, the European Community (through various regeneration funding initiatives) and through the National Forest Company.³⁴⁰

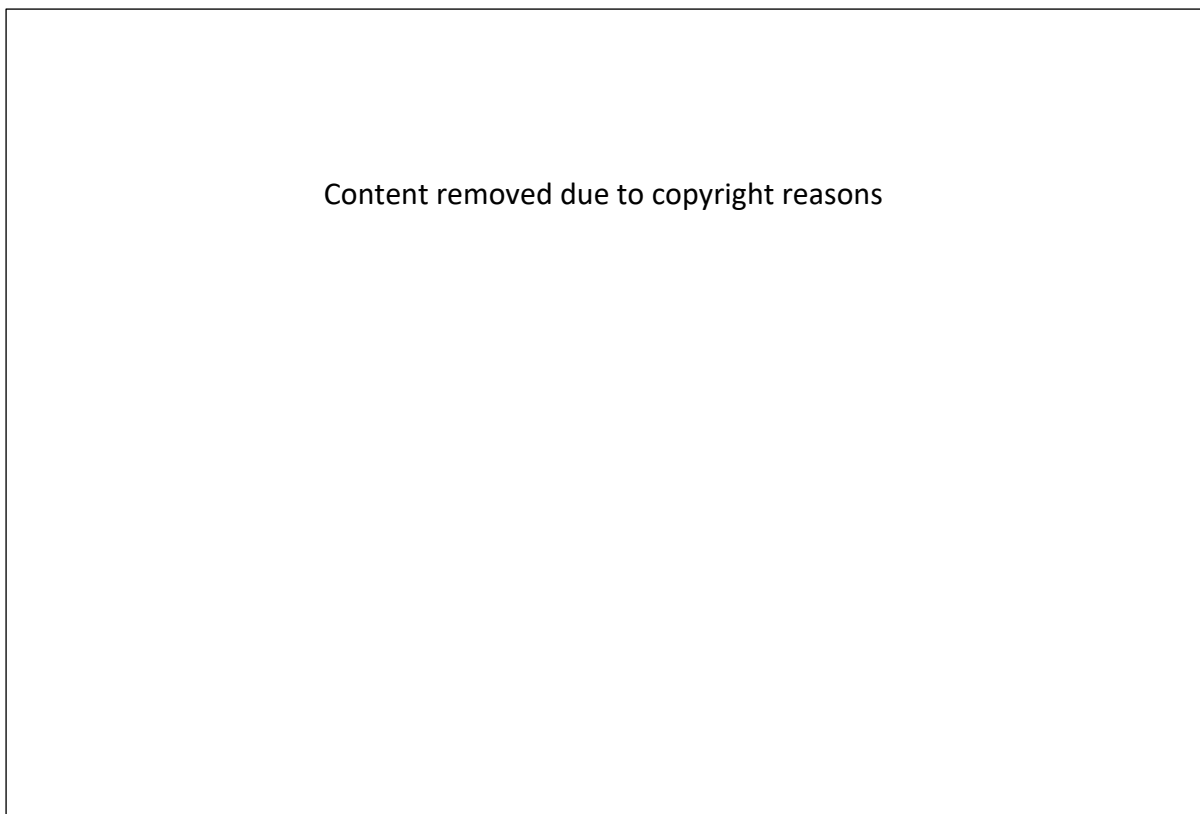


Figure 37. Map showing the area of activity of the Ashby Wolds Regeneration Forum. (see note 419). Author's photograph.

³⁴⁰ The Ashby Wolds Regeneration Forum. *Transforming the Ashby Wolds. A Progress Report*. April 2000. Copy held in Moira Replan Archive (accessed 22nd June 2020).

Other sites where opencast mining was planned had comprehensive landscaping plans built into the planning applications, funded largely by the mineral operators along with some government grant aid. Many other projects and schemes were developed in conjunction with the Forum, the last of which is currently drawing to a close at the time of writing (April 2021); the opencast clay and coal mine at the Albion Void site, which after cessation of mining activities was turned over to use as a landfill site for household waste. That site is now nearing completion, and very significant restorative landscaping work is underway on all areas of the site, in preparation for it to (eventually) become a country park with woodland glades and a recreational lake. Of the thirteen key sites identified by the Forum as sites for strategic development and major restoration, all of them were achieved.³⁴¹ In some cases there were delays and supplementary plans had to be initiated, in others the targets were exceeded, but in none was there a failure.

Recognition of the Forum's work and its eventual success was acknowledged at national government level. The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) gave the prestigious 2001 Silver Jubilee Award to the Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum for its work. The judges' comments are worth repeating here:

The forum has played a key role in stimulating, facilitating and guiding a range of schemes designed to address problems of individual sites. We were most impressed with its work, both on the ground and as a mechanism for reaching consensus amongst a diverse range of interests. We were left in no doubt that the transformation of a declining and dispirited population to one that believed in itself and its achievements was well underway. The professionals provided the community with the vision and goals. But the commitment of local people was the ingredient that made it all happen.³⁴²

This win was reiterated in 2012, when the RTPI East Midlands awarded the Ashby Woulds with the cup-winner's cup against very strong competition from the region:

Ashby Woulds proved the winner with the extremely effective renovation of mineral scarred landscapes and their replacement with the National Forest and a range of other facilities from leisure activities to new housing. Substantial community involvement secured the necessary buy-in and enhanced the proposals. It was also clear that the project was ongoing and a permanent solution to the critical issues in the area...³⁴³

The stress that the RTPI placed on community involvement and the commitment of local people in the judges' statements in 2001 and again in 2012 is noteworthy. The significance of both quotations is in the demonstration of connection and commitment to the Forest felt by locals and by local organisations and engendered by the NFC and local and regional government. The NFC supported local people and organisations and working together forged

³⁴¹ The Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum. *Transforming the Ashby Woulds. A Progress Report*. April 2000. Copy held in Moira Replan Archive (accessed 22nd June 2020).

³⁴² *The RTPI National Awards for Planning Achievement 2001*. RTPI London 2001 p:3 .

³⁴³ Peter Wilkinson, Chairman RTPI East Midlands, quoted in *Spectrum* newsletter, December 2012: https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/11787/spectrum_december_2012.pdf (accessed 18th February 2019).

a working forum that was able to realise several important regeneration goals over a period of years.

The Heart of the National Forest Foundation/ The National Forest Charitable Trust

The vision to develop the visitor centre and later the discovery centre and in the centre of the former despoiled landscapes at the heart of the National Forest was one originally devised by the Development Team, at least in outline, but was clearly one which the NFC could not oversee directly. It had only a small team and as has been noted, partnership working was key to its success, and anyway its main function was the planting of a forest. From the outset it had been envisioned that another body would take ownership of this development work, in partnership with the Company and other actors.

The Heart of the National Forest Foundation was incorporated on 14th November 1997 as an independent charity constituted as a company limited by guarantee with board members from the public and private sectors, and from the communities local to the centre of the Forest. It remained dormant for six months, and directors to the board were appointed in July 1998, including the current Director and Company Secretary, Mike Ballantyne.³⁴⁴ The Foundation had close ties to the NFC, Susan Bell had served as a board member since the Foundation became active in 1998 and remained in position on the board until 2001. She remained in position as Chief Executive of the National Forest Company until February 2006. Bell was succeeded by the incoming CEO, Sophie Churchill, on February 7th 2006.³⁴⁵

Personnel changes over periods of time are inevitable with any operation but the overarching demands of creating the National Forest remained focussed on the Business Plan first outlined by the Development Team, with updates and changes to suit the requirements of the day. The first chair of the Board of Directors, Rodney Swarbrick, had left that position in 1999, when he was replaced by Viv Astling. Astling and Bell forged a successful partnership, with Simon Evans, an original member of the Development Team who had begun his association with the Forest through his position with Warwickshire County Council and their failed bid to take the Forest to the Forest of Arden. Evans eventually became Director of Operations at the Company, and he and Bell together had exerted their efforts in creating an entirely new environmental project for the nation and shaped the direction of the Company for years to come. Not alone of course, the Company has had some exceptional staff throughout the years, including Clive Keble and Mike Dewsnap, amongst many others but the Bell/ Evans partnership shaped the beginnings of the Forest itself. Susan Bell left the Company in good shape, Astling said of her 'Susan Bell has been a quite exceptional Chief Executive. She is the personification of the Forest and can take great credit as the principal architect of the largest single landscape change initiative in the UK and possibly Europe. Quite a feat'.³⁴⁶ Her tenure ending roughly coincided with a further change of chairmanship. The directors normally serve for six years and Astling left at the end of March 2005, leaving Bell a

³⁴⁴ <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/03468753> (Accessed 26th June 2020).

³⁴⁵ The National Forest Company. *Annual Report 2005-2006*. The National Forest Company, Moira 2006 p: 17.

³⁴⁶ The National Forest Company. *Annual Report 2004- 2005*. The National Forest Company, Moira 2005. p:1 Chairman's Report.

10-month period to brief Dinah Nichols, the new Chair of the Board of Directors, on the day-to-day management of the Company and to search for a new Chief Executive. Evans stayed on until his retirement in 2018. The Company appointed Sophie Churchill as new Chief Executive, another very capable person who influenced how the Forest was to grow for the next ten years. Churchill and Nichols also formed a very successful partnership which was also to last for the next six years. Sophie Churchill left the Company in December 2014, handing the reins to the current Chief Executive, John Everitt.

The Heart of the National Forest Foundation was set up to create and maintain the National Forest Discovery Centre (latterly Conkers), and the 1,000-acre (~405 hectare) *Heart of the National Forest Park* as a recreational resource. The Foundation changed its name to the Heart of the Forest Charitable Trust in October 2010 to make clear its role in the National Forest;³⁴⁷ it also has two subsidiary companies, The Forest Experience Ltd, which managed Conkers Discovery Centre and the Heart of the National Forest Park Developments, which is responsible for the day-to-day development of the Forest Park.³⁴⁸ Both were incorporated on 21st July 1998.³⁴⁹ The Heart of the Forest Park covers approximately ten square miles (~2,600 hectares) straddling the Leicestershire/ Derbyshire border, the area most damaged by denuded post- industrial landscapes, inside which is the Heart of the Forest Park. The Heart of the Forest Trust works alongside the National Forest Company and other partners, including the County and District Councils on both sides of the boundary to manage and improve the Heart of the Forest, building on the successes of the National Forest in this area.³⁵⁰ Most of the Heart of the Forest lies within Leicestershire, however, and the 2019 draft of the *Heart of the Forest Masterplan Specification* (a tender document to potential consultancy companies formulated to outline the development of the Heart of the Forest up to 2040, which itself builds on the *Vision and Action Plan* drawn up by consultants in 2009-see below, a copy of both of which is held in the Moira Replan archive), recognises this when listing the key landowners: the National Forest Company, the National Forest Charitable Trust, Forestry England, the Woodland Trust, North West Leicestershire District Council and Leicestershire County Council. Derbyshire and South Derbyshire own a very small proportion of land in the Heart and consequently play only a correspondingly small role in its development. The *Heart of the Forest Masterplan Specification* was the tender document for a successor to the 2009 *Heart of the Forest Foundation and National Forest Company: Unlocking the Potential- Vision and Action Plan for Heart of the National Forest* (see below) which itself led to the creation of the NFC's *Greenprint for the Nation*, which is discussed in the final chapter. The aspiration for the Heart of the Forest Park was to increase visitor numbers from 150,000 in 2003 to 600,000 by 2013 and up to one million following the restoration of Donington 2 (at Albert Village, near Swadlincote but in Leicestershire) and the

³⁴⁷ <http://www.nationalforestcharitabletrust.co.uk/about/> (Accessed 26th June 2020).

³⁴⁸ Heart of the National Forest Foundation. *Heart of the National Forest Park: Presentation to Overseal Parish Council*. 1st July 2004. Copy held in Moira Replan Archive, accessed 22nd June 2020. The Foundation were making representations to Overseal Parish Council as they were planning to build a Youth Hostel and camp site on the parish boundary (partially funded by housing development) and required endorsement for strategy and funding bids, and assistance with public consultation.

³⁴⁹ <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/03601522> & <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/03601510> (Accessed 26th June 2020).

³⁵⁰ Draft copy of the *Heart of the Forest Masterplan Specification*. Undated but inferred date 2019. Copy held in Moira Replan archive (accessed 24th June 2020).

Albion sites.³⁵¹ By February 2021 Donington 2 had been restored and Albion, a former opencast clay and coal void used as a landfill site is nearing completion of its restoration, which is overdue. It was due for completion in the late autumn of 2019. Visitor numbers to the Forest overall in 2019 achieved a total of 8.9 million people.³⁵²

The shared successes of the Trust, through working with partners, have been many. Transforming Conkers into a nationally recognised day visitor centre (the Heart of the Forest Visitor Centre was quickly amalgamated into Conkers; they were adjacent to each other and complimented each other to the extent that it was the obvious move to connect them physically to each other), the creation of a network of miles of recreational routes around the Heart of the Forest for cyclists, pedestrians and horse riders, the creation of an attractive woodland destination for visitors and tourists, the creation of a youth hostel, managed and operated by the Youth Hostels Association, a caravan touring site managed and operated by the Caravan and Camping Club, the creation of the Hick's Lodge Visitor and Cycle Centre and many more achievements. The continued development of the Heart of the Forest and the unlocking of the economic and environmental potential has been the focus of the Trust's activities since its inception.

At a meeting of the Heart of the National Forest Developments Ltd on June 10th, 2009, at which attendees included representatives from the NFC, the East Midlands Development Agency and Leicestershire County Council the draft report for the *Heart of the Forest Vision and Action Plan* was circulated, along with a series of strands for development work in the form of a 'Themes Diagram'.³⁵³



Figure 38. 'Themes Diagram' from the draft Vision and Action Plan. Author's photograph

³⁵¹ Roger Tym and Partners. *Heart of the Forest Foundation and National Forest Company: Unlocking the Potential- Vision and Action Plan for Heart of the National Forest, Executive Summary and Action Plan*. M9342. Leicester June 2009 p: 6 note 2. Copy in the Moira Replan archive (accessed 23rd June 2020).

³⁵²https://www.nationalforest.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/1693%20NFC%20Brand%20Vision%20Report%20AW_SCREEN%20%281%29.pdf (Accessed 28th June 2020).

³⁵³ Heart of the National Forest Developments Ltd. *Minutes of Meeting held on 10th June 2009*. Copy held in Moira Replan archive (accessed 23rd June 2020). See item 7.

In 2008 a Leicester based consultancy firm had been contracted to draw up a plan for 'unlocking the potential for the Heart of the Forest', essentially a 'strategy to access the full economic potential through place shaping to create a strategic green infrastructure and established visitor destination, which connects people and place, celebrating the cultural past and embracing a green future'.³⁵⁴ This strategy would see the Heart of the Forest develop as an area so that by 2026 it would support a successful forest economy and would have become a major tourist and leisure destination. A series of actions and strategies were drawn up to approach change over the short, medium and longer terms (six, twelve and 17 years respectively) and were designed to address multiple themes and sub- themes (see figure 38 above).

The overall strategy was aimed at increasing visitor numbers by developing the Forest as a major tourism destination, moving from an emerging to established visitor destination, a sustained increase to Conkers through a regular refresh and makeover, attacking the problem of pockets of high deprivation through regeneration and training initiatives around woodland management by building on the work of Moira Replan and BCTV (now the Conservation Trust-TCV), and through the revitalisation of Swadlincote, Coalville, Burton upon Trent, Ashby de la Zouch and Measham town centres and their development as key service centres. Throughout the entire document there are two or three key underlying themes; the environmental and 'green' agenda to connect with nature; wealth creation through the focus on transition from an 'emerging' to 'established' tourist destination; and partnership working and community engagement through the continued support from and involvement of local people.³⁵⁵

The consultation had included a great deal of contact with local people, especially through community groups, parish councils and parish plans groups, and especially the Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum, who had suggested that consideration should be given to their own remit to reflect the *Vision and Action Plan for the Heart of the Forest*.

The Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum becomes the Heart of the Forest Forum.

The Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum wound up its activities in the final months of 2010, the original plans for landscape and economic regeneration having been fomented and initiated, and in many instances completed, and the attendance, especially that by landowners having waned over the previous years. Once the mineral extraction and restorative works had been completed, many landowners and industry representatives no longer had a real stake in the activities of the Forum.³⁵⁶ The success of the previous 18 years in supporting the regeneration of the Ashby Woulds through building agreement and networks whereby the solution was a compromise out of which all parties eventually gained.

³⁵⁴ Roger Tym and Partners. *Heart of the Forest Foundation and National Forest Company: Unlocking the Potential- Vision and Action Plan for Heart of the National Forest, Executive Summary and Action Plan*. M9342. Leicester June 2009 p: 6 note 2. Copy in the Moira Replan archive (accessed 23rd June 2020).

³⁵⁵ Roger Tym and Partners. *Heart of the Forest Foundation and National Forest Company: Unlocking the Potential- Vision and Action Plan for Heart of the National Forest, Executive Summary and Action Plan*. M9342. Leicester June 2009 overview of pp: 1- 44. Copy in the Moira Replan archive (accessed 26th June 2020).

³⁵⁶ Letter from Mike Ballantyne of the National Forest Charitable Trust, and Clive Keble of the National Forest Company to members of the Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum dated 10th January 2011 (Author's copy).

Nor was there any real precedent for this kind of multi-faceted activity, certainly none on the scale envisaged and achieved by the Forum; and perhaps the single most remarkable accomplishment of the Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum in all of its endeavours was that it never had any statutory power whatsoever to enforce any of its strategies - they were all achieved through negotiation, concession and agreement.³⁵⁷

There were several parties and stakeholders that were interested in building on the achievements of the Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum, including Leicestershire County Council, North West Leicestershire and South Derbyshire District Councils, the three parish councils involved at the Heart of the Forest project, three museums, and a small number of focus groups including local footpaths groups and football teams, Moira Replan, Heart of the Forest Charitable Trust and the NFC itself.³⁵⁸ They were keen to pursue the momentum that had been created, and many of the forum members realised that rather than become a talking shop, it could transfer its activities to other bodies or create a new purpose for itself. This second course of action was agreed upon and the inaugural meeting of the Heart of the Forest Forum was held on the 8th of February 2011.³⁵⁹ The remit of this new forum was intended to be broader in outlook than the previous one, encompassing a wider area at the heart of the forest and to include representation from parish and town councils, district and county councils, landowners and tourism businesses. The initial project development included discussion topics of a Heart of the Forest Art and Sculpture Trail, Multi-User Recreational Route Network, collaboration on land management and opportunities arising from 'Localism' (the government policy that ran from 2010 to 2015 and was intended to allow communities a voice on neighbourhood planning, rights to reclaim unused land, and rights to build community-led developments, amongst other changes); the Heart of the Forest Forum planned to understand what, if any, opportunities might arise from this policy and how best to develop these.³⁶⁰ The Heart of the Forest was announced as a defined area of approximately ten square miles centred on the village of Moira in North West Leicestershire, and including part of South Derbyshire, and was agreed upon as the locus of the new forum's activities. The boundary was drawn on a map, but it was agreed that the map would not be definitive, the boundary was allowed to be porous to a degree otherwise the Heart would run into the same difficulties as the Forest at large and some communities would find themselves separated from each other: 'Hearts beat so the boundary is moveable' was the general understanding within the Forum.³⁶¹

Several working groups were formed; an Art and Sculpture trail was worked on by volunteers and professionals but was eventually placed in abeyance for future consideration; after several meetings with consultants and artists no agreement was reached, and a large enough budget could not be found. The Multi-User Recreational Route Network was eventually achieved (although the intended link to Rosliston Forestry Centre has yet to come to fruition)

³⁵⁷ Pers com. Email from Peter Williams, Chief Assistant Planning Officer at Leicestershire County Council dated 6th September 2012.

³⁵⁸ Agenda from the inaugural meeting of the *Heart of the Forest Forum*, 8th February 2011 (author's copy).

³⁵⁹ Letter from Mike Ballantyne of the National Forest Charitable Trust, and Clive Keble of the National Forest Company to members of the Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum dated 10th January 2011.

³⁶⁰ Agenda from the inaugural meeting of the *Heart of the Forest Forum*, 8th February 2011 (author's copy).

³⁶¹ Informal discussion at the meeting of the Forum and the Heritage Group meetings. I asked for this clarification at the Forum meeting as the boundary otherwise divides my own village in two.

and continues to be developed through the more recent redefining of signage and interpretation hubs as part of the *Black to Green* project, and separately, a new long-distance footpath was created in 2014; the 75-mile long *National Forest Way*, linking Charnwood and Needwood on existing public rights of way and new access routes.³⁶² Collaboration on land management and the recreational route network developed into the 'Access and Connectivity' group, which worked on the National Forest Way and continues to meet to the present day, working on connecting the Heart of the Forest with the wider area through multi-user recreational routes.

It was very quickly realised by the new forum that the speed of change had been so rapid that many potential heritage assets had disappeared, and a Heritage Liaison group was established to promote connection between various local history and heritage groups. This performed a various; primarily it promoted a linked strategy between groups that had potentially been unknowingly duplicating efforts. For example, Moira Replan had a sizeable collection of historical photographs that Moira Furnace did not realise existed and both were asking locals for copies of the same information, presenting a seemingly piecemeal and fragmented approach to collating information. Secondly, and perhaps more fundamentally, it presented the Heart of the Forest Forum, the National Forest Charitable Trust, and the National Forest Company with the opportunity to bid for significant Heritage Lottery Funding for heritage-related projects. The new Forum, guided by the NFCT and the NFC, deliberately created the working groups that would be useful to the next stage of Forest creation. These would assist in bidding for funds that would continue to develop the work created by the former Forum, namely through the Heritage Group and the Footpath and Connectivity Group; and a successful bid for a near £1 million project (in total, the first tranche was for consultation on the viability of the project, the project itself was funded at £770,000), *Black to Green*, through the Heritage Lottery Fund was forthcoming. The bid was in the name of the Heart of the Forest Forum but was administered solely by the National Forest Company, who also appointed a project manager and officers to work through the three-year project. The project concluded in January 2019.³⁶³

The Forum, once its usefulness in successfully bidding for Heritage Lottery Funding had passed, fell into decline and although still nominally in place has not met, at the time of writing, for several years. The two active groups mentioned above, the Heritage group and the Access group still function and continue to be supported by the NFC. The Heritage Group has since taken on a life of its own, with regular meetings and support from a wider section of the local community. A discussion with Mike Ballantyne about the function of the Heart of the Forest Forum was revealing; it was his opinion that the *Black to Green* project was intended to develop the capacity of the Forum as well as implement some of the smaller projects, and the Forum's sub-groups effectively became the mechanism for supporting the *Black to Green* project. They were well attended and achieved a lot of small wins for the area. However, over time the overseeing body of the sub-groups, the Forum, became less well

³⁶² <https://www.nationalforest.org/visit/national-forest-way> accessed 20th December 2018.

³⁶³ National Forest Company. *Annual Report 2013-2014*. National Forest Company, Moira 2014 p: 38, National Forest Company. *Annual Report 2014-2015*. National Forest Company, Moira 2015 p: 26 & p:28, National Forest Company. *Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2020*. National Forest Company, Moira 2020, Heart of the Forest Heritage Link minutes of meeting held at Moira Replan 18th August 2014 (Author's copy).

attended, especially as the recession meant that very little funding was available to deliver what had been set out in the *Vision and Action Plan*. It was initially thought that a follow-on project to the *Black to Green* project would deliver much more funding to take the vision forward. Changes to the Heritage Lottery Fund's priorities meant that the project failed to get further funding and the staff employed by the NFC to manage the project could no longer be afforded. It gradually became apparent that the projects in the *Vision and Action Plan* were not going to be delivered through the mechanism of *Black to Green*. It was Ballantyne's impression that unlike the Ashby Wouds Regeneration Forum, local people never really thought the Heart of the Forest Forum belonged to them. Partly this could be because it covered a larger area but also it could be because it was an idea pushed by the NFC and the NFCT and not a body created to deal with local people's concerns. In future the Forum may exist through the continued work of the Access group and the Heritage group and it seems possible that the membership of those groups that will in time push for a meeting of the overall Forum to put weight behind particular issues.³⁶⁴

Partnership Working.

One of the NFC's great strengths (and specific strategies) has always been its ability to work in partnership with other entities, be they other governmental bodies or departments, landowning charities, trusts or influencing groups, or with volunteer organisations and individuals. One such agreement, that with British Coal, has been discussed in chapter 2, another was the work with the Ashby Wouds Regeneration Forum and its successor, the Heart of the Forest Forum. Amongst these was a working arrangement drawn up with the foremost tree planting and management body in the UK, the Forestry Commission.

In 2001 the NFC and the Forestry Commission entered into a *Concordat* to work together to deliver the shared objectives of the England Forestry Strategy and the National Forest Strategy. The Forestry Commission is the Government Department responsible for forestry policy across the UK and as the largest woodland owner in England and actively working to deliver public benefits including allowing and creating access to woodlands for recreation, the amelioration of industrial dereliction, the strengthening of local economies, and biodiversity and environmental improvement and enhancement the NFC were aligning themselves with a powerful governmental body. The agency of the Forestry Commission in England, Forest Enterprise, was formed in 1996 (rebranded on April 1st 2019 as Forestry England) as the 'key vehicle for implementing the England Forestry Strategy [with a] leading role in championing sustainable forestry'.³⁶⁵

In 1998 the Forestry Commission had set out a national programme for Forestry for the period 2003 to 2008 with two main aims, which were the sustainable management of existing woodlands and a continued steady expansion of woodland nationally to provide more benefits for society and the environment. Within the England Forestry Strategy were four strategic priorities; to create forestry for rural development, for economic regeneration, for recreation, access and tourism, and for the environment and conservation. This strategy marked a major sea change in Forestry Commission and government policy, away from the

³⁶⁴ Pers. Comm. Series of email exchanges with Mike Ballantyne, Director of the NFCT, between June and September 2020.

³⁶⁵ The National Forest Company and the Forestry Commission. A Concordat Between the Forestry Commission and the National Forest Company. Unpaginated. Inferred date 2000 or 2001.

original 1919 direction of focussing on forestry for timber production and towards the delivery of public goods. This less tangible product did not have delivery targets or indicate the balance of outputs to be achieved but was very much in line with the aims of the National Forest Company and the Countryside Commission's original concept of a 'Forest for the Nation'.³⁶⁶ One of the key elements of the Commission's forestry strategies is the need to conserve woodland biodiversity and to combat habitat fragmentation and to 'create conditions that allow particularly fragmented habitats to expand or, in the case of animal species, to retain or create wildlife corridors to allow natural migration, escape from danger and interbreeding'.³⁶⁷

The *Concordat* recognised that by working together across the Forest area there was an opportunity for greater achievement than working in isolation from each other and identified a range of areas for co-operation and joint action, setting out an agenda for further key actions and activities that either partner may pursue individually and further the shared objectives for the Forest.

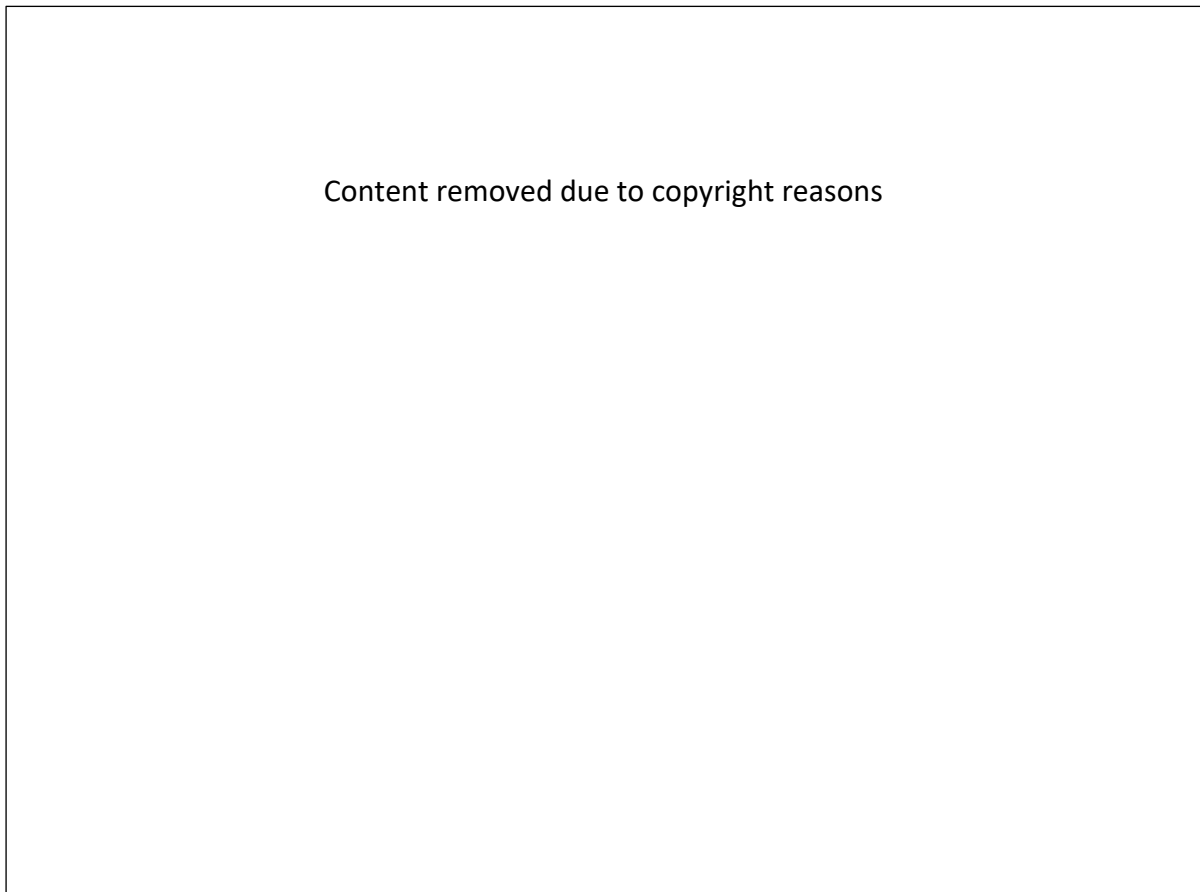


Figure 39. The Concordat Action Plan 2001- 2002. Author's photograph.

³⁶⁶ CJC Consulting. Final Report for the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. *Review of Evidence for the Formulation of Forestry Policy in England*. October 2005 sheet 20 p: 2.

³⁶⁷ Forest Research. *Evaluating Biodiversity in Fragmented Landscapes: Application of Landscape Ecology Tools*. Forestry Commission. Edinburgh March 2007 p: 1.

The *Concordat* listed a series of key themes, in summary these were; working together on the National Forest Tender Scheme and undertaking an annual review of other grants and incentives, alongside the joint consideration of the development of new ones; the optimisation of land acquisition opportunities, including joint acquisitions along with a target of 500 hectares of new woodland in the Forest for Forest Enterprise by 2005; the joint promotion of best practice and advice; training and support for the private sector for woodland managers and owners; a more joined-up approach to include other departments, agencies and organisations, including the creation of a new Forester position jointly funded to manage Forest Enterprise land in the Forest and support the development of new acquisitions; working together to promote public awareness of the Forest, to work together to secure good-quality public access for recreational opportunities; to jointly pursue additional sources of funding from regional, national, government and private sector funds, including EU funds; and to promote and support the development of a sustainable, local, wood-based economy based on wood products, wood energy and the contribution woodland can make to leisure enterprises.

This last point deserves some consideration, and it seems that the single line remark in the *Concordat* Action Plan for 2001-2002 recognised the difficulties that this commitment would bring. Under point 6. *Woodland Based Economy* (note here the subtle change from 'wood-based' to 'woodland-based' economy that appears in the original *Concordat*) there is the brief remark 'Ensure that the National Forest Company is fully engaged in the emerging regional wood marketing and wood fuel opportunities'.

Gone is the much broader and bolder initiative of support for the development of a 'sustainable, local, wood-based economy based on wood products, wood energy and the contribution woodland can make to leisure enterprises' and in its place a commitment to, in reality, something more ephemeral.³⁶⁸ It also seems to be a recognition that the commitment to those initiatives were, like the attempt to develop a rural skills training centre some five years earlier, too soon in the creation of the Forest and would come in good time. Sustainable development had been a guiding principle of the NFC since the publication of the first National Forest Strategy in 1993 and both commitments were laudable intentions and aspirations; just a few short years later, in 2007, the NFC was able to report considerable progress as an exemplar of rural development and in pursuing the goals of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy.³⁶⁹ The report of achievements of 2007 still does not address the sections of the *Concordat* theme of a 'local wood-based economy based on wood products and wood energy' though, they are related to the final point around woodland and leisure enterprises and a leisure based economy. Those aspirations, like the Forest itself, take time to grow, indeed they are reliant on a mature wood, or at least mature enough to be harvested. This too had been recognised, the experimental plantation at Barton under Needwood discussed previously was based around the plantation of trees as a crop, a commodity to be harvested.

³⁶⁸ The National Forest Company and the Forestry Commission. *A Concordat Between the Forestry Commission and the National Forest Company*. Unpaginated, undated. Inferred date sometime in 2000 or 2001. See also the *Forestry Commission and National Forest Company Concordat Action Plan 2001- 2002*. Undated and unpaginated but clearly later in date than the Concordat.

³⁶⁹ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest: An Example of Sustainable Development*. Moira 2007 pp: 8- 9, 38- 44 & see also p: 51.

Partnership working by the National Forest Company has so far allowed it to create a Forest across the 200 square mile area in a way that would not have been possible otherwise. The work is not complete, as of the end of 2019 21% of the planned target of 30% of the area is afforested³⁷⁰ and there is still much to do. By continuing the partnership work throughout the 25 years of its activities, the Company has had a wider influence than it could have ever had working alone; the Development Team and Countryside Commission knew and planned for the Company to be set up in such a way that it would have an effect many times greater than its small staff could individually achieve. Reviewing the Company's own literature it can be seen that there are a small number of key themes that run through the lifespan of the Company: partnership working; influence that belies its small size at all levels from National Government to local community organisations and individuals; as an enabler for other bodies to act within the Forest but always with an overview and oversight to ensure that the correct decisions are made for the long-term success of the Forest and for the economic prosperity of the area overall. These are key themes, perhaps *the* key themes that have set the National Forest apart from other initiatives that have some or even many similarities to the project. It is distinctive because it had a broad support base across three counties, from grass roots individuals and organisations to all levels of local authorities, from volunteer organisations to ministerial and Governmental level, and from private enterprise to nationalised industry and public bodies like the Forestry Commission or large charities such as the Woodland Trust. Moving forward beyond 2020, as we will see in the final chapter, one of the key drivers, the bold vision that created the possibility for the planting of a new Forest on a large scale will increasingly come to the fore: the environmental effects and benefits of planting trees in vast numbers to act as an exemplar for sustainable development and sustainable living, to educate and demonstrate how a circular local economy can work, and to try and show how the principles project, if adopted and applied elsewhere could alleviate and mitigate the disaster of the climate crisis.

³⁷⁰https://www.nationalforest.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/1693%20NFC%20Brand%20Vision%20Report%20AW_SCREEN%20%281%29.pdf (Accessed 28th June 2020).

4. Urban Forestry and Towns in the Forest.

The inclusion of some towns within the National Forest boundary was deliberate and formed part of the overall forest plan from the outset, and there is a striking contrast in this with the development of British national parks such as those in the Peak District and Snowdonia which deliberately excluded most towns and many industrial areas such as active quarries.³⁷¹ The linking of the remaining ancient forests of Charnwood and Needwood geographically included several large towns and sub-rural urban and ex-industrial villages. Settlements of this type were specifically included within the Forest boundary and a recognition of the major challenge they presented, alongside the opportunities for development of urban forestry themes to complement the rural forest at their fringes, was part of the strategy from at least 1993.³⁷² Interwoven into the strategy for the Forest was a plan for a 'mosaic of farms, open land, towns and villages', alongside new planting designed to link the ancient woodlands.³⁷³ These planned-for urban forests can be considered as part of a continuity of amenities provided for urban dwellers dating back into the Victorian period and this chapter discusses the green spaces provided in the urban centres of the National Forest. The chapter demonstrates that the urban forestry created since the inception of the National Forest is part of that continuity, based partly around ideas of environmental regeneration and partly for provision of health and economic improvements. Swadlincote and Coalville are considered in this discussion, although much of the focus centres on the largest town in the Forest, Burton-upon-Trent. The subject of green gentrification is part of the larger debate around the development of urban forestry, and within the National Forest the chapter argues that in developing the Trent Washlands Project as part of its urban forest strategy, the town will not only increase its Forest identity, an issue that has been problematic over the course of the National Forest's first two decades, but must also take considerations of economic deprivation and improvement into account, maintaining inclusivity for the most economically deprived families. The NFC's plans for the years 2020-2045 include a target to increase urban forestry cover by 20% to increase connectivity with the wider Forest, creating blocks of more resilient habitat. This will also reduce or mitigate the risk of flood or drought, help to future-proof local businesses and help communities adapt to change as the environment changes through the climate crisis.³⁷⁴

Although trees have been a feature of towns and cities for centuries and Angus Duncan Webster's *Town Planting*, the first book on the subject was published in 1910, it was not until the 1970s that urban forestry became a recognised discipline within the forestry profession. In 1972 the Society of American Foresters created an Urban Forestry Working Group, which developed a definition of urban forestry: 'Urban Forestry is a specialised branch of forestry that has as its objective the cultivation and management of trees for their present and potential contribution to the physiological, sociological and economic wellbeing of urban

³⁷¹ Edwards, K.C, *The Peak District*, second edition. Fontana, Glasgow. 1973. p. 24; Condry, W., *The Snowdonia National Park*. Fontana, Glasgow, 1973. p. 17.

³⁷² Countryside Commission. *The National Forest. The Strategy: The Forest Vision*. Countryside Commission Publications, Cheltenham 1994 p: 29.

³⁷³ Countryside Commission. *Consultation Paper. The National Forest Strategy: Draft for Consultation*. Countryside Commission Publications, Cheltenham 1993 p: 6.

³⁷⁴ The National Forest Company: *Our 25 Year Vision for the National Forest: a Greenprint for the Nation*. Moira 2019 p:22.

society'.³⁷⁵ In developing this description of a specialist branch of forestry, there is a tacit recognition of not only the physical importance of trees in our everyday lives but also of their importance to the structure and functioning of human society. Modern urban forestry in England was given impetus at around the same time with the establishment of the Countryside Commission in 1968, who went on to develop a strategy for twelve community forests to create a series of urban forests across England for similar reasons as the development of the National Forest: to increase tree cover to denuded landscapes, to improve the health of the natural environment and the health of the people interacting and living in the area, to stimulate economic development and to counteract climate change.

The United Kingdom has a long history of the greening of its cities; the creation of the Royal Parks in London dates to the 17th century, and public parks to the 19th century.³⁷⁶ By the end of the 19th century many parks had been created across the country in Britain's industrial cities and towns, often by philanthropists and industrialists keen to provide green spaces and leisure parks as a recreational facility, and given impetus by prominent landscape gardeners and gardeners of the day. Joseph Paxton, Shirley Hibberd, and Edward Kemp were amongst those designing, and equally importantly, writing books and treatises on the hugely popular market for urban and suburban gardens, parks and trees. Professor Paul Elliott, in his *British Urban Trees; a Social and Cultural History, c. 1800- 1914* notes that: 'The greening of city was one of its most important developments of the nineteenth century [and] trees are the organic statuary of modern urban society, providing continuity yet constantly changing through the day and over the season'.³⁷⁷ Public parks were generally considered to be the lungs of towns and cities during the nineteenth century and were created with the intention that the general public would take advantage of the fresh air and the walking opportunities they provided, alongside using them as 'a means of improving the health, morals and demeanour of the working classes'.³⁷⁸ Civic authorities across the country attempted to attract urban populations to public parks by laying them out as ornamental grounds planted up with a variety of trees, shrubs and flowering plants.³⁷⁹ Parliamentary acts from 1833 encouraged the provision of new urban parks and the planting of street trees, and the 1845 recommendation by the *Royal Commission of the State of Towns and Populous Districts* that local administrative bodies be given powers to establish public walks, followed by the 1848 Public Health Act giving the power to purchase and maintain parks and open spaces.³⁸⁰ There was interest too in the establishment of arboretums in urban settings, with towns competing to outdo one another in the planting, layout and variety of trees in their collections. This interest has not abated as cities have grown in size since the first city parks and arboretums were laid out, and the vital need for urban green space and the human connection to that space has been

³⁷⁵ Miller, R.W. Hauer, R.J. Werner, L.P. *Urban Forestry: Planning and Managing Urban Greenspaces*, Third Edition. Waveland Press, Illinois 2015 p:8.

³⁷⁶ Rabbits, P. *London's Royal Parks*. Bloomsbury, London. Unpaginated. See chapter 1. See also Nicholson-Lord, D. *The Greening of the Cities*. Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

³⁷⁷ Elliott, P.A. *British Urban Trees; a Social and Cultural History, c. 1800- 1914*. White Horse Press, Cambridge 2016. Introduction. Jones N. *Approaches to Urban Forestry in the United Kingdom*. In: Carreiro M.M., Song YC., Wu J. (eds) *Ecology, Planning, and Management of Urban Forests*. Springer, New York, 2008.

³⁷⁸ Elliot, P.A., Watkins, C. & Daniels, S. *The British Arboretum: Trees, Science and Culture in the Nineteenth Century*. Routledge, Abingdon 2016 p: 209

³⁷⁹ Elliott, *British Urban Trees* p: 69.

³⁸⁰ Elliott, *British Urban Trees* p: 69.

highlighted during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁸¹ Trees characterise a connection to nature that the built environment masks in a shroud of concrete and tarmac, 'Urban trees represent and embody the interface between humans and nature, they reach through time to past and future generations and have come to define urbanity whilst simultaneously evoking nature and the countryside'.³⁸² City parks and individual street trees help us connect with nature, allowing us to access a sense of wellbeing in the unnatural environment of an urban space.

The twelve urban forests planned in the government's white paper of 1990 effectively ruled out the inclusion of a city within the National Forest, although a small number of towns were deliberately included when the boundary was drawn up. This was partially dictated by geography, linking two geographically separate and distinct areas necessitates the inclusion of the space between them, which in this case meant the deliberate inclusion of much derelict land reduced to a wasteland of sorts following the closure of the mining and extractive clay industries, and the regeneration of the derelict land had very much formed the basis of the policy promoted by the three county councils in the first place. It also meant that the inclusion of some urban and semi-urban areas was unavoidable and anyway was desirable in creating a multi-purpose forest.³⁸³ This is to put the cart before the horse though; the focus of the original plan was specifically the regeneration of those areas blighted by the scarring of industry and the decline of local employment opportunities, the linking of the two ancient forests framed the proposal and gave it impetus. It would have been possible to exclude the town of Burton on Trent whilst planning the greening of the former industrial towns of Swadlincote and Coalville, if for example, the boundary had followed the river Trent around the southern boundary of the town, whilst still including the ancient Forest of Needwood. However, this would have also excluded the only passenger railway station in the Forest area and risked the possibility of alienating future support from Staffordshire as it would have significantly reduced the Staffordshire interest in the National Forest. As the successful bid had in no small part been attributed to its three-county tripartite co-operative approach, excluding Burton on Trent might have distanced Staffordshire County and East Staffs Borough Councils from participating fully in future. As Needwood lies within Staffordshire, it was strategically vital to keep the town within the forest boundary.³⁸⁴

The original economic and social objectives underpinned the significance of engagement between urban and rural populations, and achieving these goals presented planning problems for the NFC and all partners involved. The strategic importance of including Burton at the Forest's inception was not without recognised major challenges for the future. Some Burton wards contained (and still contain) some of the most income, educational, employment, housing and environmentally deprived areas in the country, and certainly the most deprived in the Forest area. Parts of Coalville in North West Leicestershire and some of

³⁸¹ Geng, D., Innes, J., Wu, W. Wang, G. Impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on urban park visitation: a global analysis. *Journal of Forestry Research*. 32, pp: 553–567 (2021).

³⁸² Elliott, P.A. *British Urban Trees* pp: 5-14.

³⁸³ Countryside Commission. *The National Forest. The Strategy: The Forest Vision*. Countryside Commission Publications, Cheltenham 1994 p: 29.

³⁸⁴ *A new National Forest in the Midlands. The Needwood Forest, North West Leicestershire Charnwood Forest Submission to the Countryside Commission*. Derbyshire County Council, Leicestershire County Council, Staffordshire County Council. 1990 p:12.

the greater urban areas of Swadlincote and district in South Derbyshire also have some very deprived areas, and whilst they represent a much a smaller number and scale than those in parts of Burton, still the economic and environmental objectives of the Forest strategy encompassed planned improvements for those. The regeneration of these areas was a focus for the original tripartite approach as well as the environmental improvements for the post-industrial denuded landscapes of the mineral workings, and the difficulties they presented were also opportunities for development.³⁸⁵

The potential rewards for the more difficult task of creating a multi-purpose forest in the Charnwood/ Needwood area included the possibility of reducing levels of deprivation within the Forest towns and by bringing new types of employment to the area through economic regeneration and urban greening. This approach would neatly sidestep the potential for deprivation levels to worsen with the closure of the local collieries and associated heavy industries across the wider forest area. Greening deprived urban spaces is an effective tool in the fight against deprivation.³⁸⁶ Later studies conclude that health benefits associated with greening urban spaces also have a significant economic benefit and that that ‘the interventions most likely to have an effect on inequalities within populations are those that operate upstream, at a societal or population level, rather than at an individual level. This includes changing the environment in which people live’.³⁸⁷ Individuals can make a difference to their own lives, but societal changes require local authority and Government supported initiatives that can be funded and sustained over the long term. The National Forest and the twelve Urban Forests are significant cases in point. As we will see in chapter seven, support for projects like the National Forest offer substantial and demonstrable benefits at a national scale with little cost to the public purse. Long-term commitment by national government provides excellent value-for-money solutions to a variety of problems, environmentally as well as in the battle against unemployment and deprivation.

An observational population study in 2008 compared income deprivation and green space exposure across England and found ‘health inequalities related to income deprivation in all-cause mortality [...] were lower in populations living in the greenest areas’. It concluded that: ‘populations exposed to greener environments also enjoy lower levels of income-related health inequality. Conversely, populations exposed to less green environments could be less protected from health inequality related to income deprivation, which might have ramifications for countries in which urbanisation remains a strong force’.³⁸⁸

That living in environments where trees and green space are readily available demonstrates significant health benefits is of importance at national levels; and improving access to these

³⁸⁵ www.nationalforest.org/document/sd/12_Deprivation.pdf accessed 13th August 2018. East Staffordshire Borough Council *Indices of Deprivation 2010*, taken from *Department of Communities & Local Government, Indices of Deprivation 2010*.

³⁸⁶ Public Health England document. *Improving Access to Greenspace; a new review for 2020*. Available here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904439/improving_access_to_greenspace_2020_review.pdf Accessed 25th February 2020. See also: Friends of the Earth. *England’s Green Space Gap: how to end green space deprivation in England*. September 2020.

³⁸⁷ Macintyre S. *Occasional paper number 17: inequalities in health in Scotland: what are they and what can we do about them?* Glasgow: MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, 2007.

³⁸⁸ Mitchell, R, Popham, F. *Effect of exposure to natural environment on health inequalities: an observational population study*. *The Lancet* Vol372 November 8, 2008 p: 1659.

spaces has financial benefits that should act as incentives for creating those improvements. The 'Forest effect' on reducing deprivation on the urban population and areas where urban influences are strongly evident was noted in the *Initial Assessment of the Costs and Benefits of the National Forest* in July 2010 in a DEFRA report commissioned to assess the public costs and attempt to balance those against any benefits that the National Forest may have created. It was produced in response to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee report into the National Forest, which recommended that DEFRA undertake an assessment of the public value of the Forest, and although the report does not dwell on any beneficial effect on deprivation the Forest had created at that point, it does make some pertinent comments; 'The proportion of the National Forest area's population living in communities classified amongst the most deprived in England has declined significantly since 2000'. Clearly then, by 2010 the new plantation was already having an effect. It was the case though that significant pockets of deprivation remained in parts of the former coalfield and in Burton upon Trent but overall, there was a significant decline (26% - 16%) in the proportion of the National Forest's population living in areas ranked amongst the 25% most deprived areas in England between 2000 and 2004 (reported by Stafford University in 2004).³⁸⁹

Statistically, deprived areas can be difficult to uncover. For example, North West Leicestershire is the second most deprived local authority in Leicestershire. Yet statistically, in each of Leicestershire's seven local authority areas, North West Leicestershire does not appear as one of either the least or most deprived local authorities. Once broken down into smaller lower super output areas however, there are pockets of high-level deprivation within the district. An area of the Greenhill Ward to the east of Coalville is revealed as being in the top 10% of England's most deprived areas at lower super output area (LSOA).³⁹⁰ Even one of Moira's wards, at the heart of the National Forest, falls within the top 30% of LSOAs and demonstrates the variability which can mask the extreme deprivation at larger statistical levels, some of the wards around Ashby de la Zouch fall within the least deprived percentiles nationally.³⁹¹ The area immediately surrounding Swadlincote in South Derbyshire and Coalville in North West Leicestershire included land that was some of the most despoiled across the forest area, due to two centuries of coal and clay extraction of both deep mining and opencast types which in some cases ran into the towns themselves, alongside pipe and brick yards across the whole of the central belt of the forest, the zone identified in the landscape character assessment as the Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfield.

³⁸⁹ Dickie, I. & Thomson, C. Eftec. Final report for DEFRA and the National Forest Company. *Initial Assessment of the Costs and Benefits of the National Forest*. London 2010 p:17.

³⁹⁰ LSOA calculation is a method of identifying localised deprivation (amongst other things) that can be masked by statistical processes over larger areas. See here for further information:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019> (Accessed 19th April 2021).

³⁹¹ North West Leicestershire District Council Local Plan Substantive Review: Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating Equality Impact Assessment and Health Impact Assessment) Revised Scoping Report January 2020 p:31.

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Figure 40. Map centred on Swadlincote showing how the surrounding villages of Newhall, Midway, Woodville, Albert Village, Church and Castle Gresley are all connected by continuous housing development. The area continues to be the subject of development with infill house building currently underway which will link across county boundaries and join Blackfordby in Leicestershire to Woodville in Derbyshire.

The description of this zone in the Landscape Character Assessment created by the Development Team in 1992 states that ‘urban influences are strongly evident [...] settlement is typified by straggling towns and villages, with rows of traditional brick-built miner’s cottages and new housing estates’.³⁹² In some cases, these straggling towns and villages around Swadlincote have been linked by housing estates into a continuous urban mass centred on the town, separated only by a sign notifying the observer of a change of parish boundary. Swadlincote had long been a mining centre, coal had been mined in the vicinity since at least the late 13th century and the 19th century development of sanitary pipeware and potteries, along with multiple brickyards, only added to the already industrialised nature of the town and surrounding area. Swadlincote had expanded from a village at the beginning of the nineteenth century to become a busy industrial town by the beginning of the following century. Census records reveal that from the mid-nineteenth century people were coming to Swadlincote and the surrounding area from across the country as employment opportunities developed. First the canal and turnpike road network, followed from the 1850s by the railways, meant that infrastructure was in place to exploit the natural resources of the area, the rail network ending the relative isolation of the South Derbyshire coalfield.³⁹³

³⁹² The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Strategy 2004-2014*. Moira 2004 p:108.

³⁹³ Owen, C. *The Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfield 1200-1900*. Moorland Publishing, Ashbourne 1984 p: 209.

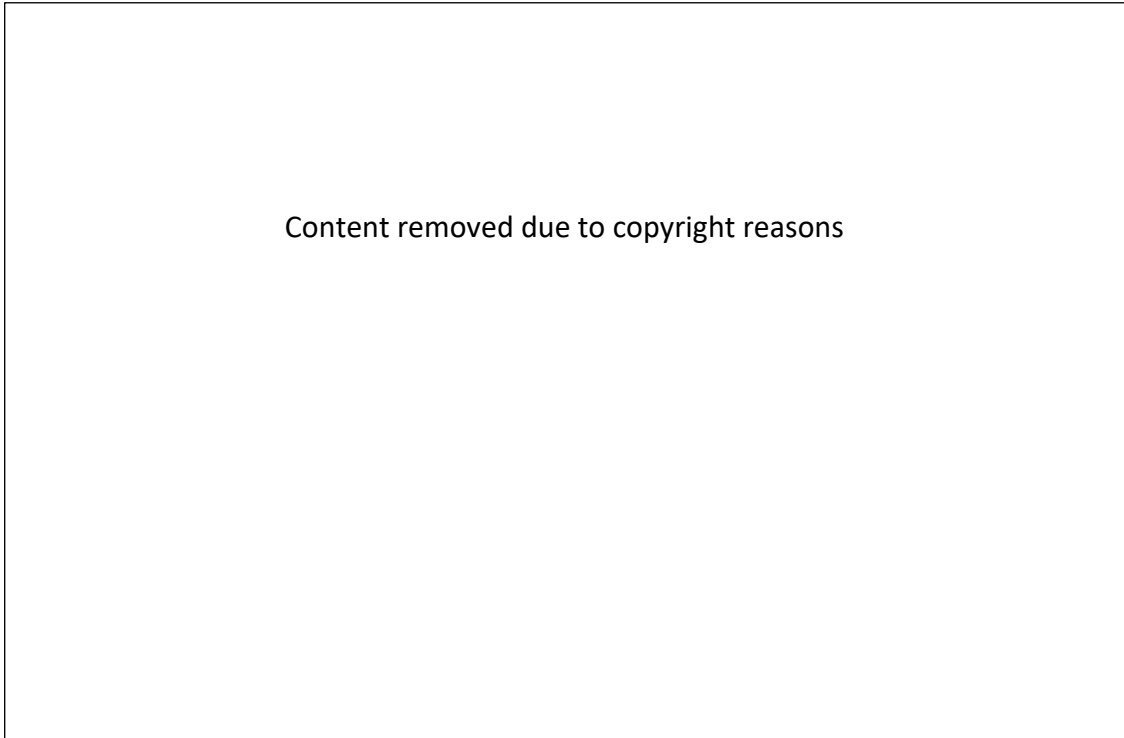


Figure 41. Swadlincote in 1821, a village on the northern edge of Gresley Common, which in turn runs into the Ashby Wolds. Note the 'coal pits' adjacent to Swadlincote. Hand drawn map by Henry Stevens in The British Library catalogue³⁹⁴

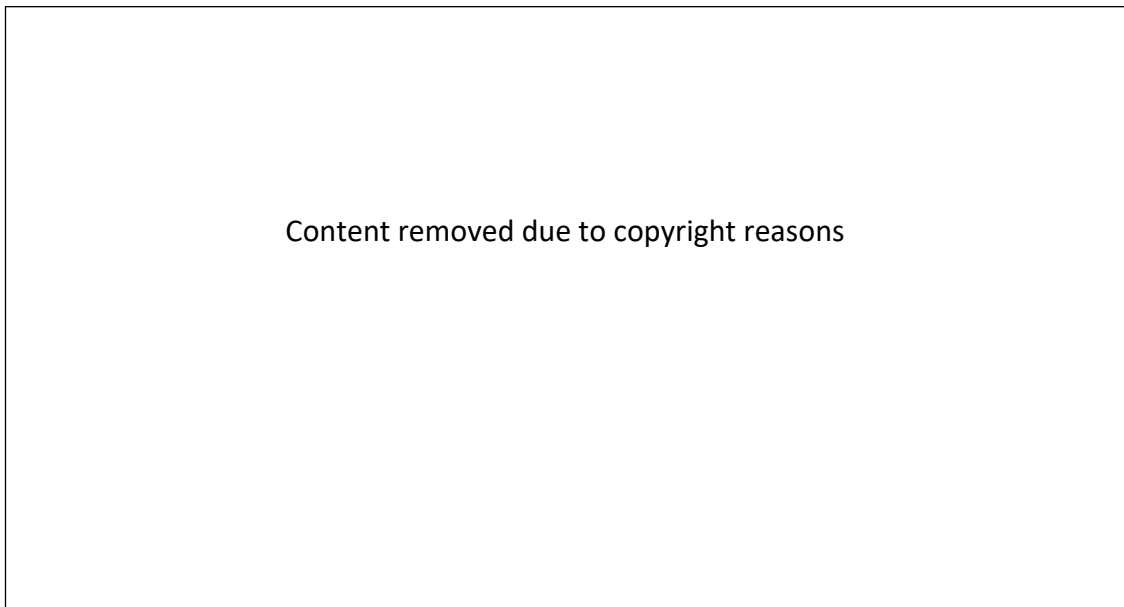


Figure 42. Swadlincote in 1902. The village has by now grown to a town and has become rapidly and heavily industrialised. OS 6' to the mile 1902.³⁹⁵

³⁹⁴ <https://www.oldmapsonline.org/map/britishlibrary/002OSD000000004U00257000> (Accessed 2nd July 2020).

³⁹⁵ <https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/?fbclid=IwAR13qK5XbkCPwszGD3vd-UBIZzTew8-g5xntk2g-gw0NzPIX2pBWFgdbbQA#zoom=17.1&lat=52.77296&lon=-1.55322&layers=6&b=1> (Accessed 2nd July 2020).

By the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth centuries, Swadlincote had become an industrial boomtown, exploiting the coal and mineral reserves which were, quite literally, beneath its feet. It had no real civic centre though and had not developed any formal parks or open green space, everything being given over to coal and clay production. The sanitary pipe ware from Swadlincote and district was exported around the world, supplying sewage pipes to Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro, Montevideo and Cairo, amongst many others including a healthy home market.³⁹⁶ Living conditions in Swadlincote were much improved by the Clean Air Act of 1956, which heralded the end of salt glazing, the method by which the sanitary pipeware industry had glazed the pipes it produced in large numbers, as salt glazing is a hazardous atmospheric pollutant and is injurious to human health.³⁹⁷

Although historically Swadlincote had had little tree cover, and industrialisation denuded the landscape even more, there was an awareness that other local towns had created civic amenities. The first of the Swadlincote area's formal parks to be developed and partially planted with trees was created from a play area on a former colliery slag heap from the 'Owd Shoddy' mine to a simple recreation ground and garden, was formally opened in 'the 1920s' under the initial name of Swadlincote Recreation Ground but renamed Eureka Park in 1937, named after nearby Eureka Lodge, itself named for the Eureka coal seam that lies beneath the town. Initial plans were created in 1923 to lay out a recreation ground on the 'old pit bank' and the mine shafts were capped and lie within the park boundary.³⁹⁸

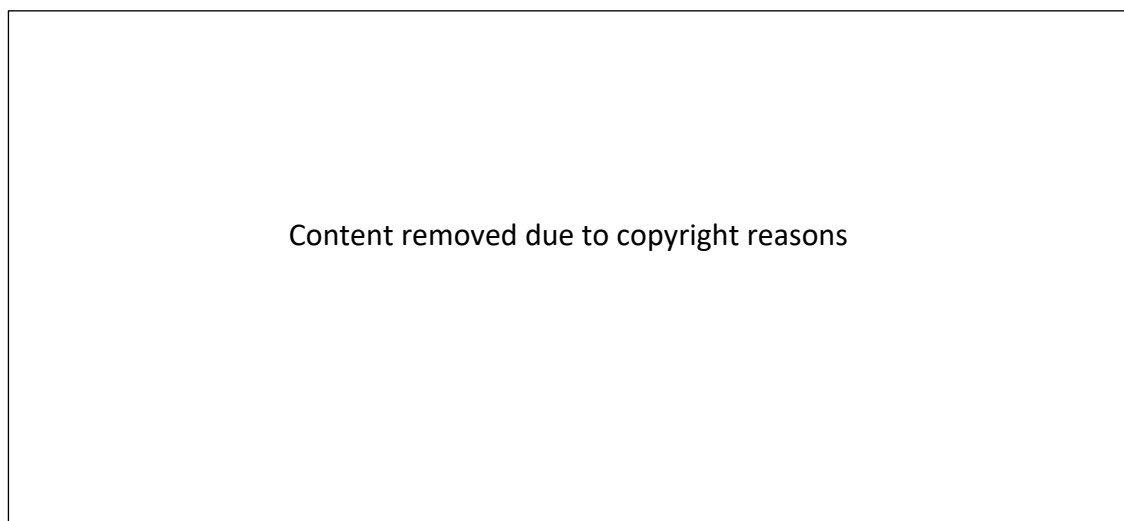


Figure 43. Proposals for the War Memorial Gardens 1923. From the *Historical Review of Eureka Park* booklet, a copy of which is held in the Magic Attic, Swadlincote, see p: 5 and note 395.

³⁹⁶ <https://www.sharpepottery.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Guide-Book-Oct-FINAL.pdf> (accessed 28th June 2020). See page 27.

³⁹⁷ Sharpe's Pottery Guidebook. Undated & unpaginated. See also: <https://www.sharpepottery.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Guide-Book-Oct-FINAL.pdf> (Accessed 28th June 2020). See page 27.

³⁹⁸ <https://www.southderbyshire.gov.uk/our-services/things-to-do-and-places-to-visit/parks-and-open-spaces/parklife-and-our-parks/eureka-park> (accessed 3rd July 2020). Friends of Eureka Park. *Historical Review of Eureka Park*. Undated, self-published. p: 13. Information from the booklet was provided as a series of photographs by Jane Wilder of the Magic Attic, it being impossible to visit the site due to Coronavirus restrictions. Friends of Eureka Park. *Historical Review of Eureka Park*. Undated, self-published. p: 5

It was laid out with trees, ornamental flower beds, benches and paths for perambulation between 1926 and 1933 and was used locally for the 'Monkey Parade' on a Sunday evening, where groups of young adults of the opposite sex met and walked under the watchful and observant eyes of their peers.³⁹⁹ A set of memorial gates was erected in 1926 to the men of Swadlincote who had lost their lives in the Great War but not formally dedicated until 1933. The park was further developed in the 1930s with a children's paddling pool, and public conveniences were constructed following complaints that children were using a hedgerow bordering neighbouring gardens for 'objectionable use'.⁴⁰⁰ Eureka Park went on to have tennis courts, a floral clock and a bowling green, amongst other attractions. The park is still very popular today and was restored in 2014 with the aid of a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The other large formal park in the greater urban area lies not in the town but on the border with nearby Church Gresley, on the edge of Gresley Common, itself an area exploited by the mineral extractive industries and by 'fedding', shallow opencast coal mines dug by striking and out of work miners during the 1926 general strike and practiced by local family groups for time out of mind. ('Fedding' is a corruption of the word 'federation', and 'federations' of families or groups joined together to mine the outcropping coal).

Content removed due to copyright reasons

Figure 44. Surface mining on Gresley Common 1921. Photo attribution K. Mason⁴⁰¹

The Maurice Lee Memorial Park was created in 1930 and was laid out in a formal style with avenues of trees and footpaths. It was presented to the District in memory of Maurice Lea who was killed in France during the First World War.⁴⁰² Following a century of exploitation of

³⁹⁹ Pers Com. Conversation with Connie Hodgkinson whom I interviewed and recorded as part of the 'Village Voices' project with Leicestershire County Council and the British Library as part of their study into local accent and dialect. 'Monkey Parades' were a phenomenon of the early 20th century and that particular name for promenading and the opportunity to converse with members of the opposite sex seems to be local to South Derbyshire and North- West Leicestershire.

⁴⁰⁰ Friends of Eureka Park. *Historical Review of Eureka Park*. Undated, self-published. p: 6.

⁴⁰¹ Owen, C. *The Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfield 1200- 1900*. Moorland Publishing, Ashbourne. 1984 p:273.

⁴⁰² <https://www.southderbyshire.gov.uk/our-services/things-to-do-and-places-to-visit/parks-and-open-spaces/parklife-and-our-parks/maurice-lea-memorial-park> (accessed 3rd July 2020).

these resources, by the mid twentieth century, although pockets of agricultural land framed the town, vast swathes of land around it resembled a moonscape of colliery slag heaps and clay stocking hills, with corresponding deep coal and clay mines. With the closure of the coal mines and transfer of the majority of the clay industry work to countries with lower labour costs throughout the late 1980s, empty, semi-derelict factories became neglected wastelands across parts of South Derbyshire and North-West Leicestershire. These neglected wastelands, along with the formal parks within the town boundaries formed part of the nucleus of the ambitious urban afforestation plans created under the Development Team and NFC, and outlined in more detail below.

Coalville too had developed during the 19th century, but in this case, there was no former town and Coalville sprang up around the newly sunk coal mines to the south and west of the village of Whitwick. Whitwick and nearby Coleorton had long historic ties to coal mining but the tiny hamlet then known as *Long Lane* became the new industrial centre for coal mining activities and as it swiftly developed it was prosaically renamed 'Coalville'.

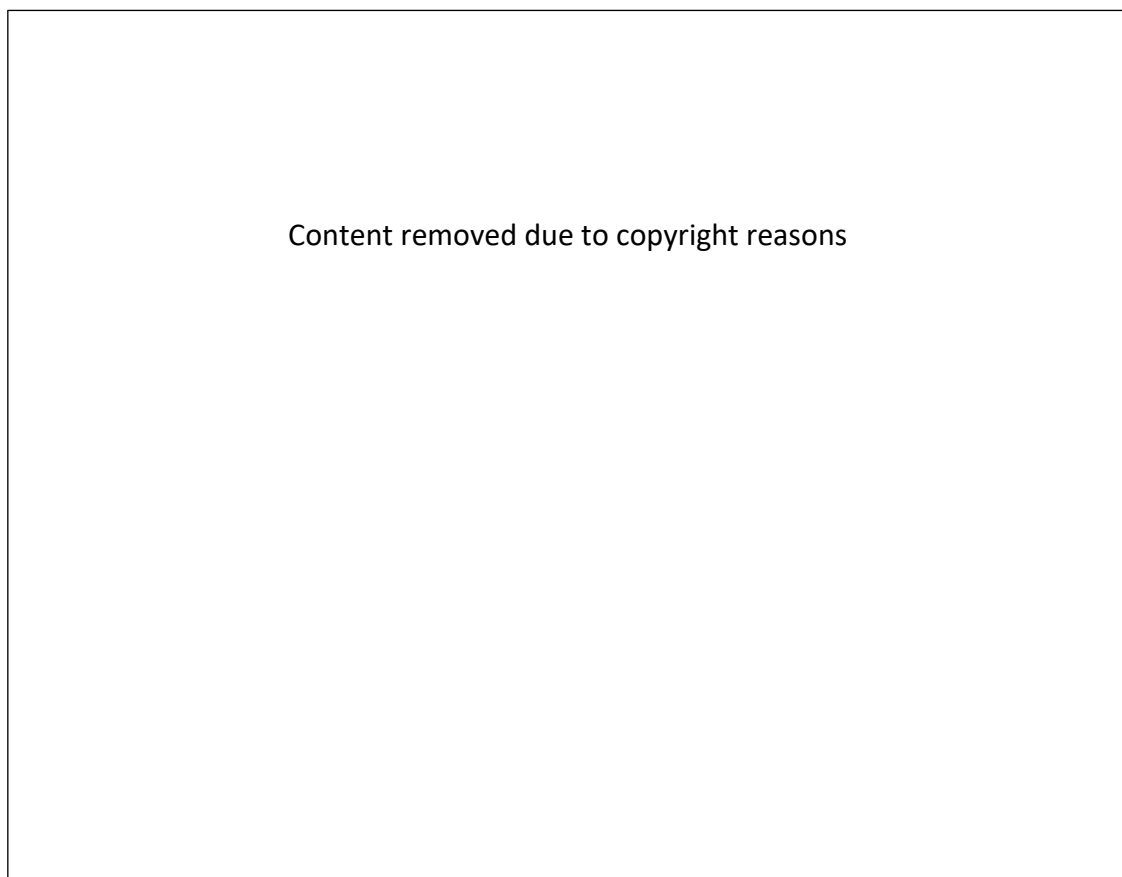


Figure 45. Coalville in 1904. Note the inclusion of a formal park alongside a recreation ground, opposite a cemetery, all inside a carefully laid out town with terraced worker's houses and within an industrial environment. OS 6' to the mile 1904.⁴⁰³

The formal opening of the 3.5-hectare Coalville Park took place in March 1899 and it retains much of its original layout of footpaths and shrubberies around the perimeter and with grass

⁴⁰³ <https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/?fbclid=IwAR13qK5XbkCPwszGD3vd-UBIZzTew8-g5xntk2g-gw0NzPIX2pBWFgdbbQA#zoom=16&lat=52.72433&lon=-1.37257&layers=6&b=1> (Accessed 2nd July 2020).

areas and flowerbeds in the centre, with play areas added at a later date. A peace garden was dedicated as an area for reflection in 2014 on the centenary of WWI and formally opened in 2015.⁴⁰⁴ It is owned and managed by North West Leicestershire District Council, who work in partnership with Fields in Trust, a charitable trust established in 1925 to protect parks and green spaces across the country.⁴⁰⁵ With the assistance of the NFC in 1997 the District Council transformed a former tip site within the town boundary into an area of urban forest. Comprising a total of 7.7 hectares, some 3.5 hectares was planted with trees and the rest as a mixed grassland and wetland. It is owned and managed by North West Leicestershire District Council.⁴⁰⁶ The NFC considered the planting of the Coalville Urban Forest to have made a significant difference to the lives of the community within Coalville and made a short film 'The National Forest- Lives Transformed' which included local testimony to this in 2013.⁴⁰⁷

The 2004 planting plan as laid out in the National Forest Company strategy identified the various landscape types across the Forest area in closer detail than the initial landscape character assessments and provided a guideline for planting to accommodate the different areas. Although no specific guideline was laid out for the planting of the towns themselves, the guideline does provide a strategy for linking landscape types to the wider forest. These are categorised in the plan into six 'Landscape Character and Indicative Planting Areas'. In summary, these are: Wooded Parklands; Enclosed Farmlands; Coalfield Village Farmlands; Urban/Urban Fringe; Historic Settlement and Enclosures; and Floodplain Farmlands; with a seventh type; planting themes that cross-cut Landscape Types, to ensure that the variety of other landscapes that might otherwise not be covered are considered when planting the forest.⁴⁰⁸ By using the template of planting types, these landscape character and indicative planting areas provide information on how the mosaic of the Forest links the different terrains together but attempts to maintain the integrity of each. It would be relatively easy to lose the character of parkland, for example by overplanting it. Similarly, other character zones might easily become 'blandscapes' if trees were simply planted in every available space. The planting plan defined in the NFC Strategy documents evolved from the initial strategy draft as set out in the first National Forest Strategy published by the Countryside Commission in 1993, which stated that 'sizeable settlements have been included within the boundary as they are seen to be integral to the plan. In time they should develop as Forest towns, with themes of urban forestry complementing the rural forest around their fringes'.⁴⁰⁹ The strategy promoted urban forestry as having a vital role within all towns and villages in the Forest area as natural linkages between and through the Forest. The UK Government website provides a definition of what an urban forest is and its general composition.

The urban forest is made up of all trees in towns and cities including those:

- along linear transport routes and waterways - e.g. canals and rivers
- in amenity areas

⁴⁰⁴ <http://www.fieldsintrust.org/FieldSite/Coalville-Park> (accessed 30th June 2020).

⁴⁰⁵ <http://www.fieldsintrust.org/about> (accessed 30th June 2020).

⁴⁰⁶ Beaverstock, J.V. *Economic Regeneration in the Midland Coalfield Area of the National Forest*. The East Midlands Geographer 1998 Vol 21, part 1 p:95. See also https://www.nwleics.gov.uk/pages/nature_sites & also Bramwell, B. *Sustainable Tourism Management: Principle and Practice*. Tilburg University Press 1996 p:233.

⁴⁰⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dUm4Y9UGJY> (Accessed 3rd July 2020).

⁴⁰⁸ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Strategy 2004-2014*. Moira 2004 p:111.

⁴⁰⁹ The Countryside Commission. *The National Forest Strategy Draft for Consultation*. Cheltenham 1993 p:6.

- in urban woodlands
- in parks and informal open spaces
- along streets
- in domestic gardens
- on institutional land⁴¹⁰

The Government definition of urban forestry includes only trees within it but the majority of other sources also consider other woody vegetation, non-woody structures and general greenspace elements, and diversity in natural resources is emphasised in more recent definitions of the urban forest to include all trees, shrubs, lawns and pervious soils found in urban areas.⁴¹¹ The National Urban Forestry Unit, in their 1996 study for Burton on Trent, focussed broadly on the trees but defined Burton's existing resource as comprising all the trees, woodland and associated greenspace already within the urban area and fringe countryside.⁴¹² The study recognised the existence of trees in towns as a means of forging strong links between the built environment and the rural forest and of introducing many people from urban areas to more extensive forestry in the countryside.⁴¹³ Whether the study included semi-wild spaces is not specified. These are areas that has been long overlooked in urban centres and are those semi-wild spaces that provide green corridors linking urban and rural. They have been gradually brought to the fore more recently by writers and naturalists. Hitherto, they have gone largely unnoticed, seemingly hidden in plain sight, often overlooked as a wildlife benefit, roads, rail links, canals and abandoned urban spaces have been termed 'Edgelands'.

Edgelands: the last wilderness?

Edgelands exist everywhere, in every town and city, in every industrial estate, at the fringe of every out-of-town retail park. Yet until relatively recently they were invisible, unseen and unremarked upon; when noticed at all they were (and are) considered at best as ugly wastelands, unloved and uncared for. Marion Shoard recognised these liminal spaces for what they were and called them by the name *edgelands*.⁴¹⁴ Remarkably unnoticed until deliberately sought out and observed, these apparent wastelands can be unusual bastions for wildlife. Edgelands are often liminal spaces and may be characterised by contingency and uncertainty. Seen through this lens, the forest, the place of liminality, the edge of structure and order, is an edgeland equivalent to be visited to experience an unordered, chaotic element of creativity and freedom in a modern world drowning in rationality and the banality of the everyday.⁴¹⁵ Edgelands are often contested spaces, subversive and derelict, loved by children seeking places to build dens away from the prying eyes of adults, fly-tippers and drug

⁴¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/urban-forestry> (Accessed 9th June 2020).

⁴¹¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/700468/IntroducingUrbanForest_FINAL_Sept16.pdf (Accessed 9th June 2020).

⁴¹² Report by National Urban Forestry Unit. *Burton upon Trent's Urban Forest*. No publisher details. January 1996. Introduction. Copy held in SDDC archive. (Accessed June 7th 2020).

⁴¹³ Report by National Urban Forestry Unit. *Burton upon Trent's Urban Forest*. Introduction.

⁴¹⁴ Shoard, M. in Jenkins, J. (Ed.) *Remaking the Landscape: the changing face of Britain*. Profile Books London 2002 pp: 117-146.

⁴¹⁵ Thomasen, B. in Andrews, H. & Roberts, L. *Liminal Landscapes: Travel, Experience and Spaces In-Between*. Routledge, Abingdon 2012 p: 32.

pushers seeking places away from the prying eyes of the law, and seen as such by film makers representing a borderland or *Wild West* in the modern city.⁴¹⁶

In their book *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness*, Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts discuss this passed-through, unacknowledged space, calling it to our attention, offering a critique of nature fetishism by modern nature writers in a whimsical, mischievous and thought provoking way, glancing sideways at landscape, or looking again at what is there.⁴¹⁷ An examination of the creation and plantation of new forestry considered through the lens of post-modernism and late-capitalist consumerism; the 'end of nature' (i.e. nature deprived of its independence from humans) gives pause to the notion of a wild forest and instead presents a mock wilderness: created and curated, and anything but wild. These tree-places are managed and manicured to give the appearance of forest but are in reality a tame woodland, privately owned and enclosed with fences and *Keep Out* signs for the most part, with public footpath arrows directing the would-be explorer along predefined access routes. There is often no right to roam beyond the permissive access granted as part of the forest tender schemes. Edgelands thus become arguably the only 'true' wilderness. Edgelands are liminal space, physical liminality here defined as a place between two (or more) distinct environments, yet which cannot be identified with either of them.⁴¹⁸

This 'wilderness' includes (amongst other land areas), road and highway verges, motorway embankments, canal towpaths, and the edges, verges and embankments of railway lines. In England, management of this edgeland extends to government agencies and Natural England, Highways England, the Canal and River Trust and Network Rail are all involved. The *soft estate* as it is known, has become recognised as an important wildlife resource and has the ability to 'deliver ecological benefits and ecosystem services, as well as making the network more resilient to climate change'.⁴¹⁹ The Natural England report of 2014 into the soft estate also recognised that 'soft estate has considerable potential to mitigate the adverse impacts of the road or rail network and actually deliver biodiversity gains, improvement in ecological connectivity, and ecosystem services. In addition, the soft estate can be managed to help the transport network become more resilient in the face of climate change'. Soft estate contributes to mitigating the environmental problems created by modern transport systems and offsets the fragmentation of habitat continuity from new and current transport networks. It also contributes towards improvement of local air quality, reduction in local heat effects, it provides a wind and noise shield, and it helps with carbon sequestration.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁶ Shoard, M. in Jenkins, J. (Ed.) *Remaking the Landscape* pp: 130.

⁴¹⁷ Farley, P. & Symmons Roberts, M. *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness*. Vintage Books London 2012

⁴¹⁸ Turner, V. quoted by Pungas, P. & Vösu, E. in Andrews, H & Roberts, L. (eds). *Liminal Landscapes: Travel, Experience and Spaces Inbetween*. Routledge, Abingdon 2012 p: 87

⁴¹⁹ Davies, H., Image, M., Calrow, L., Foulkes, C., Fransden M. & Duignan M. 2014. *Review of literature - how transport's soft estate has enhanced green infrastructure, ecosystem services, and transport resilience in the EU*. Natural England Commissioned Reports, Number 169.

⁴²⁰ Davies, H. et al. *Review of literature - how transport's soft estate has enhanced green infrastructure, ecosystem services, and transport resilience in the EU*.

In the UK, the road network managed by the Highways Agency totals some 246,000 miles.⁴²¹ The verge and other soft estate flanking the highways and byways amounts to an estimated 30,000 hectares. In effect, this road network, the site of some of our most carbon-intensive activity, is flanked by Britain's largest unofficial nature reserve. These *edgeland* verges are powerful signifiers of environmental degradation, urban development and our increasing separation and alienation from the land itself and at the same time, of optimistic progress. Roads open up access to landscapes they despoil. The verges, as environmental habitats, offer a genuine refuge for wildlife and a modern form of wilderness in the midst of intense urbanisation and agro-chemical farming.⁴²² In opening up access for humans to more readily interact with wilder spaces, roads also, conversely, fragment that same space. Habitat fragmentation is a serious threat to the natural world, with roads and motorways posing the most effective agents of fragmentation.⁴²³ Once fragmented, wildlife is confined to ever decreasing pockets of space within which to live and breed, creating obvious deleterious effects to populations. Trapping species within increasingly isolated and fragmented habitats increases the risk of localised extinction and restricted movement within confined spaces further impacts genetic diversity. Some species can use the beneficial effects of hedgerows and grasslands provided by the soft estate as 'green corridors' to link the fragmented habitats, and others cannot. Bank voles and brown-streak butterflies, for example, thrive on the edges of woodland, and the soft estate and other edgelands mimics these habitats so that in certain instances these species thrive. Other species which require relatively large areas for sustainable populations suffer badly through habitat fragmentation and their numbers plummet.⁴²⁴

Fragmentation of the natural world and urbanisation of it is sometimes hidden from view. Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) are stormwater management installations based on natural hydrological processes which often utilise vegetated land surfaces, and their use in the soft estate holds apparent benefits in long term management of flooding.⁴²⁵ It is possible though that SuDS can also contribute to the fragmentation of natural spaces. Although they mimic natural processes, they act as continued urbanisation of wilderness or natural places. SuDS are an alternative to, or are sometimes used alongside concrete flood barriers as a complimentary system. Concrete flood barriers are used to direct and constrain flood water but also have the effect of constraining the movement of wildlife in a similar way to the relatively recent introduction of concrete barricades along the central reservation of Britain's motorways, known as *median barriers*. Animals become trapped in the traffic flow or in the case of SuDS in the floodwater flow, and because of manmade division of natural landscapes are prevented from crossing from one green space to another, thus increasing the fragmentation of our countryside and the fauna populations within it. A study in North America in 2013 concluded that 'Such traffic safety devices can reduce head-on collisions but also have the potential to reduce landscape permeability by impeding wildlife movements

⁴²¹ Warwick, H. *Linescapes: Remapping and Reconnecting Britain's Fragmented Wildlife*. Vintage/ Penguin Random House, London 2017 p:177.

⁴²² Chell, E. *Soft Estate Exhibition*: proposal abstract. See: <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=AH%2FJ005797%2F1> (Accessed 17th March 2020).

⁴²³ Warwick, H. *Linescapes* p: 181.

⁴²⁴ Warwick, H. *Linescapes: Remapping and Reconnecting Britain's Fragmented Wildlife*. Vintage/ Penguin Random House, London 2017 pp:4- 7.

⁴²⁵ L. Hoang & R.A. Fenner (2015): *System interactions of stormwater management using sustainable urban drainage systems and green infrastructure*, Urban Water Journal, DOI: 10.1080/1573062X.2015.1036083 .

across highways. Median barriers may also increase the risk of wildlife-vehicle collisions if an animal becomes trapped or confused amid barriers searching for a place to cross'.⁴²⁶

Fragmentation of the natural world has been a problem building up over a quite long period of time. The Ashby Canal opened in 1804, linking what has now become the heart of the National Forest with the Coventry Canal (and the wider canal network). The northernmost eight miles were closed in 1966 due to very significant mining subsidence,⁴²⁷ an irony in itself as the canal was opened to transport the coal that quite literally undermined it in later years. Latterly two sections of the canal have been restored; the northernmost section at Spring Cottage, where the original terminus was created to serve the colliery sunk there, which later still attracted several sanitary pipe works and brick yards which capitalised on the availability of clay suitable for sewage pipes and other sanitary ware which, at its productive height, was shipped all over the world. This section of the restored canal is only a few hundred metres long and is disconnected from the much longer restoration at Moira, a mile or so in length, from the basin at the Conkers Waterside visitor centre, past the historic Moira Furnace to the village of Donisthorpe. Reconnecting this section with the current terminus at the village of Snarestone, outside the current National Forest boundary, would bring obvious additional tourism to the Forest and has long been planned for. Provided that animal crossing points are considered, it would also be an asset as a wildlife corridor, providing access into the heart of the forest for aquatic flora and fauna. There is currently no plan to reconnect the very northernmost section of the canal at Spring Cottage.

Canals passing through towns and cities seem to attract their own problems; they become dumping grounds for rubbish of every imaginable kind, and the image of shopping trolleys discarded in canals has become ubiquitous. They are also considered affective edgelands by Farley and Symmons Roberts. In more rural areas canals have taken on a much more naturalistic appearance and have been adopted as 'natural features', barely distinguishable from rivers.⁴²⁸ The gentrification of urban canals as seen in Birmingham city centre, where the once disreputable area is now redeveloped as a tourism and nightlife hub, with throngs of revellers has reduced the *edgeland* potential of such areas but has increased the value to wildlife as the canals are cleaned up. Between 2014 and 2018 approximately 140 tonnes of rubbish was cleared from the city's canals and annual cleaning by volunteers is becoming a feature of the local Inland Waterways Association.⁴²⁹ Linking the National Forest back to the wider canal system would provide clear benefits to wildlife and tourism, providing connections for some species but potentially fragmenting habitat for others.

The recent announcement by the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust of its plans to establish a small colony of beavers to the Trent Valley's Willington Wetlands reserve which is managed by the Trust is of significance to the future edgelands potential of the River Trent which runs close to the reserve. The reserve is itself the site of a former sand and gravel quarry and is of itself and edgelands space, reimagined as a nature reserve. Although there are no current plans to release the beavers into the wild, their introduction is part of the Trust's plans to create a

⁴²⁶ Clevenger, A.P. *Potential Impacts of Highway Median Barriers on Wildlife: State of the Practice and Gap Analysis*. Environmental Management 52(5) · September 2013 .

⁴²⁷ <http://www.ashbycanal.org.uk> (Accessed 22nd March 2020).

⁴²⁸ Farley & Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands* p: 117.

⁴²⁹ <https://www.waterways.org.uk/iwa/calendar/event/view?id=3922> (Accessed 20th March 2020).

nature recovery network which will extend and improve its Willington Wetlands reserve.⁴³⁰ Based just outside the forest boundary, this reintroduction is surely of significance for the National Forest and offers the possibility of reintroducing extinct animals or others that have been forced out. A recent consultation by the Trust offered the possibility of reintroducing red squirrels and pine martens to their land within the National Forest.⁴³¹

The *Review of Literature* commissioned by Natural England to see how the soft estate had enhanced ecosystems states that ‘highways soft estate has the potential to provide biodiversity gain for a variety of flora and fauna though this is highly species and context dependent. The main beneficiaries would be vulnerable grassland species restored to roadside verges as well as the insects and pollinators which rely on them. Its impact on other fauna is more mixed with some birds and mammals benefiting from the soft estate whilst posing a significant risk to others, especially larger mammal species, for reasons set out above. Transport soft estate can both enhance and reduce ecological connectivity depending on the species and context. The benefits of verges as corridors for species movement are primarily for less demanding, generalist species that are tolerant of disturbance and pollution and are resilient to increased mortality risk associated with traffic’. The literature review does not consider habitat fragmentation, and at no point in the review is it considered, with the closest reference posited in the abstract: ‘Transport networks can have significant adverse impacts on biodiversity as well as being a source of pollution for human communities’.⁴³²

None of this is without significant financial cost, but as has been demonstrated many times over, the initial outlay reaps financial benefits as well as societal, cultural, health and environmental ones. These financial costs also pale to insignificance against the cost of building motorways compared to planting Forests, and a re-evaluation of priorities in the face of the climate crisis is long overdue. Railways are forecast to increase in passenger use over the next thirty years and reintroducing a passenger line to the Forest might now be nearer becoming a reality than at any time in the last thirty years.

Burton on Trent, self-titled capital of the National Forest.

During the course of 1996 two major funding bids were submitted that might have transformed Burton into a major Forest attraction and centre. The first was to the Single Regeneration Budget and would have helped to implement the Burton Urban Forestry Strategy. The other was to the Millennium Commission and was to create a major woodland and heritage centre in the heart of the town. Both were unsuccessful and one can only speculate on what part these, especially the woodland and heritage centre, might have played in the town’s development in its relationship to the wider Forest.⁴³³ Instead of becoming part of the wider Forest, Burton focussed inwardly on its own importance and internal heritage as a major brewing town and developed instead the National Brewery Centre. It did make forest

⁴³⁰ <https://www.derbyshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/news/derbyshire-wildlife-trusts-appeal-bring-back-beaver> (Accessed 22nd March 2020).

⁴³¹ Consultation and information document delivered to households in South Derbyshire during March 2020.

⁴³² Davies, H et al. *Review of literature - how transport’s soft estate has enhanced green infrastructure, ecosystem services, and transport resilience in the EU*.

⁴³³ *The National Forest Company. The National Forest Company Annual Report 1996- 1997*. Moira 1997. Unpaginated, refer to pages entitled *Investment*, column three paragraph three.

related developments along the Burton Washlands later in the 1990s and has current plans to introduce further forest connections along the Trent as it passes through the town.⁴³⁴ There was significant work on the flood defences to the town following flooding of the Washlands by the River Trent in 2000, and in recognition that flood occurrences are likely to become more commonplace, considered by DEFRA as increasingly likely events.⁴³⁵

In January 1996 the National Urban Forestry Unit (formerly the Black Country Urban Forest Unit) produced a report for East Staffordshire Borough Council and the National Forest Company. *Burton Upon Trent's Urban Forest* was a review of the existing woodland resource in the town, and a strategy for implementation of an expansion of Burton's urban forest, providing a strong link to the wider Forest. The plan included increasing public involvement, and importantly for the town, increasing public access to the Forest through access to the Trent Washlands and other smaller woodlands and parks both on the fringes and within the town, especially in the town's parks. The report included a proposed series of flagship projects that would help consolidate Burton as a forest town. The aim of the project was to improve quality of life in the town and boost local economic prospects through a series of benefits that included landscape improvement, improved public health, wildlife habitat creation and biodiversity enhancement, timber production, improved surroundings for leisure and recreation, pollution amelioration and land and property value enhancement.⁴³⁶ The five flagship projects were themselves broken down into a series of smaller projects and complimenting these were a series of 'opportunity sites' that might also be afforested in some way and brought into the town's urban forest and the wider Forest as a whole. The overall effect of the Urban Forest Plan for Burton upon Trent was not dissimilar to the Countryside Commission's own Community Forests programme, which also focussed on bringing 'renewed vitality to an area, improving the quality of the environment and providing new opportunities for business, leisure and education' and in encouraging community involvement 'at every step along the way'.⁴³⁷

Clearly, urban forestry in the National Forest was not planned to be so very different to the Community Forests planned for twelve sites around the country by the Countryside Commission. Similarly, tree cover at the selected Community Forest sites was at 6.9% or less and planned to increase to 30%, again in keeping with the plan for the National Forest as a whole. It was in the *Burton upon Trent's Urban Forest* report that the idea for a woodland heritage centre, probably sited on the edge of the Washlands and the town first arose. Although eventually unsuccessful, the report noted that Burton was still inward looking with its back to the river and Washlands themselves, and of course, facing away from the wider Forest.

⁴³⁴ Pers. Com. Meeting with Julia Baker, Project Officer for the Washlands Project at East Staffordshire Borough Council offices on 3rd February 2020.

⁴³⁵ Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, the Natural Environment Research Council and the Met Office DEFRA FD2304 Final Report. *To what degree can the October/November 2000 flood events be attributed to climate change?* March 2001 (revised June 2001).

⁴³⁶ Report by National Urban Forestry Unit. *Burton upon Trent's Urban Forest*. No publisher details. January 1996. Introduction. Copy held in SDDC archive. (Accessed June 7th 2020).

⁴³⁷ Countryside Commission, Forestry Commission & Forests for the Community. *Community Forests- growing from Vision to Reality*. Countryside Commission Community Forest Unit, London. Undated information leaflet, inferred date *circa* 1995.

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Figure 46. Burton-upon-Trent's Urban Forest as envisaged in the 1996 plan. Author's photograph.⁴³⁸

The Washlands area features surprisingly lightly in the Urban Forest plan for Burton on Trent, with a great deal of the focus on the existing trees in the town already; the existing resource was mapped and included all trees, woodland and associated green space already within the urban area and the fringe countryside to the west and east. This included trees in recreational space, formal parks, churchyards, recreation grounds cemeteries and other substantial open spaces, which were considered to 'represent a prime potential resource for new planting'.⁴³⁹ Street trees contributed significantly and differences between leafy areas and the wards containing terraced housing with little or no green areas or front gardens were highlighted. Newly emerging pioneer woodlands were also surveyed, and marginal industrial land, vacant development lots and 'wasteland', or what might now be considered edgelands, along with hedgerows, farm woodlands and the fringe areas of established woodlands. Notable amongst these last was the three-hectare *Oaks Wood*, considered by the survey as ancient woodland (having existed as continuous woodland cover since 1600 CE). The Washlands was mentioned, of course, and represented a 'very special, accessible resource, with the potential to accommodate new planting'.⁴⁴⁰

Although largely surrounded by open fields, Burton on Trent is an industrial town and the maps and overlays of the area from satellite imagery shows both how the town has increased in size and infilled what little green space there was in the town centre but also how little

⁴³⁸ Report by National Urban Forestry Unit. *Burton upon Trent's Urban Forest*. No publisher details. January 1996. Introduction. Copy held in SDDC archive, accessed June 7th 2020.

⁴³⁹ Countryside Commission, Forestry Commission & Forests for the Community. *Community Forests- growing from Vision to Reality*. Countryside Commission Community Forest Unit, London.

⁴⁴⁰ Report by National Urban Forestry Unit. *Burton upon Trent's Urban Forest*. pp:4-6.

improvement there has been in the provision of urban trees during the entirety of the twentieth century.

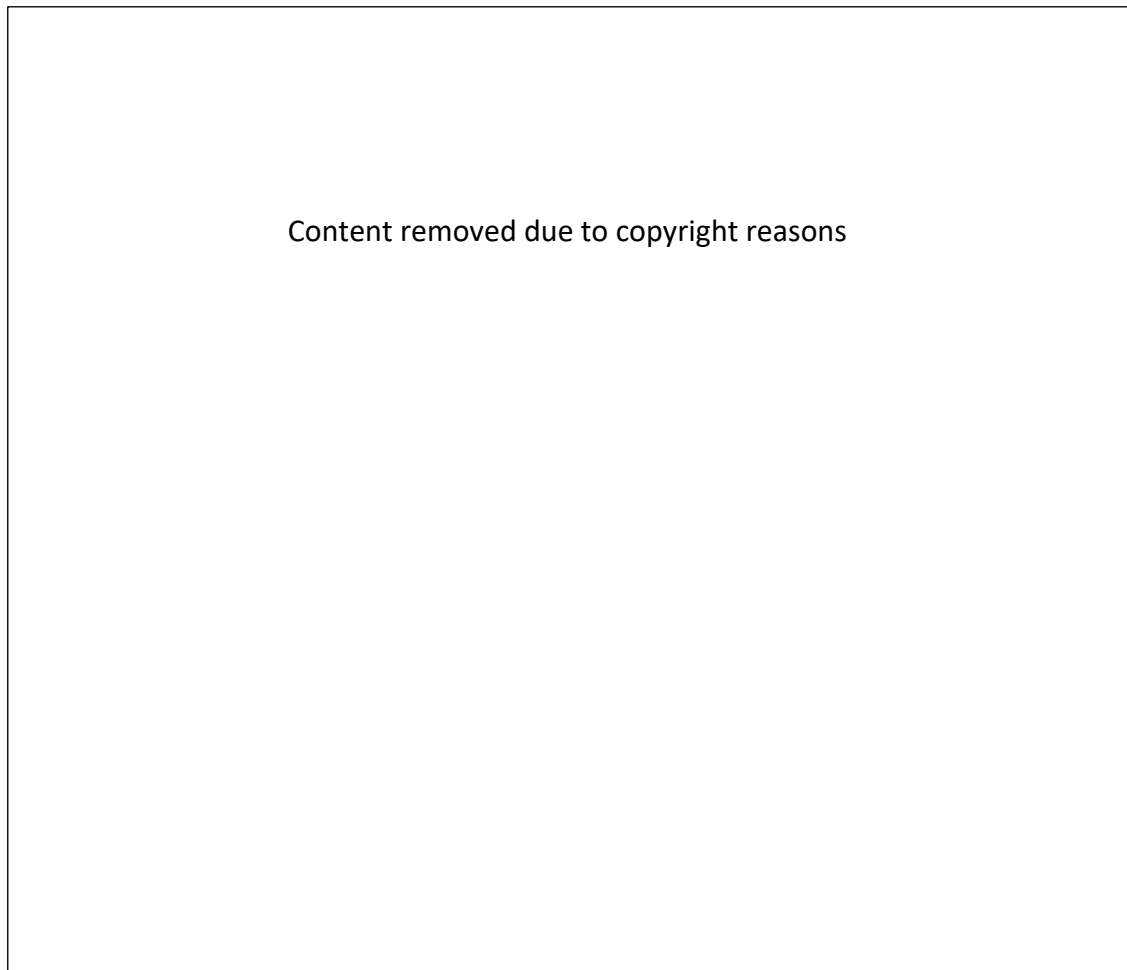


Figure 47. Burton on Trent in 1900. Ordnance Survey 6' to the mile.⁴⁴¹

According to ESBC's own website, in a recent survey, Burton on Trent, the self-proclaimed capital of the National Forest, was identified as having one of the *lowest tree densities of any town in the country*.⁴⁴² This is an astonishing state of affairs. Examination of the six-inch to the mile map of 1901 provides much information about the location of trees in towns such as Burton, with individual trees as well as stands of trees being recorded.

The map image shows Burton upon Trent as a small but heavily industrialised town with very little in the way of green open space or parkland within the town itself, and no street trees at all. The 'Outwoods Pleasure Ground' is to the west side of the town and the Washlands on the east. Across the river are what were then the leafy villages, and later suburbs of Winshill and Stapenhill. Expansion and development of each of these villages throughout the twentieth century changed their character entirely.

⁴⁴¹<https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/?fbclid=IwAR2BTwAsbDCxOiL08KhkWJEQryUroaiWtPmpRkJQEWqEmFhmbY1yGM8oj0Q#zoom=16&lat=52.80451&lon=-1.63048&layers=6&b=1> (Accessed 30th June 2020).

⁴⁴² <http://www.eaststaffsbc.gov.uk/burton-town-regeneration-programme/street-furniture> (Accessed July 2nd 2020) Author's italics.

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Figure 48. The same area as figure 47 above, to the same scale, present day. See note 433, overlay transparency set to zero.

That Burton had developed and expanded rapidly in the course of the nineteenth century is demonstrated by comparing the 1821 hand drawn map⁴⁴³ with the 1901 OS map of the town:

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Figure 49. A hand drawn map of 1821 held in the British Library includes Burton upon Trent on its western edge. See note 443 below.

⁴⁴³ <https://www.oldmapsonline.org/map/britishlibrary/002OSD000000004U00257000> (Accessed 2nd July 2020)

Burton upon Trent in 1821 seems to have developed very little from its medieval origins and is little more than an extended village along the course of the old Roman road and the important crossing of the Trent. Its reputation as a brewing centre and its development as a brewing town was to change that as the nineteenth century proceeded, with a rapid industrial expansion that included very little in the way of green open space, the Outwoods Pleasure Ground coming later in the Victorian period.

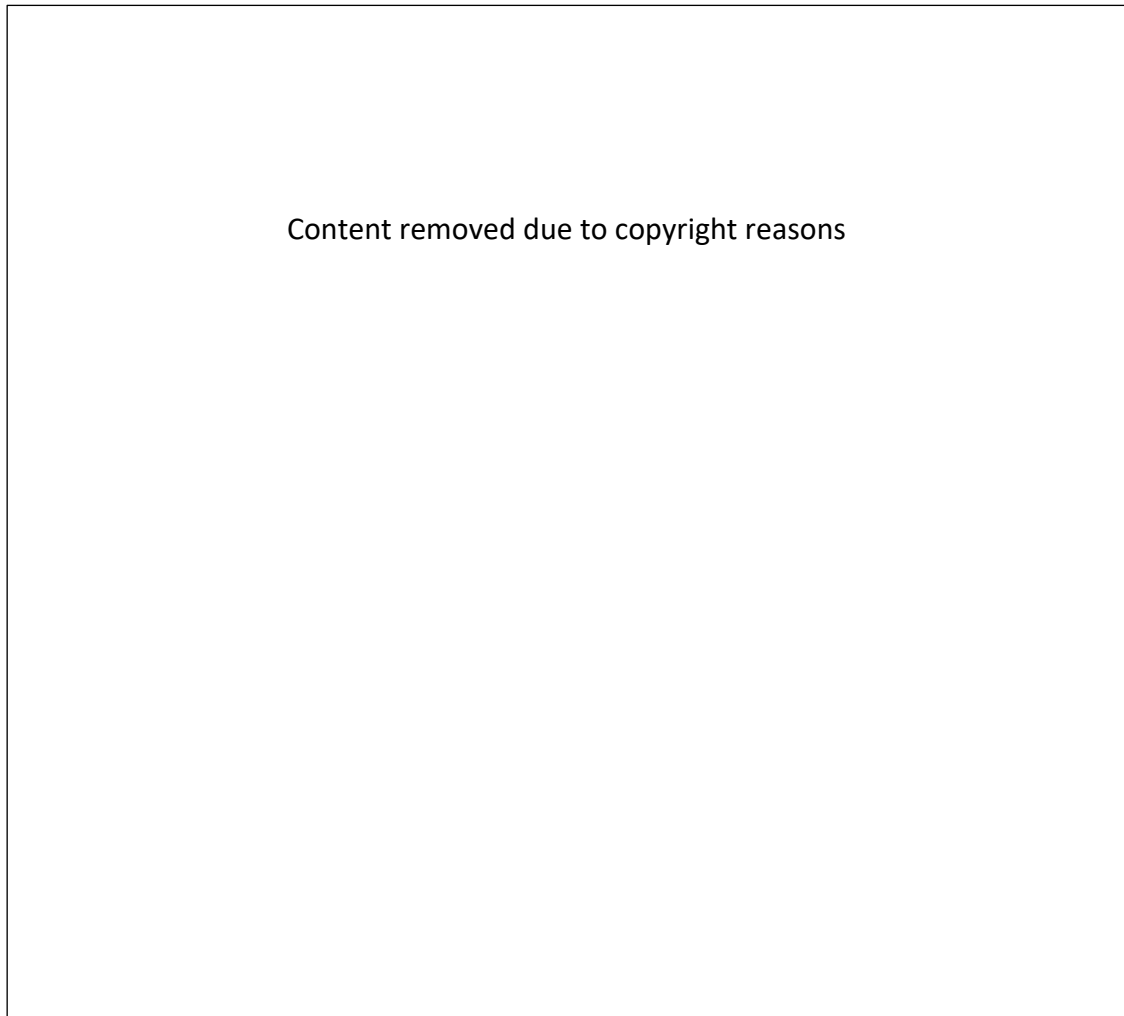


Figure 50. Detail showing Outwoods Pleasure Ground with Oaks Wood to the south west. Ordnance Survey 6' to the mile 1901.⁴⁴⁴

Figure 50 shows the Pleasure Ground at Outwoods to the west of the town laid out as a formal space to promenade in, with an avenue of trees on both the northern and southern boundaries and a more wooded area laid with paths and a bandstand. The area of some twenty acres (~8 hectares) was acquired to create a formal pleasure garden by the town corporation and opened in 1884.⁴⁴⁵ This end of the park is now separated from the main park by the A38 Bypass, which finally opened in 1967.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁴<https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/?fbclid=IwAR2BTwAsbDCxOiL08KhkWJEQryUroaiWtPmpRkJQEWqEmFhmbY1yGM8oj0Q#zoom=17&lat=52.81202&lon=-1.65365&layers=6&b=1> (Accessed 1st July 2020)

⁴⁴⁵ Stuart, D. *County Borough History of Burton upon Trent. Part I Edwardian Burton.* The Charter Trustees of Burton upon Trent, 1977. p: 3.

⁴⁴⁶ Stuart, County Borough History of Burton upon Trent. Part II 1914-74. p: 267.

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Figure 51. The route of the A38 Bypass, which separates part of the pleasure gardens and Oaks Wood from Shobnall Playing Fields. See note 444; overlay transparency set to zero.

Across the Trent, to the east side of the borough lay the then leafy suburbs of Winshill and Stapenhill (both have since expanded significantly, although the older village centres remain relatively 'green' with mature street trees and open green spaces). These had been accessed via the old Trent Bridge or by ferry up until 1889 when the Stapenhill Viaduct (known locally as the *Ferry Bridge*) was opened to pedestrian traffic. The viaduct is now a Grade II listed building.⁴⁴⁷ This attractive cast and wrought iron bridge directly accessed the formal pleasure grounds of Stapenhill Gardens (and does to this day), which had been laid out at least as early as 1857 as a public pleasure grounds by Edward Cliff and was a place 'where parties usually resort during the summer season; [the gardens] are tastefully laid out, and reflect much credit on the proprietor for their general arrangement and good taste displayed' and adopted by the Burton Improvement Commissioners in 1865, who then created formal paths and two bandstands there in 1870.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁷ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1038718> (Accessed 1st July 2020).

⁴⁴⁸ White, F. & Co. *History, Gazetteer and Directory of the County of Derby*. Sheffield 1857 p:381.

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Figure 52. The Stapenhill Pleasure Gardens and the Oxhay &c on the Washlands. Ordnance Survey 6' to the mile. 1901⁴⁴⁹

1865 also saw the creation of a riverside walk alongside an along the steeply rising east bank of the Trent which connected the Trent Bridge with Stapenhill Gardens and was laid out in a formal style, with paths amongst specimen trees, a drinking fountain and grotto, giving a view west over the Trent to the Burton 'skyline of chimneys, maltings and church towers'.⁴⁵⁰ In 1884 the town Corporation leased twenty five acres of land comprising the Oxhay, St. Modwen's Garden and the Fleet, part of the Washlands and laid the area out as a recreation ground. (Formal planting and footpaths would not survive long here as it forms part of the Trent flood plain and is regularly inundated with flood waters). The Stapenhill pleasure gardens were extended further when a four acre (1.6 hectare) recreation ground was added by Burton Corporation in 1894, and again in 1933 when Henry Goodger gave part of the garden and land adjoining Stapenhill House as an extension to the pleasure ground in his mother's memory.⁴⁵¹ Stapenhill House was eventually demolished, and that area too became part of the gardens.

⁴⁴⁹ https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/?fbclid=IwAR0UkruY3e8m_qLSddQH0-VFC7ln877qo2ntmqJUuvWQDi4XrYeUCNj-a9Q#zoom=17&lat=52.79942&lon=-1.62584&layers=168&b=1 (Accessed July 1st 2020).

⁴⁵⁰ Stuart, *County Borough History of Burton upon Trent. Part I Edwardian Burton*. p: 3

⁴⁵¹ *The Burton Daily Mail* May 1st 1933 p:1. Copy held in the Magic Attic archive, Sharp's Pottery Museum, Swadlincote.

The southern extension to Stapenhill Gardens and the area were badly affected by the creation of a second river crossing for Burton in 1985 when St Peter's Bridge carved the garden in two.

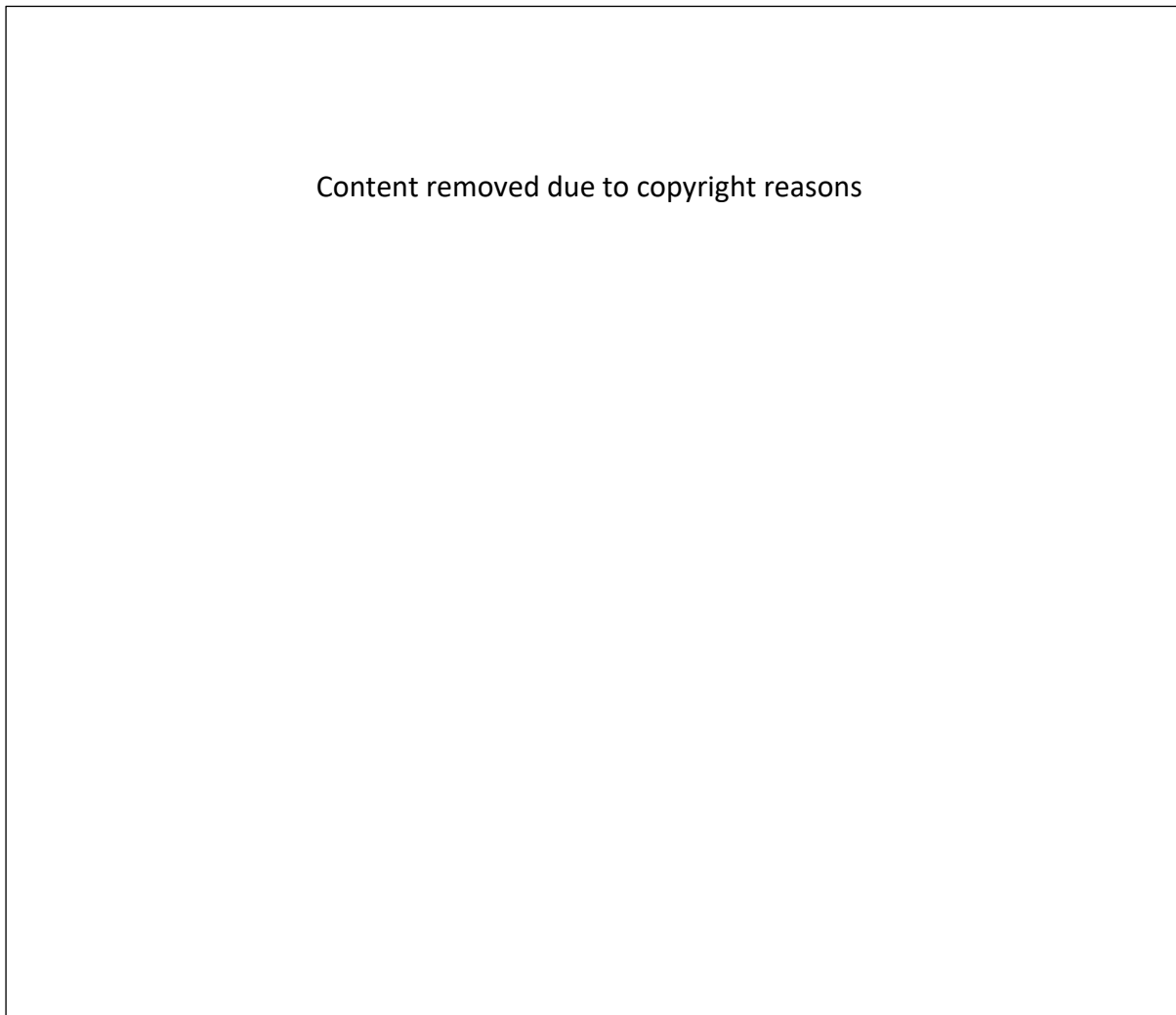


Figure 53. Satellite view of the same area as Figure 52 to the same scale. See note 35; overlay transparency set to zero. Note that St. Peter's Bridge cuts through the southern part of the pleasure gardens and over the top of the Ferry Bridge on a raised embankment over the Washlands.

The site for the new town cemetery on the east of the river Trent was acquired in 1864 and consecrated on May 25th 1866. It was enlarged to 22 acres (~9 hectares) in 1883 and is adjacent to the pleasure gardens (across the road Burton-Coventry road) and thus formed an unofficial extension to them.⁴⁵² The Ordnance Survey 6-inch to the mile map of 1901 shows a formally laid out cemetery with a series of wide paths in a circular and sub-circular pattern, with a lodge and two mortuary chapels, one Church of England and the other Nonconformist. The laying out of cemeteries as public gardens was promoted between the 1820s and 1840s by campaigners, and garden cemeteries, such as this example at Stapenhill were conceived as beautiful places that might serve as public walks. The planting of trees, shrubs and flower beds in cemeteries was advocated by the commissioner of the General Board of Health in the middle of the nineteenth century as 'rich vegetation [...] exercised a powerful purifying

⁴⁵² Kelly's Directories Ltd. *Kelly's Directory of Staffordshire*. Kelly & Co. London 1888 p: 72.

influence' and helped to 'prevent the escape of deleterious miasma'.⁴⁵³ The year of consecration and the town coat- of- arms is depicted on the imposing three- arched entrance to the cemetery.⁴⁵⁴

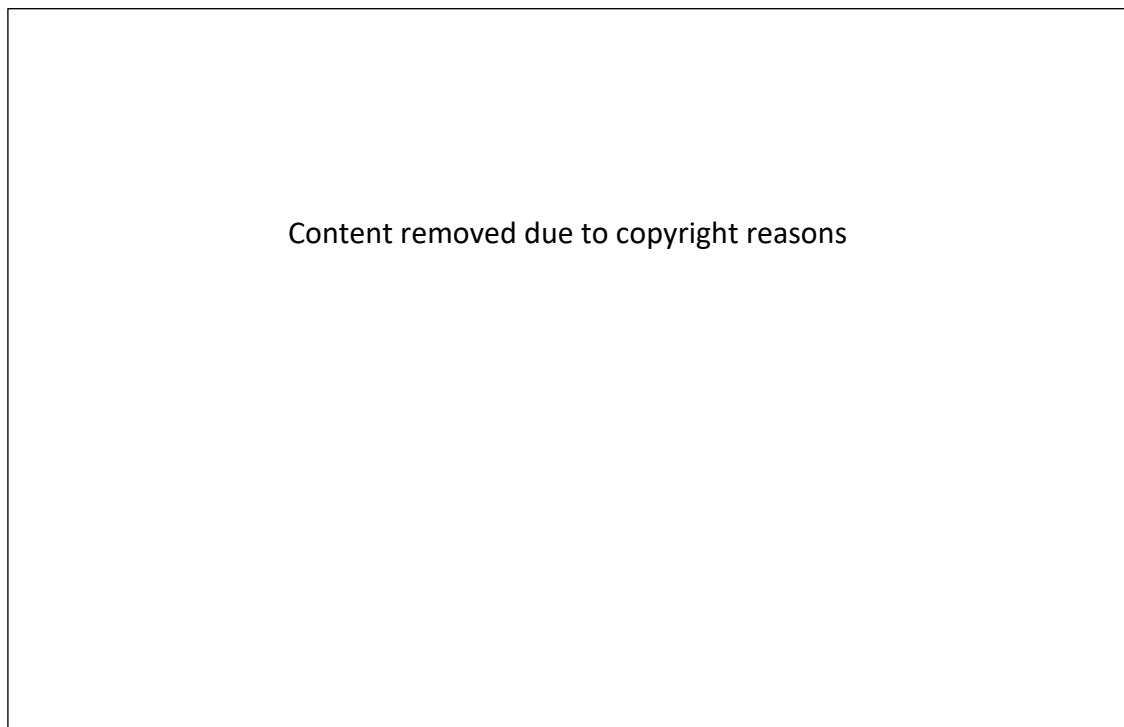


Figure 54. The town cemetery at Stapenhill. Note the proximity to the pleasure gardens and the recreation grounds on the Washlands to the west of the Trent. Ordnance Survey 6' to the mile. 1901⁴⁵⁵

The 1951 Plan for the town, under the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947 defined two major areas of open space, Shobnall Fields (now a sports and recreation area, much of which was formerly open fields- see *Figure 5* above) and the Trent Washlands.⁴⁵⁶ The Washlands have to be preserved as an open space to contain and pass the occasional floodwaters of the Trent, and expensive flood prevention works have been made on several occasions over the past 140 years. Extensive flooding in 1875, 1932, 1947, again in the 1960s and markedly in 2000 have caused the authorities to react by engineering embankments along the western side of the area. The largest of these to date was an approximate 9 kilometres of defences consisting of walls, embankments and raised ground following the 1932 floods, which were themselves an extension of the defence works engineered after the 1875 flood event.⁴⁵⁷ These embankments form the core of the current work by the Environment Agency and have been eroded over time. The eastern side rises much more steeply and did not require flood

⁴⁵³ Elliott, P.A. *British Urban Trees; a Social and Cultural History, c. 1800- 1914*. White Horse Press, Winwick, Cambs. 2016 p: 106.

⁴⁵⁴ Stuart, *County Borough History of Burton upon Trent. Part I Edwardian Burton*. p: 68.

⁴⁵⁵ https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/?fbclid=IwAR0UkruY3e8m_qLSddQH0-VFC7ln877qo2ntmqJUuvWQDi4XrYeUCNj-a9Q#zoom=18&lat=52.80278&lon=-1.62000&layers=168&b=1 (Accessed July 1st 2020).

⁴⁵⁶ Stuart, *County Borough History of Burton upon Trent. Part II 1914-74*. p: 261. See also <https://www.staffordshire-live.co.uk/news/burton-news/a38-burton-bypass-turns-50-145134> (Accessed 10th June 2020).

⁴⁵⁷ <https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/west-midlands/copy-of-burton-frms-information-page/> (Accessed 8th June 2020).

engineering works. The pollution of the River Trent by (largely) the brewing industry in the town meant that swimming and fishing in the river was not possible or safe and it was only following the opening of a new sewage pumping station at Clay Mills that the town Corporation was able to pressure the Trent River Authority for regional action, and fish began to return to the river by 1976. Water quality is still poor and the most recent data available shows a deterioration due to a number of factors: agricultural a rural land management issues (pollution from rural areas- nitrogen and phosphates from fertilizer applied to farmland) mining and quarrying (pollution from abandoned mines), urban and transport issues and water industry failings (pollution from waste water).⁴⁵⁸

The re-laying of the parish church graveyard (St. Modwen's) and removal of the gravestones to a garden of remembrance next to a spur of the river, along with the siting of the new Technical College at the riverside in the 1950s nearby began the long process of turning the Victorian townscape, then inward- looking, to start to face outwards, towards the Washlands and the River Trent.⁴⁵⁹ The opening of the new library at the Riverside in 1976 and the replacement of the old public swimming baths with a more modern leisure centre in 1980 continued this trend.⁴⁶⁰ More recent renovation to the library has also contributed to the gradual broadening of the change towards embracing the Washlands and the river beyond. This is reflected in recent information from the Environment Agency (EA) where the stated objectives of the most recent and ongoing flood defence project, the *Burton Flood Risk Management Project* are:

- To improve flood defences for over 4,500 homes and 1000 businesses
- To provide additional environmental improvements- work with partners, such as East Staffordshire Borough Council, to help achieve more than just flood defences
- Engage with the town and it's communities to educate them about the flood risk and the defences - *highlighting that the river is at the heart of this community* (author's italics).

Point two refers to the latest of the Environmental improvement projects taken on by ESBC and partners, *The Washlands Project*, as will point three, partially by the ongoing information provided to the town by the EA, and more obviously once the Washlands Project is delivered. The EA Burton Flood Risk Management Project funding stands at £30 million, funded through flood defence grant in aid with some local levy support.⁴⁶¹

The Environment Agency work is jointly with the partnership working on delivering the Washlands Project, and this has been funded through the partners who have been successful in securing £3 million grant from Greater Birmingham Local Enterprise Partnership, £500,000 from the EA and a further £1.05 million allocated by ESBC.⁴⁶² This will enable additional public

⁴⁵⁸ Milliman, J.D. & Farnsworth, K.L. *River Discharge into the Coastal Ocean*. CUP 2011 p:128.

<https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/OperationalCatchment/3472/Summary> (Accessed 8th June 2020).

⁴⁵⁹ Stuart, *County Borough History of Burton upon Trent. Part II 1914-74*. pp: 261- 263

⁴⁶⁰ <https://www.derbytelegraph.co.uk/burton/gallery/building-burton-library-1974-1976-3437933> Accessed 8th June 2020. <https://www.derbytelegraph.co.uk/burton/opening-of-meadowside-leisure-centre-3202511> (Accessed 8th June 2020).

⁴⁶¹ <https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/west-midlands/copy-of-burton-frms-information-page/> (Accessed 8th June 2020).

⁴⁶² Project information copy given to the author at a meeting with Julia Baker, the Project Officer for the Washlands Project at a meeting at ESBC offices on 3rd February 2020.

realm enhancements beyond the scope of the flood defence works around the library and leisure centre area. These partners working on the Washlands Project, for which the EA are delivering the flood defence aspect of the work, are East Staffordshire Borough Council, the Environment Agency, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, The National Forest Company, and the Trent Rivers Trust.

The River Trent runs to the south east side of Burton on Trent and the wide Washlands flood plain has been used as an amenity site, managed by the Borough Council in the style of a semi-formal recreational park, with football pitches and rugby pitches marked out, along with metalled footpaths, a children's play area, and outdoor informal exercise equipment. Alongside this, efforts had been made throughout the twentieth century to drain large parts of the Washlands for farmland use (an extension of the area's use as cattle grazing for much of its history) and the effects of that on the environmental diversity became a subject of public concern from 2011 on, to the degree that in 2017 and into 2018 in tandem with the Borough Council, the EA embarked on a series of local public consultations and engaged with a number of public and private sector bodies to evaluate and formulate a new plan for the area.⁴⁶³ The EA engaged a specialist consultant to develop the new 'vision for the Washlands' and this was in turn guided by a steering group of the key partners, all overseen by environmental experts from within the EA itself.⁴⁶⁴

Much of the audit information relevant to the Burton Washlands was undertaken by the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust as they are also the lead partner for an ongoing environmental project focussed on the middle reaches of the River Trent. The Environment Agency became involved in the Washlands Project as part of their flood defence strategy and the work they had already undertaken in their multi-million-pound programme of flood defence enhancement of the Burton Washlands.⁴⁶⁵ ESBC timing was carefully planned to take advantage of the work then planned by the EA and the opportunity that presented to create a much wider scheme of environmental and other enhancements to the town. The development of the Washlands and the planting of parts of it will allow the forest into the heart of the largest town in the forest itself, an ambition of the National Forest Company as set out in the earliest strategy plan to create fringe planting along major watercourses.⁴⁶⁶ The project highlighted a number of key points of concern; how to balance the increasing requirement for public access and recreation with the regular flooding of the area, alongside increasing biodiversity, promoting and managing nature conservation with a more environmentally sustainable approach to green space management.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶³ <http://www.eaststaffsbc.gov.uk/washlands-project> (Accessed 2nd May 2019).

⁴⁶⁴ Project information copy given to the author at a meeting with Julia Baker, the Project Officer for the Washlands Project at a meeting at ESBC offices on 3rd February 2020.

⁴⁶⁵ It is with good reason that the pre-Celtic people of Britain named the Trent so, the name translates as 'the wandering one' or 'the flooding one', literally 'the trespasser'. Mills, A.D. *English Place Names*. (2nd Edition) OUP 1998 p:353. See also note 459.

⁴⁶⁶ *The National Forest Strategy Draft for Consultation*. The Countryside Commission 1993 pp:29-30.

⁴⁶⁷ Project information copy given to the author at a meeting with Julia Baker, the Project Officer for the Washlands Project at a meeting at ESBC offices on 3rd February 2020.

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*Figure 55: The area affected by the Trent Washlands Project through Burton on Trent*⁴⁶⁸

The project recognises a number of inputs; the requirement of the people of Burton to connect more closely with the natural environment, the need to balance the regular flooding of the area with public access and recreation, and the need to promote nature conservation through an environmentally sustainable green- space management system. ESBC is keen to improve access to the Washlands, improve degraded environments and river water quality whilst also increasing the economic situation of the most deprived areas of the town, many of which border the Washlands. (See figure 57). The Washlands and the Shobnall playing fields still provide the open green spaces for the town, despite urban expansion and infill during the course of the twentieth century. Reliance on these spaces, and the adjacent Stapenhill Gardens means that careful management is required.

Recent refurbishment of Station Street, in the town centre, as part of the Borough Council's 'aspiration to improve the public realm', included the removal of established trees from the street. These trees had been planted when parts of the town centre were pedestrianised in

⁴⁶⁸ <http://www.eaststaffsbc.gov.uk/washlands-project> (Accessed 17th December 2019).

the 1980s and met with negative response to their removal on social media. Trees seem to root themselves in the hearts and minds of people as well as in the earth. Information on the Borough Council's website about the Station Street Project included the statement that the council intends to address regeneration of the street by (amongst other measures) '[Providing] for significant and robust street tree planting to reflect Burton upon Trent's position as the 'capital of the National Forest'.⁴⁶⁹ In discussion about the removal of mature trees from the street scene with Councillor George Allen of ESBC, Cabinet Member responsible for the Regeneration and Planning Policy, he noted that:

My view on the trees being removed is that it is absolutely necessary to prevent the new paving being pushed up and then filled with tarmac, wasting taxpayers money. I insisted the trees were removed for this very reason and considered the fact that the project would lead to 15 new trees being planted along the street, in borders and special root containment systems. We are also planting new trees as part of the Washlands enhancement project, just the other side of the buildings on High Street.⁴⁷⁰

The street trees here seem to be being used as decoration for the streets rather than a permanent part of the town environment, with little consideration given to the fact that trees form a significant part of our identity and sense of place. That sense of separation from the wider Forest is apparent in Burton's signage, in which the Forest appears secondary to the town, almost as an afterthought or an appendage to the town itself. Councillor Allen was unaware that Burton on Trent signage does not conform to the standard signage across the rest of the Forest and requested further information (provided), to which no response has been received.

The Station Street scheme is claimed by ESBC's website to have been designed from the outset to 'dramatically increase the number of street trees and reflect the National Forest location.' The planting of fifteen trees in planting beds will do little to change the town's position as 'having one of the lowest tree densities of any town in the country'. 'The final number and location of street trees is dependent on the position of underground services' and may well be fewer than the fifteen that Councillor Allen proposes.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁹ <http://www.eaststaffsbc.gov.uk/burton-town-regeneration-programme/street-furniture> (Accessed 2nd July 2020).

⁴⁷⁰ Pers. Com. Email discussion with Councillor Allen 18th – 19th March 2020.

⁴⁷¹ <http://www.eaststaffsbc.gov.uk/burton-town-regeneration-programme/street-furniture> (Accessed 2nd July 2020).

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Figure 56. Deprivation zones shown on the map of the River Trent through Burton created for the Trent Washlands Project.⁴⁷²

Revitalisation of the town, with an especial focus on the most deprived areas may indeed be very welcome, provided a number of factors are also taken into consideration. Careful planning to avoid forcing poorer residents away requires attention. As demonstrated by the deprivation indices, ESBC has significant problems with adequate and affordable housing. Ideally, in a balanced housing market, the median household income would equate to the median housing price, which is not the case in the Borough of East Staffordshire as a whole, although not all of the Borough lies within the Forest. Across the Borough the median price of a house is unaffordable to 65% households, which indicates that incomes of Borough residents are misaligned and extrapolating data from the graph below it seems increasingly so. Property price increases have significantly outstripped rises in income, with the average price of lower value properties increasing above the average price increase.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷² <http://www.eaststaffsbc.gov.uk/washlands-project> (Accessed 17th December 2019).

⁴⁷³ East Staffordshire Borough Council. *The Housing Strategy 2015-2020*. Burton upon Trent 2014. pp:10- 11.

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Figure 57. Graph demonstrating the difference between house prices and the income affordable price.⁴⁷⁴

ESBC stated in its 2015-2020 Housing Strategy that has had a long-standing desire to improve housing in the Inner Burton wards of Anglesey, Burton, Eton Park and Shobnall. These areas contain a large amount of housing which is over 100 years old and has resulting concentrations of poor housing conditions and very little open green space. The same areas also contain a concentration of private rented housing and consequential lower levels of owner-occupation. The Borough Council owns no social housing, and this is provided instead by ten different housing associations across the Borough. Overcrowding within homes is a significant problem for ESBC, with some 56% of overcrowded households in the private rented and social housing sector. The effect of the COVID-19 outbreak is too recent for any impact to have been assessed but is likely to worsen the current state of affairs, possibly dramatically so, and early figures from the Office of National Statistics indicate that this is indeed the case; reporting as early as May 2020 that the coronavirus (COVID-19) had a proportionally higher impact on the most deprived areas at 55.1 deaths per 100,000 people versus 25.3 deaths per 100,000 in the least deprived areas, 118% higher in the most deprived than the least deprived areas.⁴⁷⁵ As we saw early in this chapter, the COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the need for and connection to urban green space.⁴⁷⁶ The effects of the Trent Washlands Project, whilst not a silver bullet for the problems of deprivation, will contribute to alleviating the problem, provided that steps are taken to ensure that neighbourhoods are not consequentially priced out of living in the area. In targeting 'neglected' neighbourhoods for regeneration as part of wider environmental improvements the resulting effects for local residents have the potential to be counterproductive. These poorer environments have residents that tend to prioritise low- cost housing due to limited finances and once environmental quality has been improved then property values rise, thus forcing lower

⁴⁷⁴ East Staffordshire Borough Council. *The Housing Strategy 2015-2020*. Burton upon Trent 2014. p:11.

⁴⁷⁵ <https://www.poverty.ac.uk/editorial/coronavirus-covid-19-has-had-proportionally-higher-impact-most-deprived-areas> (Accessed 12th June 2020).

⁴⁷⁶ Geng, D., Innes, J., Wu, W. Wang, G. Impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on urban park visitation: a global analysis. *Journal of Forestry Research*. 32, pp: 553–567 (2021).

income families out of the area. These distributional effects have become the focus of many grass roots movements.⁴⁷⁷ The effects of regeneration can result in ‘green gentrification’ and the effects of this can be felt in rural villages as well as regenerated urban streets and areas. The building of local authority homes or similar lower-cost housing can do much to ameliorate the problem and is one of the strategies employed by councils and authorities to assist in urban regeneration, as such South Derbyshire District Council included this as part of their housing strategy up to 2023, building small numbers of local authority owned rental properties in Key Service villages between 2016 & 2019, and ensuring that developers build more affordable houses as part of their planning schemes as part of a wider social equity strategy.⁴⁷⁸ An Australian study indicated that property developers have recognised the effect of green gentrification and the upward pressure it has on property prices and have taken to ‘actively promoting urban green as a positive influence’ to increase the return on their investments, thus ‘hijacking the green agenda’ simply to benefit themselves. The same study noted that presence of a playground within 300 metres of a home adds \$30,000 Australian dollars to the average house price and that a 10% higher tree coverage increases property values by an average AU\$50,000 compared to less leafy streets in the same suburb.⁴⁷⁹

‘Green gentrification’, also sometimes referred to as ‘eco-gentrification’ can be a side-effect of genuinely well-intentioned environmental projects, or those like the Washlands Project, which have several strands to them, including economic regeneration as well as an improvement in environmental standards. For example, urban parks and green spaces may be intended as places of enjoyment and revelry for all can also be places of aesthetic contemplation, or of physical exercise. Such places can also be the locus of ‘deviant’ activity, drug dealing, gang culture and places of fear after dark. Some activists and writers see gentrification generally (and green gentrification as a branch of this) as ‘part of the neoliberal arsenal of regeneration worldwide, a new urban colonialism institutionalised as urban policy [...] middle class suburban dwellers lifestyle focus born out of post war consumptive culture’.⁴⁸⁰ The Australian study discussed above considered that ‘only those... [urban areas] that coupled social equity policies with their urban greening programmes were successful in avoiding community displacement due to property speculation, and in other cases low income residents or even the middle class were driven out’.⁴⁸¹ Urban forestry is a useful tool in countering deprivation when deployed alongside other social equity policies, in fact, as we have seen above, providing urban greenspace can enhance policies aimed at health improvements in chronic disease, social housing and other elements in the deprivation indices.

Following the 1987 release of the *Brundtland Report* by the United Nations, (see chapter 1) which coined the term ‘sustainable development,’ international agreements and goals on

⁴⁷⁷ Banzhaf, S. (ed). *The Political Economy of Environmental Justice*. Stanford University Press 2012 p:10.

⁴⁷⁸ South Derbyshire District Council, Community and Planning Services Annual Monitoring Report 2015- 2016. PDF available here:

[https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwidp9vi3fHpAhUZTxUIH51PD-](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwidp9vi3fHpAhUZTxUIH51PD-8QFjADegQIAhAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.southderbyshire.gov.uk%2Fassets%2Fattach%2F1815%2FAnnual%2520Monitoring%2520Report%25202015%2520-%25202016.pdf&usg=AOvVaw0-ovxT0Eff7HsxebZA2JZV)

[8QFjADegQIAhAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.southderbyshire.gov.uk%2Fassets%2Fattach%2F1815%2FAnnual%2520Monitoring%2520Report%25202015%2520-%25202016.pdf&usg=AOvVaw0-ovxT0Eff7HsxebZA2JZV](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwidp9vi3fHpAhUZTxUIH51PD-8QFjADegQIAhAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.southderbyshire.gov.uk%2Fassets%2Fattach%2F1815%2FAnnual%2520Monitoring%2520Report%25202015%2520-%25202016.pdf&usg=AOvVaw0-ovxT0Eff7HsxebZA2JZV)

⁴⁷⁹ www.foreground.com.au/parks/green-gentrification/ (Accessed 20th March 2020).

⁴⁸⁰ Paton, K. *Gentrification: A Working Class Perspective*. Ashgate Farnham 2014 p:2-3.

⁴⁸¹ www.foreground.com.au/parks/green-gentrification/ (Accessed 20th March 2020).

environmental issues were lent further momentum with the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. Cities and municipalities around the world began to adopt greening policies; the National Forest and the twelve Community Forests envisaged by the Countryside Commission were given impetus by the international movement(s) at that time. They were also a response to the World Health Organisations call to address increasingly dangerous and health threatening levels of air pollution, poorly managed urban settlements and general urban growth. In their recent book *Green Trajectories*, the Barcelona Laboratory for Urban Justice and Sustainability discuss the environmental agendas currently influencing urban planning worldwide. 'This greening agenda will likely continue to intensify in the future, building on the momentum created by the 2016 Habitat III conference in Quito,⁴⁸² which, among others, articulated the importance of increasing urban green areas and investing in social well-being in order to build sustainable cities. This call brought together greening, health, and equity in urban planning. It highlighted that a green city which does not integrate social development, economic opportunities, environmental management and sound urban governance cannot create long-term sustainability.'⁴⁸³ In their guidance on urban forestry, the United Kingdom Government states that 'there is a need to not only increase canopy cover across towns and cities, but also to ensure that its distribution is fair and equitable to all sectors of society'.⁴⁸⁴

Sustainability and sustainable development were contributing factors and outcomes of both the *Bruntland Report* and *Forestry in the Countryside*. The green gentrification effect of the National Forest on the desirability of the area as a place to live is reflected in the population increase being higher than the national average, South Derbyshire, for example was approximately twice the national average for the period from 2005 to 2014 (~0.6 % versus ~ 1.2%).⁴⁸⁵ Similar figures are observable in regions elsewhere across the Forest- but are not evenly distributed. Caution must be applied here as figures for the National Forest itself are difficult to obtain, each of the three local authorities that the Forest covers have only part of their area within the Forest proper and therefore there may be other factors at play. For example, the northern boundary of South Derbyshire abuts the Derby City boundary and there is no green belt separating the two, pressure to build housing stock in the city has led to an increase in house building across the boundary which may also have affected the upward trajectory of house prices and had other economic effects. The National Forest Company noted this difficulty in collating and analysing meaningful data specifically for the

⁴⁸² *Habitat III* was the 2016 United Nations Conference on sustainable urban development, hosted in Quito, Ecuador, where the UN launched its *New Urban Agenda*, designed to address the challenges faced by a growing world urban population; it had recently been revealed that more than 50% of the world's human population now lived in an urban environment for the first time.

⁴⁸³ Anguelovski, I. Argüelles, L. Baró, F. Cole, H. V.S. Connolly, J.J.T. García, M. Lamarca, Loveless, S. Pérez del Pulgar, C. Shokry, G. Trebic, T. Wood, E. *Green Trajectories; Municipal policy trends and strategies for greening in Europe, Canada and United States (1990-2016)*. Barcelona Laboratory for Urban Justice and Sustainability. 2018 see introduction.

⁴⁸⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/urban-forestry> (Accessed 10th June 2020).

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/700468/introducingUrbanForest_FINAL_Sept16.pdf (Accessed 15th June 2020).

⁴⁸⁵ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/overviewoftheukpopulation/november2018> & <http://population.city/united-kingdom/south-derbyshire/> (both accessed 8th June 2020).

Forest area in 2007 as ‘only parts of each District or Borough are within the Forest’ and ‘data is only available at District/ Borough level’.⁴⁸⁶

Whilst there has been an increase and diversification in employment opportunities within the Forest area since the collapse of the heavy industries of coal and clay, there is no avoiding the fact that many of the people who live in the Forest work outside it and commute to work- often quite some distance along the motorway network- thereby creating dormitory villages and suburbs. This is green gentrification of a different order to that discussed above but green gentrification nonetheless, the effect of which led (and continues to lead) to the necessity for the building of social housing. The sustainable development element is planned in as an integral part of the continued development of housing and employment opportunities locally, which also contribute to the overall effect of the Forest on the area. In the South Derbyshire section of the National Forest alone, the 2016 Sustainable Appraisal Report described how the plan would deliver a minimum of 12,618 new homes, around 53ha of employment land, new primary and secondary schools, new roads, public transport provision and walking and cycling routes, along with community facilities, healthcare provision, recreational facilities and green infrastructure provision such as allotments and Local Green Spaces.⁴⁸⁷ In North West Leicestershire the dormitory village effect was noted in the 2012 *Sustainability Appraisal of the North West Leicestershire Core Strategy*: ‘The Core Strategy allows some growth in the rural areas. Past completion rates for housing show that the rural area has always played an important role in housing growth in the District. However, development in villages has led to a pattern of development that is unsustainable. Many new homes are occupied by people who travel outside of the villages for work and also may meet many of their other needs outside these areas, not necessarily supporting rural services.’⁴⁸⁸ Clearly, the growth of dormitory villages and a commuter belt on the edge of towns in the Forest is not sustainable development in any meaningful sense of the term.

The North West Leicestershire Sustainability Appraisal indirectly noted the difficulty at the core of sustainable development, namely that it is a planned response to the requirement for increasing demands on the natural world, it requires continuous increase, and it places continuous pressure on finite resources:

‘The Core Strategy proposes a number of large-scale urban extensions to the main villages and towns. These will require a large amount of greenfield land with possible adverse impacts on landscape quality, nature conservation and flooding. However, these extensions also present an opportunity to deliver development that meets needs and is substantially better at securing sustainable development than existing residential neighbourhoods.’

The *Appraisal* then goes on to suggest a series of mitigation approaches:

- design protocols and the layout of development

⁴⁸⁶ *The National Forest: an exemplar of Sustainable Development*. The National Forest Company, Moira 2007 p:21

⁴⁸⁷ South Derbyshire District Council, Community and Planning Services. *South Derbyshire Sustainability Appraisal. Local Plan Part 2. Non- Technical Summary*. Swadlincote 2016 p:7

⁴⁸⁸ North West Leicestershire District Council. *Sustainability Appraisal of the North West Leicestershire Core Strategy - Submission Version. Non-Technical Summary*. Peter Brett Associates, Bristol. 2012 p:6

- biodiversity protection or enhancement measures
- site-specific sustainable construction standards
- targets for energy efficiency or on-site energy provision
- mix of uses
- public transport, walking or cycling links between individual site elements
- a delivery and implementation plan
- phasing to development parcels to ensure infrastructure and services are in place prior to occupation.⁴⁸⁹

Planning departments across the country have the delicate balancing act of managing the pressure for development against the negative effects of environmental degradation created by that very development. For example, development in Ashby de la Zouch was restricted for a long period due to the water quality of the River Mease being severely affected by sewage outflow and the local sewage works being unable to cope. The River Mease had been designated as a site of international importance for nature conservation in 2006, as a Special Area for Conservation (SAC) under the European Union Habitats Directive, requiring protection from significant harm, and this had the effect of forcing local development to be reallocated elsewhere in the area.⁴⁹⁰ The Appraisal noted that ‘The Core Strategy needs to make clear to all developers the significance of this issue and that if no solution is found, economic and residential growth in the town may be limited’.⁴⁹¹ Work on raising the water quality through improved sewage works has led to the lifting of building restrictions and a growth in dwellings of 19% is anticipated by 2036.⁴⁹²

Swadlincote Urban Forest; Swadlincote Woodlands.

The South Derbyshire Local Plan 1991-2001 has surprisingly little content for the National Forest, and this may reflect that as the draft was written the final announcement was relatively recent and the final boundary was still in a state of flux. What it does say is that ‘within the area of search for the new National Forest [...] the planting of woodlands with public access will be promoted and encouraged’ and that ‘the Council supports the establishment of the New National Forest covering parts of South Derbyshire’. When the support to bring the National Forest to the area is taken into consideration this is hardly the ringing endorsement one might have hoped for and belies the level of work expended by SDDC to that date. The report later went on to state that SDDC considered that ecological and landscape improvement was considered very important, especially in view of the concentration of derelict land and mineral workings in the area, and that ‘the character of many villages and smaller settlements is enhanced by single trees as well as groups of trees. They are a vital element of the landscape’.⁴⁹³ In fact the work of individual officers and

⁴⁸⁹ North West Leicestershire District Council. *Sustainability Appraisal of the North West Leicestershire Core Strategy - Submission Version. Non-Technical Summary*. Peter Brett Associates, Bristol. 2012 p:8.

⁴⁹⁰ *The National Forest: an exemplar of Sustainable Development*. The National Forest Company, Moira 2007 p:19.

⁴⁹¹ North West Leicestershire District Council. *Sustainability Appraisal of the North West Leicestershire Core Strategy* p:7.

⁴⁹² https://www.nwleics.gov.uk/files/documents/hedna_executive_summary_january_2017/HEDNA%20Executive%20Summary%20%28January%202017%29.pdf (Accessed February 23rd 2021).

⁴⁹³ South Derbyshire District Council. *South Derbyshire Local Plan (Draft)*. Swadlincote 1991 p:54, Environment Proposal 10: *The New National Forest* item numbers 5.57, 5.58, 5.61. Author’s copy.

departments within SDDC was instrumental in collaborating with the Forestry Commission in purchasing Rosliston Farm and opening the first visitor centre in the National Forest there, as noted above in chapter 2.

One example of efforts to better integrate urban areas into the National Forest and take advantage of their location was the plan to move Swadlincote towards becoming a true forest town during the 1990s, and away from its own industrial past with its own funding bid to the Single Regeneration Budget which contributed substantially to the Swadlincote Woodlands Project.⁴⁹⁴ In this case the bid was successful and in 1996 a team of consultants was appointed by SDDC, working with the National Urban Forestry Unit in the first year who advised on tree species choice for the woodland planting. The intent for the urban forest park was to apply urban forestry landscape design techniques on the 33-hectare site, 15 hectares of which was to be developed into new housing. The site itself was visible from Swadlincote town centre and had been extensively worked for coal and clay and then backfilled with colliery and domestic waste. By 1995 it was an area of rough grassland with pockets of spoil and rubbish revealing remnants of its former use as a tip. The project was designed to demonstrate that the multi-purpose and sustainable objectives of the National Forest could be achieved in an urban setting, with a series of objectives that exemplified housing development landscaping linking directly to the new woodland. Planned community and schools involvement in the project's creation and management, which would feature multi-use public areas and trails and a mixture of wild and semi-formal areas, alongside woodland planting, all incorporated into the management and creation of nature conservation habitats alongside dwellings, recreation areas and adventure play areas.⁴⁹⁵ The government had issued a report in 1990 with a guidance note that a standard of 2.4 hectares of public open space per 1,000 population be adopted by local authorities and there was a shortage of up to 15 hectares shortage in the Swadlincote urban area.⁴⁹⁶ The creation of the Swadlincote Woodlands would address this shortfall.

The despoiled and varied nature of the site created difficult conditions for woodland creation, with a very thin layer of topsoil and a requirement for effective ground preparation. A robust planting specification contained only a very limited mix of arboreal species suited to tolerate the harsh conditions, these were principally alder, birch and willow.⁴⁹⁷ Small planting stock was selected with limited root systems that would be able to adapt to the limited soil depth available. Ground ripping to prepare the ground and relieve compaction proved to be very successful with an average survival rate of the 'whip' stock of around 95%. The tree and woodland planting were phased over a 5-year period between 1997 and 2001 and proved very effective.⁴⁹⁸ A limited budget of £725,00 was available for landscaping, ground

⁴⁹⁴ *The National Forest Company Annual Report 1996- 1997*. Unpaginated, refer to pages entitled *Investment*, column two paragraph two.

⁴⁹⁵ South Derbyshire District Council. *From the Legacy of Pits and Pots: experience from the National Forest in transforming 33 hectares of despoiled land into a new exemplary urban forest park for the 21st century*. Swadlincote. Undated but inferred date 2001. pp:2- 3.

⁴⁹⁶ South Derbyshire District Council. *South Derbyshire Local Plan (Draft)*. Swadlincote 1991 p:79, Recreation and Tourism: item numbers 8.10, 8.11. Author's copy.

⁴⁹⁷ These, incidentally, are all species that are native to the Ashby Woulds, itself of a poor spoil type and the first to naturally recolonise the despoiled land and unrestored spoil heaps of former colliery tip sites elsewhere in the area.

⁴⁹⁸ South Derbyshire District Council. *From the Legacy of Pits and Pots*. p:7.

preparation, planting, footbridges and other structures, paving, an outdoor classroom, ranger offices and car park, fencing and park furniture, adventure play area, arts features and the creation of a 'water spine' (using a natural spring on the site to create a water course, ponds and channels). This would leave £33,000 to finance 5 years of management and maintenance whilst the trees became established. The management strategy was simple; plant trees that are suited to the poorer quality soil and plant grasses and grasslands suitable for a wilder nature area that do not need to be cut more than twice a year, more like a traditional meadow than a formal parkland. Overall, the budget equated to approximately £2.20 per square metre. Further to this, a commuted sum of £400,000 towards the long-term management of the park was negotiated with the landowners as part of the planning obligation associated with the housing development, which was to be used as a contribution towards the future costs of managing and maintaining the woodlands and park.⁴⁹⁹

A review of the Swadlincote Woodlands by the Swadlincote Woodlands Scrutiny Committee for South Derbyshire District Council in September 2010 noted that the commuted sum funding for the site from the Section 106 planning agreement was due to run out in approximately July of the following year and that placed the management of the site in jeopardy. The site had been supported by one full time and two part-time rangers, meaning that they could maintain a presence during daylight hours and these roles would need to be absorbed into the Council's parks and woodland management staff. A biodiversity study and subsequent Biodiversity Management Statement undertaken by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust in 2008 mapped existing wildlife habitats and produced a series of advisory recommendations for site management to achieve a desired state of biodiversity which was used as guidance for external contractors and SDDC grounds maintenance to ensure that works carried out on the site were to the benefit of the park's biodiversity. A partnership project was developed in 2009 with the National Forest Company and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (now The Conservation Volunteers- TCV) to fund a series of conservation action days throughout the year to work on projects identified in the Biodiversity Management Statement and conservation management tasks.⁵⁰⁰ The site continues to hold conservation days on a monthly basis to upkeep the site, managed by the TCV.⁵⁰¹

It had been planned from the inception of the Swadlincote Woodlands project that the people in the community, especially those moving into the new housing development on the site would become directly involved in the care of the whole of the woodlands area and feel a sense of ownership and responsibility. This has never happened, and the Scrutiny Committee noted this in 2010, along with an attempt to explain and understand the reason for the failure:

The local community was just forming, as the houses were being built at the same time as the site was created. There was an early intention to form a "Friends of" group, although this has never been successfully achieved. Partly because of a lack of staff resources, as this can be a time-consuming process, and also possibly that

⁴⁹⁹ South Derbyshire District Council. *Swadlincote Woodlands Scrutiny Committee Report September 2010* Agenda Item 6.1 2010.

South Derbyshire District Council. *From the Legacy of Pits and Pots*. p:9 Undated, no author credited.

⁵⁰⁰ South Derbyshire District Council. *Swadlincote Woodlands Scrutiny Committee Report September 2010* Agenda Item 6.1 2010.

⁵⁰¹ <https://www.southderbyshire.gov.uk/our-services/things-to-do-and-places-to-visit/parks-and-open-spaces/swadlincote-woodlands> (Accessed 15th June 2020).

the community was too “new” and not yet established to take enough interest in the site.⁵⁰²

Problems on the site itself were largely related to repeated vandalism of the play area and occasional illegal traveller encampments with associated high costs for clean-up operations and improved security measures and this may have contributed to the lack of community involvement. In fact, the only real community involvement in the site came from local schools on organised trips to create artwork on the site and a one-off *Wassail* event organised to celebrate the millennium in 2000 but again aimed at children.⁵⁰³ Despite the lack of success at creating a ‘Friends of’ group, the Swadlincote Woodlands, maintained through SDDC and with help from woodland volunteers and the TCV, is considered a successful transformation of a once derelict site and a significant contribution to Swadlincote’s transition to establishing itself as an Urban Forest Town. Street trees are a feature of the town centre and the routes into the town and much has been done to transform derelict former industrial sites into leafy shopping areas and suburbs. Although the tree-planting programme has been considered subsidiary to the regeneration of former colliery and other industrial sites it is clearly the case that both are required for a successful transformation. As Francis Rawdon-Hastings, the Earl of Moira discovered in 1810 with his attempt to locate a colliery directly adjacent to a public spa, the area needs also to be aesthetically pleasing to encourage visitors and develop a tourism economy.⁵⁰⁴

The inclusion of urban forestry within the National Forest, linking urban and rural areas, and urban areas with trees and green space can thus be demonstrated to have had a beneficial effect on the communities within the Forest’s towns from the 1990s onwards, in economic and environmental terms and also in terms of the physical and mental wellbeing of the inhabitants of those urban communities. The NFC’s plans for the future certainly include a target of a 20% increase in urban tree canopy cover and build on decades of planning for urban forestry to be included in the Forest’s creation. Following the industrial slump of the early 1990s, the NFC was swift to adopt regeneration through new forestry measures as a method of avoiding the worst effects of economic change, and the adoption of urban forestry into the hearts of two of the major towns has seen beneficial effects. The creation of Swadlincote Woodlands has been a success, integrating new housing development and regeneration through effective use of targeted planting on the site of a former colliery slag heap and industrial wasteland. The identities of some of those towns and urban villages seem less resistant to change, whereas Burton on Trent seems much slower to adopt a Forest identity and lagging behind in a significant way. Coalville has gradually adopted a more Forest-based persona. Burton’s proximity to Needwood is similar to Coalville’s proximity to Charnwood, so the difference in identities associating with the Forest must be affected by other means; the town’s longer history as an urban area, it’s more inward-looking ‘persona’ and its situation on the edge of the Forest perhaps all come into play. It could be that alongside a much-needed regeneration of some of the deprived areas of the town, the Trent

⁵⁰² South Derbyshire District Council. *Swadlincote Woodlands Scrutiny Committee Report September 2010* Agenda Item 6.1 2010.

⁵⁰³ South Derbyshire District Council. *Swadlincote Woodlands Scrutiny Committee Report September 2010* Agenda Item 6.1 2010. See also the *Wassail* booklet produced by SDDC for the Wassail event held in SDDC archive (Accessed May 2020).

⁵⁰⁴ Nail, S. *Forest Policies and Social Change in England*. Springer 2008 p:148.

Washlands Project will increase Burton's connection with the Forest and help promote a Forest identity, surely a recommendation for community leaders, ESBC, local politicians and the NFC itself to take up, and then the town can truly don the mantle of the Capital of the National Forest. This chapter has demonstrated that the problems associated with integrating urban areas into the National Forest that were apparent in the very early years still exist today. The next chapter will consider the first change of leadership at the National Forest Company in 2005, and the appointment of its next CEO with a background in urban-based regeneration and the skills associated with projects of that nature, and how those skills were deployed to address at least some of the problems that integrating urban forestry into the wider National Forest brings.

5. The Company Comes of Age, the Forest Grows Apace.

The National Forest Company, and the Development Team before it, had benefitted from strong leadership and key team members, alongside support from established and respected board members from the Countryside Commission and then the NFC Board of Trustees. Their experience of partnership working and using influence through their partners and supporters had proved to be vital in establishing the Forest. They had developed workable strategies to try and ensure the long-term success of the project, but change was inevitable, and a succession plan was developed whereby Susan Bell would be able to step down from her long-held position as CEO of the NFC and Director of the Development Team prior to that. At roughly the same period, the Chair of the Board of Trustees would come to the end of his tenure and a replacement was also required. The next ten years of the project would be crucial to the long-term viability of the Forest and selecting the right candidates for these roles was of utmost importance if it were to succeed. As we will see, the new candidates would not only have to contend with the foreseen difficulties of managing the overly aspirational planting targets and the creation of a sustainable development strategy, alongside managing Government ministers and DEFRA expectations, but the unforeseen ones too. There was another change of Government with a proposal to entirely change Forestry policy in the UK, alongside a global economic recession, and the spread of new diseases that may yet devastate established ash and oak populations.

By the time Susan Bell left the NFC in the spring of 2006 the company was in a strong position, and with the team she had created 'enormous goodwill for the Forest' with a string of successes and achievements that had barely seemed possible a decade earlier, at times it was through sheer force of will that the project had survived and thrived; but there was clearly a great deal of work to do if it was to fulfil all of the requirements of a multi-purpose, multi-user forest.⁵⁰⁵ In some ways the more difficult job would be maintaining the impetus, especially after the novelty of creating a new project became wearing or pedestrian. Bell's partnerships with board chairman Rodney Swarbrick and then later with his replacement Viv Astling had been successful, demonstrably so, and in the face of some harsh, and as argued in chapter 2, sometimes severe criticism and heavy-weight scepticism at ministerial level and in the national press, especially throughout the years of the Development Team and the early years of the NFC. She had built a solid, dependable team of reliable, committed and focussed people and by 2006 the Forest was a growing reality; careful succession planning for her departure meant that there was a requirement for a CEO with a dogged and tenacious character who would be a suitable replacement but with new and different attributes.

Astling had been replaced as chair by Dinah Nicholls the previous year in a strategy that gave Bell and Nicholls a year to work together to ensure as smooth a transition as possible whilst Bell's replacement could also be found. By that time Bell had been part of the creation of the Forest for some sixteen years and although rewarding it must, at times, have been tiring work. The recruitment of Dr Sophie Churchill to the post of Chief Executive of the NFC may not have been an obvious first choice; she was at the time the Chief Executive of *Regen WM* (Regeneration West Midlands, an operating unit of Advantage West Midlands, an urban-focussed project which was set up to address the skills shortages in the regeneration sector

⁵⁰⁵ The National Forest Company. *Annual Report 2005- 2006*. Moira 2006 p: 5.

in the region, promoting and developing regeneration excellence in the West Midlands), however, she proved to be an excellent CEO and a worthy successor to Bell. She steered the Company through what she termed ‘relatively choppy waters’ between February 2006 and December 2014.⁵⁰⁶ Those ‘choppy waters’ included both the things she could affect or try to influence; changes to the Forest Tender Scheme (the Tender Scheme did not run for most of the duration of 2006 as a new Rural Development Scheme for England was awaiting approval, with a new scheme planned for development in the year 2007-2008, the *Changing Landscapes* scheme), or target setting for afforestation, for example, and those outside her sphere of influence;⁵⁰⁷ increases in the price of land, pressures on urban and rural land uses, variables in funding through continued downward pressure on DEFRA’s budgets (the main source of the NFC’s funding) and not least the global economic crisis that began in the United States in September 2008 and which swiftly spread around the world.⁵⁰⁸ The after-effects of the world crisis on UK economic policy and financial support for international forestry are outside the scope of this work, suffice it to say here that the government recognised that ‘climate change represents a significant economic and environmental threat for all countries’ and there was concern amongst NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) that the UK had not paid sufficient attention to providing funding to finance a global deal on climate change.⁵⁰⁹ The Eliasch Review of 2008 was an independent report to government demonstrating the case for reducing forest loss internationally and aimed to provide a comprehensive analysis of international financing to reduce forest loss and its associated impacts on climate change.⁵¹⁰ It contributed to the ‘Green New Deal’ report of 2008 which was aimed at combatting the financial crisis and the climate crisis through a series of policy proposals. The idea was revived in the United States in 2018 and has since been taken up around the world.⁵¹¹

The global market crash altered fiscal policy in the short term whilst governments around the world tried to contain the rapidly evolving economic situation; the point being that what Churchill understatedly calls ‘relatively choppy waters’ and ‘a certain amount of white water’ was in fact a global recession of proportions unseen for more than a generation. On top of this, and more immediate in its potential threat to the Company itself and the wider Forest was the change of government in 2010. After thirteen years of relative political stability a new coalition government had come to power in the UK and everything was under intense scrutiny. All public bodies were reviewed and the very existence of the NFC itself came into question (could the job be done by the Forestry Commission, for example) and all public spending was reviewed and dissected. With ‘political and practical support’ from DEFRA but with curtailed budget the project survived but both Dinah Nichols as Chair of the Board of Trustees and Sophie Churchill as CEO realised that what had seemed to be inviolate had come

⁵⁰⁶ <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C18834> Accessed 23rd September 2020. See Churchill’s LinkedIn page here: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/sophie-churchill-obe-phd-ficfor-fiema-7776636/?originalSubdomain=uk> (Accessed 24th September 2020).

⁵⁰⁷ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Company Annual Report 2006- 2007*. Moira 2007 p: 14

⁵⁰⁸ Tooze, A. *Crashed: How a Decade of Financial Crises Changed the World*. Allen Lane/ Penguin Random House 2018 pp: introduction.

⁵⁰⁹ House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee. *Pre- Budget Report 2008: Green fiscal policy in a recession*. Third report of Session 2008- 09: Evidence EV69 & EV70. The Stationary Office Ltd. London 2009.

⁵¹⁰ Eliasch, J. *Climate Change: Financing Global Forests: the Eliasch Review*. Earthscan London 2008 introduction p:XV . <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/climate-change-financing-global-forests> Accessed 28th September 2020.

⁵¹¹ <https://greennewdealgroup.org/history-of-the-green-new-deal/> (Accessed 29th September 2020).

into question and the decision could have easily been otherwise.⁵¹² The budgetary restrictions resulted in a required reduction in capacity and a certain amount of reorganisation was undertaken within the NFC; Clive Keble (amongst others) left after a long period of service and responding to the funding environment a single Directorate of Operations position was created, which Simon Evans filled, having been immersed in the project since 1992.⁵¹³ The NFC under Bell had created a new strategic plan in 2004 to guide the Forest's continuous creation until 2014, the 126-page document *The National Forest Strategy 2004-2014*. At the same time the company also produced a further document, the *Concise Strategy & Delivering the Strategy, 2004-2014* which, as the title suggests, condensed the detail of the former down to just 23 pages and included an outline of how the strategic targets would be met over the following decade.⁵¹⁴

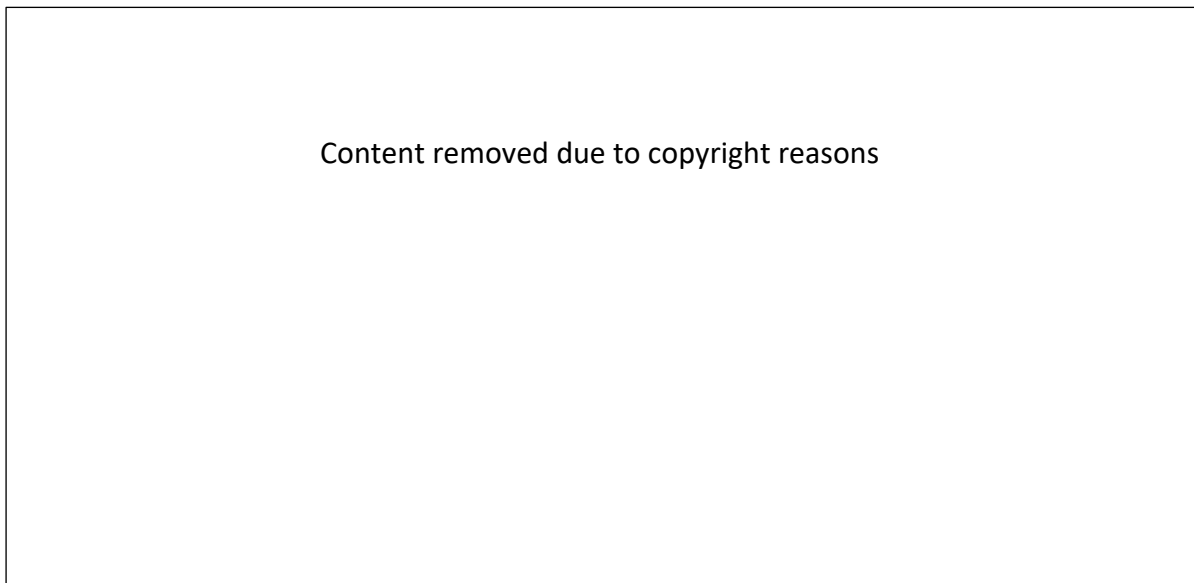


Figure 58. *The Strategy and the Concise strategy, 2004-2014*. Author's photograph.

The new strategy did not radically alter the original 1995 strategy but built on it whilst identifying any weaknesses or overly ambitious planting targets, providing a comprehensive framework for action to create the Forest. The targets remained very difficult to achieve, indeed, in *The Strategy 2004-2014* the planting target of 4-5,000 hectares of new woodland creation for that ten-year period was now referred to as aspirational; the lessons of the past had been learned the hard way.⁵¹⁵ It was not only new forest creation that was targeted, the strategic requirements were as broad as they had always been, including landscape change in other areas such as new wetlands and heaths, increased biodiversity, access to more areas, the inclusion of heritage features and increased recognition of the historic environment, community participation, economic regeneration, agricultural diversification and increased tourism and it was under Churchill's guidance, in an increasingly difficult economic situation, that these objectives were to be compassed.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹² The National Forest Company. *National Forest Company Annual Report and Accounts 2010-2011*. Moira 2011 pp: 2- 4.

⁵¹³ The National Forest Company. *National Forest Company Annual Report and Accounts 2010-2011*. p: 4.

⁵¹⁴ The National Forest Company. *Concise Strategy and Delivering the Strategy 2004-2014*. Moira 2004.

⁵¹⁵ The National Forest Company. *The Strategy 2004-2014*. Moira 2004 p: 121 see Appendix 8: Timing and Prioritisation of Strategy Actions, Action F2.

⁵¹⁶ The National Forest Company. *The Strategy 2004-2014*. pp: 121- 126.

The strategy concerned itself with some policies that at first glance seem only distantly related to the creation of new woodlands and this is where the influence of a corporate body like the National Forest Company really began to demonstrate the differences between itself and other more environmentally focussed groups like, for example, the Woodland Trust. (As an NGO the Woodland Trust does have authority; it is a member of a number of advocacy partnerships which include other NGOs, parliamentary groups and professional institutes;⁵¹⁷ where the NFC has an advantage is that it is a trusted arm of government, a non-departmental public body, and has the direct ear of ministers). Planning for development and transport were key to the Strategy, and although the NFC had no direct powers to implement transport initiatives, they were concerned that access to the Forest was available to all. This included those with no access to a car, and the concern was that the lack of affordable transport choices might preclude some visitors from visiting or becoming involved in the Forest's creation, creating a significant barrier for some people, in particular disadvantaged communities from surrounding towns and cities. The fact that the Forest covers parts of two regions, three counties and six districts complicates transport policy as all of these organisations are involved in transport and roads.⁵¹⁸

One of the core guiding principles of the creation of the National Forest had always been to maintain sustainable development at the heart of its philosophy and to that end the report *The National Forest: An Exemplar of Sustainable Development* was undertaken and published in 2007. Monitoring of this key principle had been ongoing since the foundation of the company and the 2007 report was, in effect, a stocktake of the status at that point in time. There had been two earlier reports demonstrating the social and economic benefits of the Forest, with supplementary reporting already existing on the main environmental impact of the Forest. The Sustainable Development report, focussing in particular on the contribution of the Forest to the United Kingdom Sustainable Development Strategy (The government had launched its strategy for sustainable development in March 2005: *Securing the Future: Delivering UK Sustainable Development Strategy*), and through analysis of data provided evidence on priorities for sustainable development.⁵¹⁹ The 2004-2014 Strategy included a series of proposals and goals: rural transport partnerships in which the NFC set itself the target of working with partners to agree a framework for rural transport initiatives in and around the Forest. Public transport improvements included the provision of bus services from towns and adjoining urban areas to recreation and tourism attractions, and support for the reopening of the Ivanhoe Line to public rail passengers, by working with rail authorities and companies, alongside regional agencies and local authorities to pursue the line's implementation. All abilities cycling and horse-riding routes were envisaged along with improved car parking. There was also the continued development of a common approach to road signage to announce arrival in the National Forest and a common boundary and settlement road sign programme to promote a unity across the Forest area. There was also the promotion of new planting and other environmental improvements to offset the impacts

⁵¹⁷ <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/policy-and-practice/> (Accessed 1st October 2020).

⁵¹⁸ The National Forest Company. *The Strategy 2004- 2014*. pp: 96- 101.

⁵¹⁹ Available here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69412/pb10589-securing-the-future-050307.pdf (Accessed 1st October 2020).

of major infrastructure projects. Sustainable transport was recognised as critical for tourism as the sustainability of the Forest itself could be compromised by increasing numbers, therefore an integrated Forest-wide transport strategy was viewed as a vital requirement.⁵²⁰ The Sustainable Development Report of 2007 reviewed a number of indicators as to the success or otherwise of the Forest at that point but the transport strategy was not one of those, presumably the actions had yet to be put in place or to have had a measurable effect, certainly one of the actions that received significant attention at the time, the reinstatement of the Forest Line or Ivanhoe Line as it came to be known, as a passenger route had not yet come to pass.

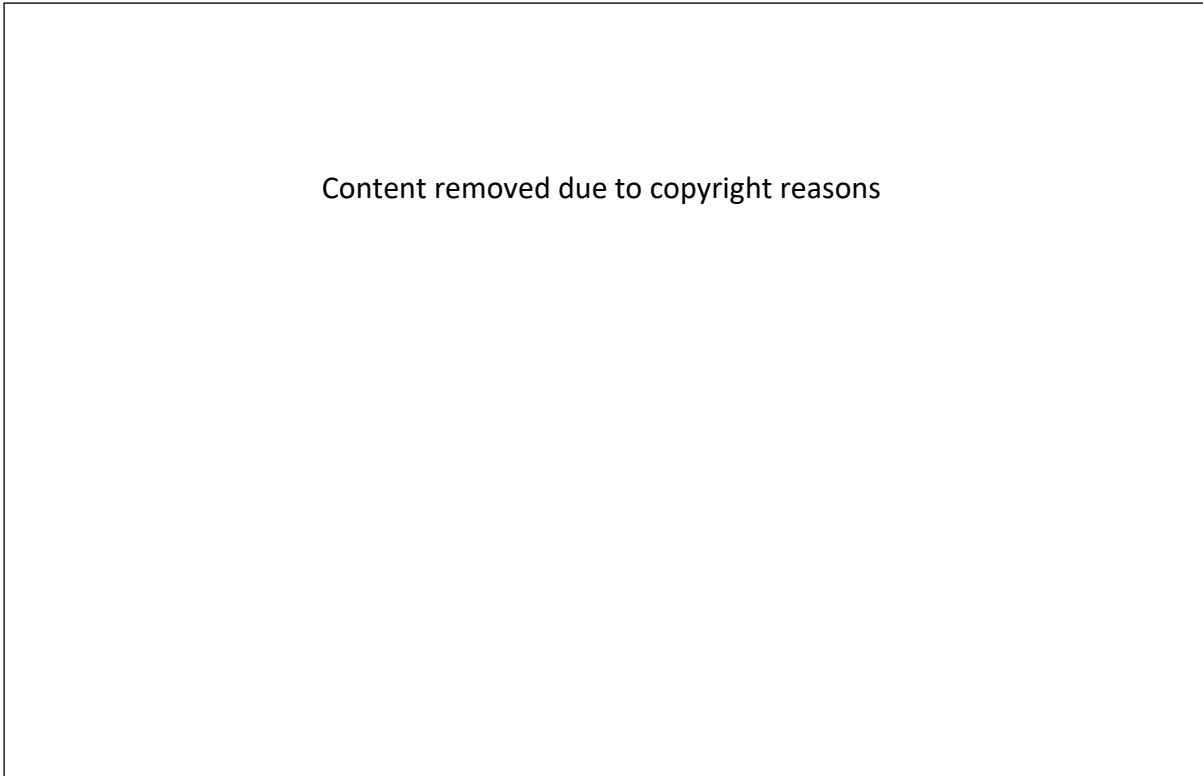


Figure 59. The *Ivanhoe Line* as envisaged in the Submission to the Countryside Commission in February 1990. (The black line with black circles indicating current or potential sites for stations). See note 2, p:13 of the Submission document.

The February 1990 submission document by the Needwood/ Charnwood partnership to the Countryside Commission covered a number of subjects, one of which included a section on transport and access to the proposed forest. After a preamble and discussion of the suitability of the proposed location due to the proximity of several motorways the document stated that: 'The heart of the Forest area is well placed for the development of recreation and tourist initiatives and accessibility will be improved still further by the joint Leicestershire County Council/ Derbyshire County Council/ British Rail proposal to re-open passenger rail services between Loughborough, Leicester, Burton on Trent and Derby via Coalville. There is also a joint initiative between Derbyshire and Staffordshire County Councils to re-open Tutbury Station. The area of search being highly accessible, is therefore a potential prime location for

⁵²⁰ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest: An Exemplar of Sustainable Development*. Moira 2007 p: 4.

visitors, locally, regionally and nationally'.⁵²¹ The submission focussed on the transport and movement of people into the Forest through tourism and visitors; what it did not foresee was the scale of development of the Forest as a home for people commuting from to go to work and the expansion of dormitory villages and urban commuter-belt housing discussed in chapter 4. Perhaps that is partially understandable through the lens of how the heart of the Forest area appeared at the time. Although the collieries were then either closed or closing imminently, the area had not shaken off its industrialised aspect with a scarred and broken appearance to the landscape, alongside industrial villages grey from clay deposits and rumbling with coal lorries. Indeed, it was more than a perception, it was a living reality, and it would have taken an extraordinary vision to imagine that only thirty years on it would become such a desirable area to live in and commute from. As noted above in chapter 4, much of the growth in housing development in the towns and villages across the Forest has been in incomers to the area wishing to live in the National Forest but then commuting to Derby, Nottingham, Leicester and the towns and cities of the West Midlands on a daily basis. The social, economic, environmental and regenerative aspects of the Forest had yet to come into play in 1990, thirty years on the industrial past is almost lost. The increase in commuters using railways is projected to rise nationally, with an increase in passenger demand forecast to rise by 60% between 2018 and 2050.⁵²² Reopening the Ivanhoe line to passenger traffic would surely help to increase this number further.

The Ivanhoe Line is currently the subject of a sustained campaign for its reopening. Conducted by the Campaign for the Reopening of the Ivanhoe Line (CRIL) and supported by county and district councillors from across the political spectrum and across the three counties of the National Forest, the campaign opened in 2019 and has so far successfully secured £50,000 in funding from the three county councils for the procurement of a feasibility study into the viability of reopening the route to passenger traffic.⁵²³

⁵²¹ Document produced jointly by Derbyshire County Council, Leicestershire County Council and Staffordshire County Council. *A New National Forest in the Midlands. The Needwood Forest North West Leicestershire Charnwood Forest Submission to the Countryside Commission*. Prepared by the three County Councils with the support of Charnwood Borough Council, East Staffordshire Borough Council, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, Lichfield District Council, North Warwickshire Borough Council, North West Leicestershire District Council, South Derbyshire District Council and Tamworth Borough Council. Designed by Leicestershire County Council, February 1990.p:7.

⁵²²https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/87864/2/decarbonising-transport-setting-the-challenge.pdf p:27 item 2.41 (Accessed 13th July 2020)

⁵²³ <https://ivanhoeline.org> (Accessed 21st March 2020).

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Figure 60. CRIL online survey heatmap showing support for the reopening of the Ivanhoe Line to passengers. See note 524 below.

An online survey conducted by CRIL with the results regularly updated on their website demonstrates that support for the reopening of the Ivanhoe Line as a passenger is strong all across the forest and beyond, into Leicester.⁵²⁴ This seems to demonstrate that a future passenger service would be used for commuting to and from the city for employment as well as for leisure purposes. The failure to reopen the line so far has been due largely to the costs of upgrading rail infrastructure, of developing and building stations and associated car parking facilities, and concern over lack of demand.⁵²⁵ Costs were reported in 2016 to be up to £175 million and a further £4 million per annum to run.⁵²⁶ Various proposals to re-open the line have been in and out of vogue since the early 1990s, with the most recent being in 2009 and again in 2016, in both of which CRIL noticed omissions, with the 2016 report overlooking future housing development and the use of an out of date demand model. The latest campaign seems to have developed real traction. In December 2019 the CRIL campaign successfully attracted funding of up to £60,000 from ‘multiple local County and District Councils for a new feasibility report through a rail consultant’.⁵²⁷ This was quickly followed by the proposal winning the first-round bidding through Central Government’s ‘Restoring Your

⁵²⁴ <https://ivanhoeline.org/information/survey/> (Accessed 21st March 2020).

⁵²⁵ Pers. Comm. Telephone conversation with Geoff Bushell, Chair of the Campaign to Reopen the Ivanhoe Line, 3rd July 2020. A meeting in person was not possible due to the Coronavirus outbreak. Geoff died of COVID-19 on Saturday 7th November and will be sorely missed by CRIL and others working to that end.

⁵²⁶ <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/local-news/leicester-burton-ivanhoe-railway-line-4161149> (Accessed 7th July 2020).

⁵²⁷ <https://ivanhoeline.org/category/political/> (Accessed 3rd July 2020).

Railway Ideas Fund' in which the CRIL campaign progressed from sixty round one entrants to the ten in round two, attracting further funding of £50,000 to develop the proposal.⁵²⁸

The 2007 Sustainable Development report was well received by the government minister for Biodiversity, Landscape and Rural Affairs, commenting that the NFC's Sustainable Development Action Plan aligned with the *Securing the Future* 2005 sustainable development commitment and policy of the UK Government, Government Departments and Executive Agencies.⁵²⁹ The five principles of *Securing the Future* were; living within environmental limits, achieving a sustainable economy, ensuring a strong, healthy and just society, using sound science responsibly and promoting good governance.⁵³⁰ As we shall see in the final chapter, these principles are still fundamental concepts in the NFC's commitment to the Forest for the future.⁵³¹

The planting targets that had dogged the early years of the Forest remained difficult to achieve. The target had been reduced from 500 hectares to 450 hectares in the year 2003-2004, reduced again the following year to 350-400 hectares and then increased the year prior to Churchill's appointment to 440-475 hectares. There had been an political uncertainty in the air in the previous years, the country having been at war in the Middle East since 2003, which had contributed to a fall in take-up of the Tender Scheme amongst landowners.⁵³² This was alongside an increase in land prices, and the declared target had again been missed in the 2005- 2006 reporting year (413 hectares of woodland planted) although this was an improvement on the previous year, which had seen the lowest conversion to woodland since the NFC's establishment and that itself set against a run of decreasing afforestation across the Forest zone.⁵³³ A new, revised Tender Scheme had been introduced, including a One Acre Woods scheme targeted at encouraging owners of smaller pockets of land to become involved in woodland plantation. Several good but expensive schemes were declined by the NFC Board under the remit of guaranteeing value for public money as they were considered too expensive, resulting in just 14 new schemes being selected and only 227 hectares created under the new scheme, although other new plantation meant the total target was within clutching distance. The major thrust of the new Tender Scheme was an extended contract period of 30 years and the clarification of requirements for parkland creation.⁵³⁴ The money not spent on the more expensive of the proposed schemes was transferred to the land acquisition budget and the NFC purchased some 118 hectares of land that year, then the highest annual achievement since the Company was established, although the resale and disposal of 81 hectares of that land was planned for the following financial year.⁵³⁵

⁵²⁸https://www.nwleics.gov.uk/news/2020/05/24/ivanhoe_line_announcement_a_major_boost_for_north_west_leicestershire (Accessed 7th July 2020).

⁵²⁹ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest: An Exemplar of Sustainable Development*. Moira 2007, Minister's Foreword.

⁵³⁰ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest: An Exemplar of Sustainable Development*. Moira 2007 p:51.

⁵³¹ The National Forest Company: *Our 25 Year Vision for the National Forest: a greenprint for the nation*. Moira 2019.

⁵³² The National Forest Company. *Annual Report 2003- 2004*. Moira 2004 pp: 4-5. See: *Growth and enrichment of the amenity of the Forest (Key Target 1)*.

⁵³³ The National Forest Company. *Annual Report and Accounts 2005- 2006*. Moira 2006 pp: 5-6 and see also p: 32.

⁵³⁴ The National Forest Company. *Annual Report and Accounts 2005- 2006*. pp: 5-6 and p: 18 paragraph 7.

⁵³⁵ The National Forest Company. *Annual Report and Accounts 2005- 2006*. pp: 18- 20.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given Churchill's background in urban regeneration and partnership working, there was a return to the focus on urban forestry too. Churchill wanted to re-state the NFC's commitment to the four towns in the Forest and agree actions with local authorities, partnerships with County and District Councils having been recognised as critical to the development of the Forest and consultation with these authorities began with a view to developing an urban strategy for each of the four main towns.⁵³⁶

The partnership with the Forestry Commission continued too, with a new Concordat to run from 2005-2008 having been signed and a new action plan agreed between the two. The Forestry Commission part-funded the Tender Scheme, owned significant sites within the Forest and partnership was considered vital. Formal partnerships with the Woodland Trust and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (now The Conservation Volunteers, TCV) were also viewed as significant.⁵³⁷ The heritage project *LANDshapes* completed at the end of 2006, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and besides supporting several community groups investigating their history and heritage, and the publication of a book *The National Forest- Heritage in the Making*, it had also supported the creation of six noon- columns by international landscape artist David Nash.⁵³⁸ These columns were intended to capture the spirit of each of the six distinct landscapes of the Forest and are aligned on the summer and winter solstices. At the time of writing, they require attention as some of them have been allowed not only to age as the artist intended, but in some cases to start to deteriorate quite badly.



Figure 61. Author's copy of Parry's book, published by the NFC and funded through the *LANDshapes* project, 2006. Author's photograph.

⁵³⁶ The National Forest Company. *Annual Report and Accounts 2005- 2006*. p:18 paragraph 8.

⁵³⁷ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest. Annual Report and Accounts 2005- 2006*. p:7.

⁵³⁸ Parry, J. *The National Forest: Heritage in the Making*. The National Forest Company, Moira 2006. The National Forest Company. *The National Forest. Annual Report and Accounts 2006- 2007* Moira p: 6.

A mid-point review of the Strategy was planned, and between June and September 2008 a consultation document was produced to determine the next steps not in the principles of the Strategy itself but to understand how best to continue with its implementation. By 2008 it was considered by the NFC that enough had changed both in terms of woodland creation and with the recognition of the coming of age of the Forest, and its focus as an exemplar of sustainable development, that comments and input from partners and individuals were sought, especially over the thorny problem of planting targets. The aims of the review were to establish how the Forest's creation to 2014 would be undertaken; to agree with partners any new approaches to implementing the Strategy and to secure their participation, and to ensure effective governance and working arrangements to underpin the agreed activity to 2014.⁵³⁹

Four questions were asked:

1. *How much planting should we aim to do in a year?*

This question directly addressed the targets problem; the 2004-2014 strategy assumed a planting rate of 400-500 hectares per annum and Churchill knew this was now unachievable. The consultation suggests a new target of 200-250 hectares per annum.

2. *What means can and should we use to achieve further large- scale change in the landscape?*

The suggestion here was that a balance of opportunistic planting and a more selective focus on certain areas would be the aim. These types of selective areas are not stated but the NFC was becoming increasingly focussed on a revised approach to landscape change. It was instead refocussing on the original view of creating resilient and connected habitats and a move away from purely numbers of trees and unattainable planting targets, to a sustainable and variegated landscape supporting a wide range of wildlife and people. This had been stated in the early plans for the Forest but sight of it had been, if not exactly lost, then overlooked in the focus on land conversion targets.

3. *How do we maintain and improve the quality of The National Forest?*

Addressing the management of the (then) 5,000 hectares of new woodlands was the main thrust of this question and views were sought on all aspects of this, from tree health to benefits for wildlife and the general public. This again demonstrates that under Churchill the company would refocus on resilience and sustainability, creating managed multi-purpose woodland rather than trees at any cost.

4. *What organisational and funding arrangements will best support the creation of the Forest to 2014 and beyond?*

The Company had led the charge- how should they continue it? Although not stated in the consultation document, the Company had been planned from the outset by Bell, the Development Team and the Countryside Commission to eventually take on charitable status. Here, though charitable status is not mentioned, the NFC were

⁵³⁹ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest to 2014: Consultation June- September 2008*. Moira 2008.

asking for views on potential organisational changes or changes to funding mechanisms.

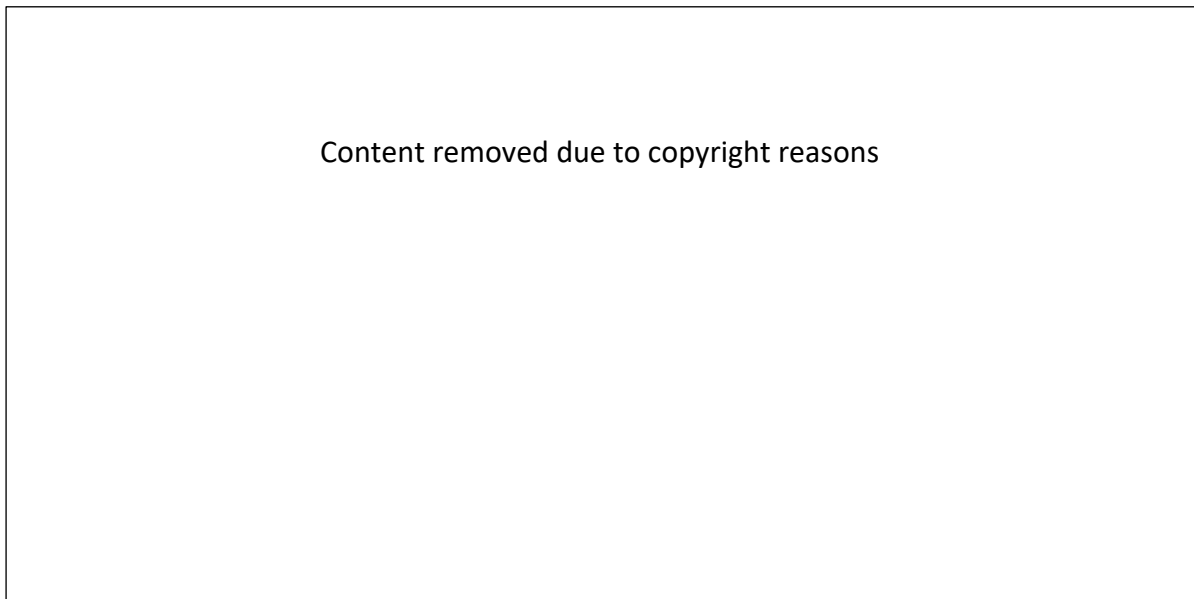


Figure 62. The Consultation document 2008. Author's photograph

Views were also sought on: growth, development and planning; community involvement and consultation; climate change; sustainable tourism; sustainable transport; and woodland species choice, although no space was made directly available in the response section for these. The consultation document made clear that certain subjects would not be reviewed, and these were that no change to the ultimate aim of 30% woodland cover would be countenanced; and no consideration would be given, or discussion entered into, relating to the National Forest boundary (a subject that is discussed in the concluding chapter).

Eventually, reduced targets were adopted, and these varied from year to year but the heady days of land conversion to forestry of over four or even five hundred hectares per annum were distant memories. In the 2016-2017 annual report, the exceeding of the target of 65-85 hectares of new forest habitat creation by planting 102 hectares was trumpeted as a success, in the early days it would have been considered a dismal failure. Such is the reality of the times, and a pragmatic recognition of possibilities must needs be considered and by the 2018-2019 annual report an increase to 254 hectares was announced as a 'particularly successful year' (target not stated).⁵⁴⁰ To have achieved the total of 30 per cent tree cover in 25 years would have meant achieving just over 600 hectares of new woodland planting per annum for every one of those years. The actual average increase is around 300 hectares per annum and the Forest will thus take around 50 years to plant, therefore at the time of writing it is at the halfway stage in the planting cycle.⁵⁴¹ Targets ought not to be readily achievable,

⁵⁴⁰ The National Forest Company. *Annual Report and Accounts 2018- 2019*. Moira 2019 p: 7.

⁵⁴¹ The totals given are approximations and for illustrative purposes only. Original tree cover across the 196 – 200 square miles of the Forest area was 6% and the use of the original figure of 196 sq.m. was taken for the calculation, using 200 sq.m. makes very little difference. Current cover is 21%, therefore the increase is circa 15% of the area. The variables are whether the increase is considered only for the 25 years of the NFC's existence or if the years of planting under the Development team are included. A longer time period reduces the average increase in tree cover per annum.

and if easily exceeded with no discernible or unusual reason then they are evidently too low. By 2021 the Forest was under tree cover of 21 per cent and the original target of 30 per cent tree cover has still clearly not been met; the reasons for not yet achieving what was initially one of the most important aspirations require further investigation and understanding by the NFC and a clear plan to achieve the final target.

The rationale must have at least some overly optimistic land conversion rate predictions that date to the beginning of the Forest, at least as early as the Development Team. The easy targets of the early years, the regeneration of former coal and clay sites had given quite large-scale land conversion rates but of course as sites become planted, future sites become increasingly scarce. It is not inconceivable that the team, and possibly the Countryside Commission, wished to convince ministers that the Forest was achievable in a shorter number of years than the actuality. It may be that they believed that they could achieve 500 hectares per annum indefinitely and the setting of aggressive but achievable targets would focus the team and its successors; perhaps they believed that there would be a more rapid and enthusiastic uptake of the Tender Scheme by landowners eager to diversify than was the case. Standing against this, of course, is the fact that both Bell and Swarbrick were formerly part of the Country Landowners Association and would certainly have known that landowners, and farmers especially, know how to make a living from growing crops and rearing animals and are not foresters or forestry specialists. To earn money from a crop that in the main takes a generation or more to grow takes something of a leap of faith (hence the decade-long support from the original tender scheme), continuing with what one knows is the easier option. Having both of them on the team would surely have given some level of confidence to CLA members but perhaps not enough confidence to convince enough landowners. A tipping point of landowners diversifying and converting would help to weigh the scales in their favour and persuade some, but not all. The appointment of a team member solely focussed on meeting farmers and convincing them of the possibilities of adopting forestry as a method of earning money suggests that if they had been of the overly optimistic bent of mind in the beginning, they were rapidly disabused of that notion. In addition and standing against the idea that the development team colluded to convince ministers that greater land conversion rates could be achieved than was practicable is Bell's near constant warnings that the targets were too high to be achievable in the medium and long term, which she was doing since at least 1992. The original plan to afforest some 30 per cent of the area at a planting rate of circa 500 hectares per annum proved to be as unrealistic as Bell and her successors argued, and the reality is that under constraints that were sometimes unforeseen and certainly outside the control and remit of the NFC, the Forest had achieved by 2019 very significant tree cover and continues to enable further planting through the variety of means at its disposal.⁵⁴²

Set against the constant political debate over cost effectiveness and target setting was the reality of what seemed to be positive change, both to the landscape and in social mobility, especially in the post-industrial heart of the forest, and the NFC, along with their partners the Forestry Commission, sought to understand this and find ways of publicising and recognising it. A decade after the formation of the NFC, 2006 saw the publication of *Growing Places*, a

⁵⁴² The National Forest Company. *Annual Report and Accounts 2018- 2019*. p: 7

five-month long study into social change in the National Forest.⁵⁴³ The conclusions on sustainable development reached similar conclusions to those in the following year's (2007) *Exemplar of Sustainable Development* study, looking at the ways in which forested places, in this case the National Forest, act as 'engines' for sustainable development. *Growing Places* recognised the significant achievement of growing communities, emerging forest identities based on positive meanings and attitudes, strong evidence of linkages between landscape change and a developing Forest sociality, with the Forest providing the setting for the reconfiguration of social capital. Of especial interest to the long planned for creation of a Forest identity was the understanding of the complexities of relationships between changing physical and social environments and the physical, visual and mental access to the Forest. The study commented positively on 'the way in which mental access points to the controlled temporal mobility of the Forest, with the implication that the NFC's careful balancing of a forward-looking vision with efforts to preserve the area's heritage and history is broadly working'.⁵⁴⁴ The study also commended the National Forest as a 'catalyst for the production of social capital within networks of cooperation between economic and political actors [displaying] a spirit of open, generalised reciprocity', and indicated that *the Forest itself* helped generate these new forms of connectedness, although they avoid discussing the non-human agency of trees, whether individually or collectively.⁵⁴⁵

The authors went on to argue that the new forms of social capital and the involvement of grass-roots groups, local organisations and networks was producing new alternatives to top-down conventional approaches to environmental and heritage conservation, pointing to the possibility of high incidences of social capital allowing the creation and conservation of what they term 'new nature' and 'new heritage'. Certainly, the creation or re-creation of new traditions such as Apple Days and Wassailing events, the establishment of health walking groups, natural history groups and heritage groups focussed on the rapidly disappearing recent industrial past seems to support Morris and Urry's conclusions. That the Forest itself becomes an active participant in the creation of new forms of connectedness concurs with Jones' and Cloke's ideas on the relationship between nature and culture, with non-human entities and actors taking if not centre stage, then equal roles as agents of change.⁵⁴⁶ (See chapter 6)

The notion of the issue of access through the different 'modes of access' addressed in *Growing Places* (physical, visual and temporal) is an interesting one and connects to how closely new identities within the Forest were then developing and are continuing to develop. The landscapes of the physical and visual Forest give way to the temporal Forest and the authors give the example of this mental access to the Forest through the acts of remembering of the area's industrial past and the imagining of a potential future suggested by young trees and newly planted sites.⁵⁴⁷ Beyond this example the study is relatively silent though, which is unfortunate; mental access can pass over or through the barbed wire and keep out signs of the privileged few to create a once-and-future Forest, one where access is not limited to

⁵⁴³ Morris, J., & Urry, J. *Growing Places: A study of social change in the National Forest*. Forest Research, Farnham 2006.

⁵⁴⁴ Morris & Urry, *Growing Places* p: 40.

⁵⁴⁵ Morris & Urry, *Growing Places* p: 41.

⁵⁴⁶ Jones, O., and Cloke, P. *Tree Cultures: The Place of Trees and Trees in Their Place*. Berg, Oxford 2002

⁵⁴⁷ Morris & Urry, *Growing Places* pp: 33- 34.

public rights of way and permissive footpaths but towards the right to roam and free access for all that the Ramblers Association pushed for in the 1990 consultation. A melange of all three approaches at once creates a stronger connection: the physicality of being in the space alongside the merging of all the senses, not just visual, in *place*, with a temporal connection thus creates the sense of being in the moment, truly connecting with a deeper, fundamental reality. The breath of the wind, the touch of rain on skin, the sight of the different trees with their seemingly infinite shades of the fresh greens of spring green, the deep colours of summer or the rich hues of autumnal reds and yellows under dappled sunlight warm on the skin (or perhaps even more magically by starlight or moonlight), their branches moving to the sound of the rustling leaves; the scurry of rabbit, stoat, fox and badger, the cry of buzzard, raven or jay, the heavy musk-scent of deer, the hum of bees and dragonflies; these all combine to create a past, present and future forest, a forest that can be lived experientially in the moment, or revisited later from afar, temporally and in the memory. Although not explicitly stated, Morris and Urry seem to have been at least tentatively feeling their way in that direction.

The difficulties with feelings of a Forest identity, its creation and the connectedness and the differences in those relationships between urban and rural areas is considered further in chapter 6 but even though recommended by their 2006 study, in 2020 it still requires continued attention and development if the Forest is to become truly connected across its 200 square mile area. This identity creation is also tied to deprivation, social justice and mobility, the Forest economy and the ability of those from within and without the Forest to visit and access woodland places without the use of a car, creating an accessible Forest for the many rather than the privileged few.

From these documents, *The Strategy 2004-2014, Growing Places, the Exemplar of Sustainable Development* report of 2007, and through the express intent of an updated mid-point review through the *2008 Consultation* document, came *The National Forest Delivery Plan 2009-2014*. The *Delivery Plan* recognised that the consultation had highlighted the key challenges the NFC and its partners and stakeholders faced, and also recognised that the NFC continued with the involvement of local communities, this was considered 'vital to maintaining the current woodlands [and] developing the long-term quality of the Forest'.⁵⁴⁸ The consultation had identified new priorities since the 2004 Strategy had been published, and although the core ambition remained unchanged, the NFC also needed to adapt to changing policy context, which included the ongoing commitment to sustainable development, reviewing the contribution to how climate change was tackled and, since the Forest was now a growing reality, addressing the development of sustainable tourism. It was also recognised that the NFC could develop its role as a national exemplar of sustainability, and as a test bed for multi-purpose forestry.

The policy changes included DEFRA's Public Service Agreements, (PSAs) which were to 'secure a healthy natural environment for today and tomorrow' and to 'reduce the effects of dangerous climate change'. Alongside this was the recognition that English forestry policy was now focussed on creating woodland in the right places, with increased woodland

⁵⁴⁸ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Delivery Plan 2009-2014*. Moira 2009. See the Ministerial Foreword.

management and public engagement and understanding. These policies held a ‘remarkable synergy’ between national policy and the National Forest Company’s Delivery Plan: ‘a high-quality forested landscape with linked health, recreation and biodiversity benefits, alongside tourism attractions’ amid well- managed and diverse woodlands.⁵⁴⁹ PSAs themselves have an unusual history, they were introduced in 1998 at very short notice, unexpected and unplanned, and slowly developed into a tool for measuring the effectiveness of performance in government departments and the accountability of central government. DEFRA’s inclusion in the PSAs was new from 2007 and was seen as a substantial departure from the past, cross-cutting departmental boundaries (cross-cutting was the new phraseology of the day and is repeated in NFC literature from that period), and as DEFRA had never worked with the Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit (PMDU) before it was a significant change.⁵⁵⁰ That change was reflected in the operation of the NFC, meaning closer cross-departmental work, including with the Department for Communities and Local Government, and with the Department for Energy and Climate change.⁵⁵¹ More ‘choppy waters’ for Churchill to pilot the company through. The good news was that the consultation had revealed widespread support for a reduced planting target, agreement that there should be a balance of opportunistic planting and of selective focus (including a proactive approach to connecting woodland, an approach which came very much to the fore in later years), agreement that woodlands should come under good quality management, and widespread support for the leadership the NFC offered. There were also ideas for new partnerships and encouragement to keep consideration of the long- term future to the fore of forest plans.⁵⁵²

The nature of the National Forest is that it is a large scale, long term landscape change project and the responses of respondents seemed almost to remind the Company that whilst the short-termism of governments, government ministers and their departments might well detract from that goal, their focus needed to be on the original mission. The Delivery Plan appears almost to glow with encouragement and endorsement by the general public and public bodies, re-motivating, invigorating and energising the company, galvanising it to action. If the goal had been to stimulate a favourable public opinion, then the consultation could not have gone better. If anything, the results of the consultation are more like a successful referendum for an updated mandate to adapt and press forward. For example, nearly 1,000 responses to Citizens Panels across the three counties of the Forest were received and 86 per cent of respondents stated that the Forest had improved their local environment and that ‘the people of the National Forest have been delighted [with its] creation’, that a ‘deep sense of pride in the area is felt’ and that access to the woodland was ‘particularly valued’. A further 84 per cent of respondents rated the standard of key sites as good or very good, again encouraging for the NFC as quality of woodlands was a major theme of future planning.⁵⁵³ This ‘mandate’ would serve the company well through the difficult times that they had not yet foreseen coming over the next two years.

⁵⁴⁹ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Delivery Plan 2009- 2014*. pp: 11- 12.

⁵⁵⁰ <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/case%20study%20psas.pdf> (accessed 6th October 2020).

⁵⁵¹ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Delivery Plan 2009- 2014*. pp: 11- 12.

⁵⁵² The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Delivery Plan 2009- 2014*. p:7.

⁵⁵³ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Delivery Plan 2009- 2014*. pp: 12- 13.

Two quite new themes came out of the consultation and the PSAs, one relating to the European Landscape Convention (ELC) of 2002, also known as the Florence Convention, and the other to landscape sensitivity. The ELC was principally aimed at promoting landscape protection, management and planning, amongst other things legally recognising landscapes ‘as an essential part of people’s surroundings, an expression of the diversity of their shared cultural and natural heritage, and *a foundation of their identity*’ and ‘strong, forward- looking action to enhance, restore or create landscapes’.⁵⁵⁴ The ELC meshed particularly well with the work that the NFC had been doing since its inception, indeed since the days of the Development Team, and the focus on sustainable development also tied in; the Forest’s creation was seen as an exemplar of how the ELC could be implemented and the NFC produced an ELC action plan, the first in the UK.⁵⁵⁵

The issue of landscape sensitivity was addressed as there had been some negative commentary on the changing nature of the landscape. As trees were maturing (some stands were now approaching 20 years old), so views were being lost or change, and in some cases, people were beginning to feel hemmed in by trees. The Delivery Plan recognised that too much woodland could overburden certain landscapes, also noting the need to avoid excessive in-filling where a good balance of wooded and open landscapes were already present and that maintenance of characteristic views was deemed important, or at least worthy of consideration. The report goes on to point out that opportunities for the creation of new viewpoints and open ground or glades within some woodlands could arise and be taken advantage of through good site management.⁵⁵⁶ The NFC had a policy of respecting landscape features and planting with sensitivity to landscape in place already and this action or commitment confirmed and built on that. An attempt at countering future negative comments of this type was intended in the Delivery Plan. Action L7 (see page 21 of the Delivery Plan) was not always adhered to by the NFC though. For example, when the NFC purchased a large part of Cadborough Hill in 2010 the presentation and planting schedule drawn up by them maintained the excellent views west from the top of the hill, indeed, the plan enhanced the view in some ways by creating a walk around the hill to give the effect of walking through a wooded landscape, with a ‘reveal’ moment as the observer stepped out from the trees to the drama of the view across the forest canopy below and across the valley towards the ancient woodland of Grangewood and the Trent Valley beyond. Sadly, the plans were not followed accurately and the majority of the top of the hill was planted, the circular path through the trees never created and the spectacular views reduced to a position lower down; still very pleasant but with a much- reduced visual impact. Requests to adopt the original plan have so far fallen on deaf ears.⁵⁵⁷

The Delivery Plan contains a blueprint for delivering on a number of important topics that go beyond land acquisition and afforestation. Addressed in detail are all the concerns of the

⁵⁵⁴https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/236096/8413.pdf See especially article 2 and 5. Author’s italics. (Accessed 6th October 2020).

⁵⁵⁵ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Delivery Plan 2009- 2014*. pp: 20- 21.

⁵⁵⁶ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Delivery Plan 2009- 2014*. p: 20.

⁵⁵⁷ Pers Comm. Email correspondence with Matt Brocklehurst in 2010, 2011 and 2012, and later with Simon Greenhouse in 2013. To Mr Greenhouse’s credit, when approached about the issue a grass path was mown around the lower slope of the hill, although not to the original circular permissive access route as outlined in the presentation to Overseal Parish Council in 2010.

realities of large-scale landscape change, and with a strategy for implementation of each: Landscape, Biodiversity, Access, recreation and Sport, Historic Environment, Community Participation, Regeneration and Economy, Agriculture, Tourism, Mineral Workings, landfill sites and derelict land, Planning and development, Transport and traffic, Research and monitoring, and Cross-Cutting themes, and many of these had new actions, sometimes multiple ones. To meet these new, and sometimes very different targets, the company recognised that it had a difficult task to deliver, and addressed this by considering organisational and resourcing requirements, partnership working and its own role in prompting central government commitment and funding. The company intended to respond through an increased role as a national exemplar, actively pursue quality and efficiency, create new partnerships and funding, lay the foundations for long-term sustainability and continue its longstanding commitment to efficiency and value for money. These aspirations sound like very bold statements to make, but in addition the Delivery Plan lays out the ways in which each will be achieved. Despite the broadened agenda, there was no plan to dramatically increase the relatively small size of the NFC headcount and at no point in its history has the headcount risen above the equivalent of 25 full-time employees, and the focus remained on the company being an enabler through partnership working. Occasionally, the selective use of well-managed external capacity has been used, external contractors or specialists with the required skills have been utilised, as is normal for any company.⁵⁵⁸

One of the items that was quietly dropped from the planning for the Forest was that of developing a vernacular architectural style for new-build houses, an aspiration of the development of the Forest and a way to demonstrate, in a similar way to the road and place or settlement signage, alongside trees of course, that the traveller had arrived in a different place. Initial concepts for this seem to have been based around the honey-coloured vernacular buildings of East Leicestershire or the Cotswolds and the aspiration was that locally sourced timber would be incorporated into new developments of houses in a visible way. In the event this has not yet been achieved and it may not be possible to do so until the Forest reaches maturity, the Youth Hostel (built 2007-2008) in the heart of the Forest and used by visitors to Conkers had been scheduled to use locally sourced timber in its design but none was yet available and ultimately the timber was sourced elsewhere. Despite this, the YHA building won the RICS (Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors) Regional Award for Sustainability and went on to be entered into both the national and international competition.⁵⁵⁹

As the Forest matured and the NFC focus came around to increased woodland management, increasing numbers of volunteer groups were encouraged onto NFC, local authority and private land to help with thinning out plantations. These wood-fuel groups took active participation in woodland management, and continue to do so, with the members either creating wood piles as nature habitats or sharing out any cut timber to take home to store and season for fuel.

⁵⁵⁸ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Delivery Plan 2009- 2014*. pp: 48- 49.

⁵⁵⁹ The National Forest Company. *The National Forest Annual Report and Accounts 2007- 2008*. Moira 2008 p: 12.



Figure 63. New community woodland planted in 2001 and 2004. The walnut plantations are part of an internationally important research project to study the growth of the European and American walnut species. The rest of the woodland is native broadleaf. This innocuous sign, passed daily by walkers, belies the wider implications of the research; that the climate crisis is upon us and research into what trees will thrive in a climate with elevated temperatures has become vital to the future of the National Forest and wider forestry in the United Kingdom. Author's photograph ⁵⁶⁰

Other volunteer groups formed; an annual walking festival was initiated with volunteer-led walks, health walking groups formed alongside footpath volunteer groups who actively manage access to public rights of way. Despite the very difficult circumstances of the 2010-2011 reporting year, reorganisation within the NFC and tightly constrained budgetary requirements, a great deal of practical work was achieved. Notable amongst these were a National Forest Wood Fair, held in Charnwood and with over 6,000 visitors, delivery of the first year of the National Forest Sustainable Tourism Strategy, and in June 2011, following a delay due to harsh weather conditions the previous winter, the National Forest Cycling Centre opened. The cycle centre at former opencast mine site Hicks Lodge has gone on to become a significant tourism attraction in the National Forest and even the year after it opened an independent survey for the Forestry Commission, who own the 150- hectare site, revealed its popularity amongst visitors.⁵⁶¹ More than 20,000 people were engaged in 'positive, practical action in support of the Forest' in 2011 alone.⁵⁶² As her predecessor had done, Churchill found herself fighting a political battle as much as she was organising the creation of a Forest and communicating successes was key to survival. Given that DEFRA were focussed on

⁵⁶⁰ In this instance, the research area adjoins the Staunton Harold estate and is part of shared research planted and undertaken by the Forestry Commission. The site enjoys full public access: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/woods/the-national-forest-jaguar-lount-wood/> (Accessed 11th October 2020).

⁵⁶¹ www.forestresearch.gov.uk%2Fdocuments%2F3738%2FQOERosliston_and_HicksLodgeMarch2013.pdf&usg=AOvVaw12ToCf-chIBZSDhOLpZKJr (Accessed 7th October 2020).

⁵⁶² The National Forest Company. *National Forest Company Annual Report and Accounts 2010- 2011*. Moira 2011 p: 7.

Comprehensive Service Review outcomes (CSR), the research outcomes undertaken by the NFC were promoted as part of a shared learning programme and Churchill ensured that the National Forest was included in the European Landscape Convention material and that cross-party support remained high through good quality information, resulting in a strong outcome in the CSR.⁵⁶³

A revised and updated *Exemplar of Sustainable Development* was produced by the NFC in 2010 which showed a good performance on key indicators despite the severity of the global economic downturn. These included increased active community participation, increased educational visits to Rosliston Forestry Centre and Conkers Discovery Centre, improved access and mobility, improvement in environmental quality, improvements in inclusion (social justice) through higher involvement of socially excluded groups, and increased investment in the woodland economy, amongst other indicators.⁵⁶⁴ The 2010 report to the government by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (EFRA) into the National Forest was well received by government, the funding difficulties and the thoroughness of the NFC in delivering value for money was recognised: ‘we recognise that the National Forest Company is adept at bringing other non- government funding to help facilitate woodland creation and we expect them, to continue to focus efforts in this area’. The report went on to conclude that the Government had recognised that:

although a great deal has been achieved over the last 15 years[...] The National Forest Company working in partnership with all its delivery partners, inside and outside Government, is critical, and the National Forest Company is dedicated to maintaining these relationships to ensure the efficient continuation and completion of the creation of the forest, for local and national benefit.⁵⁶⁵

The National Forest had received a strong coverage in the press and media, including television during 2009 and this had contributed to a raised profile, itself no bad thing in the political arena. The ‘rare endorsement’ from EFRA and the government’s response was recognised and commented on as such by the Nicholls and Churchill in the 2010-2011 Annual Report,⁵⁶⁶ (it was Nicholls’ final year of her six- year tenure as chair of the Board of Directors and she was replaced by Catherine Graham-Harrison OBE). This was the result that the NFC had been working so hard towards, and even more encouragingly, in the 2010 updated report *Much More Than Trees 3: The Socio- Economic Impact of the National Forest* stated that ‘the general view is that The National Forest is well on course to *create a major step change for its area* and to build from what has clearly been a positive and promising start’.⁵⁶⁷ (Author’s

⁵⁶³ The National Forest Company. *National Forest Company Annual Report and Accounts 2010-2011*. p: 8.

⁵⁶⁴ The National Forest: An exemplar of Sustainable Development. 1st update: 2007-2010. Available here: <https://www.nationalforest.org/sites/default/files/components/downloads/files/2010%20Sustainable%20Development%20Update%20%281.56mb%29.pdf> (Accessed 7th October 2020).

⁵⁶⁵ The National Forest: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2009-2010 – Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee. Available here: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmenvfru/400/40004.htm#a2> (Accessed 7th October 2020).

⁵⁶⁶ National Forest Company. *The National Forest Company Annual Report and Accounts 2009-2010*. pp: 2- 4.

⁵⁶⁷ The full report is available here: <https://www.nationalforest.org/sites/default/files/components/downloads/files/Much%20More%20Than%20Trees%203%20Socio-Economic%20Impact%20of%20The%20National%20Forest%20%282.2mb%29.pdf> See p: 14 (Accessed 7th October 2020).

italics). These documents, along with the hard work of the team contributed to the survival of the NFC at an otherwise very difficult period. On the downside, financial constraints from other funding sources were felt as the recession began to bite and businesses which in happier times had provided sponsorship for planting had to withdraw their support.

With the immediate danger averted, the NFC could continue with the real job of creating a well-managed, multi-purpose forest that boosted the local economy through job creation and tourism. One of the long planned for goals had been the creation of a long-distance walking trail across the Forest. Delays in the creation of this had been due partly to the economic reasons outside the NFC's control, alongside which the initial funding source was deemed inappropriate. Other difficulties also presented themselves pertaining to matters of access along the desired route: although the majority of the path was intended to utilise already established public rights-of-way, the intention had been to also link in sites of importance for visitors or for the pleasing aesthetic of certain specific locales.⁵⁶⁸ This entailed the creation of a small number of permissive paths, and negotiation had failed in one or two instances meaning that alternative routes had to be planned and therefore delays were encountered. Access to the Forest for the general public was high on the agenda, with the aspiration of locals knowing that they had ready access to green space within easy reach, with increasing numbers of people using green corridors to access the wider Forest; a long-distance walking route was the obvious next step.

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The National Forest Way long-distance path was opened in 2014, after five years of development and planning, the result of many hours of work by the NFC and volunteers who had cleared overgrown paths, repaired stiles, constructed gates and installed way markers along its 75-mile length. The Way connects the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire with Beacon Hill in Charnwood, Leicestershire, calling along the way at many forestry and heritage sites and largely avoiding built- up areas. It was the inspiration for a music CD in

⁵⁶⁸ National Forest Company. *The National Forest Company Annual Report and Accounts 2010- 2011* p: 6.

⁵⁶⁹ National Forest Company. *The National Forest Company Annual Report and Accounts 2011- 2012*. Moira 2012 p: 11.

2016, when a collaboration of local, national and international artists combined to create *Wayfarers All*, an album of songs inspired by the route itself and the mythology, history and folklore across the Forest. The *National Forest Way* is not the least of the NFC's many successes and has come to be fondly regarded by locals and tourists alike.⁵⁷⁰

There were new battles to be fought and concerns to be addressed. The year 2011-2012 had seen the reduced staff NFC working with and relying on partners; previous developments in the Heart of the Forest area had gone well, working with the National Forest Charitable Trust and the Heart of the Forest Forum (amongst many others) had proved successful with the Trust delivering the Youth Hostel, Caravanning and Camping site and the Conkers circuit supported by the NFC and funding from East Midlands Development Agency. At that time the NFC was seen to have a specific task to complete, i.e., the creation of the National Forest and there was an expectation that NFC would have a limited life.⁵⁷¹

There was a renewed focus on quality of Forest through good management practice, and the programme of research that the NFC had already embarked on became important as tree disease began to be reported. Phytophthora, a microscopic fungus-like organism caused large numbers of tree deaths, especially in larch trees, which are particularly susceptible and are planted in large numbers as a crop tree, and the diversification away from local provenance seed that the NFC had been researching with partners now seemed ever-more important. The effects of phytophthora on the National Forest would not be devastating as larch is not grown in abundance but the next wave of tree disease, chalara, or ash dieback has already begun to attack the Forest. Ash dieback (ADB) was introduced to Europe from Asia around 1990 and has since devastated European ash. It was first reported in the UK in 2012, in Kent, and rapidly spread north, the first instances in the National Forest reported the following year, although recent studies have suggested that ADB may have been in the UK since at least the late 1990s.⁵⁷² A ban on imported ash from the continent was introduced in 2012 but was much too late to have any effect whatsoever, the UK had been importing thousands of ash plants every year until that point and the disease was already widely spread. It is likely to destroy up to 80 per cent of British ash trees and will likely 'have a devastating effect on the National Forest, the ash being a real midlands tree'.⁵⁷³ The discovery on March 7th 2012 of ADB from across the English Channel in a batch of saplings from an infected Dutch nursery prompted swift action and the consignment, along with 100,000 saplings already delivered by that same supplier were destroyed over the summer but nationwide inspections revealed in October 2012 that ADB was already prevalent in mature ash trees in East Anglia. It was

⁵⁷⁰ See here for example: <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2017/apr/12/walking-national-forest-way-derbyshire-leicestershire-staffordshire> (Accessed 8th October 2020), and here: <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/news/walk-magazine/current-issue/2014/may/summer-2014/exploring-the-national-forest-way.aspx> (Accessed 8th October 2020).

⁵⁷¹ Pers. Comm. Series of email exchanges with Mike Ballantyne, Director of the National Forest Charitable Trust between June and September 2020, as we deemed the COVID-19 outbreak making meeting in person too risky.

⁵⁷² Wylder, B., Biddle, M., King, K., Baden, R. & Webber, J. Evidence from mortality dating of *Fraxinus excelsior* indicates ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) was active in England in 2004–2005. *Forestry* **91**, 434–443 (2018).

⁵⁷³ <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/tree-pests-and-diseases/key-tree-pests-and-diseases/ash-dieback/> Accessed 8th October 2020. Pers. com. Conversation and email exchange with Sophie Churchill, emails dated 5th & 6th May 2014.

already too late for the vast majority of Britain's ash trees.⁵⁷⁴ Ash constitutes nearly six per cent of British trees, and with around 100,000,000 trees is the third most abundant tree species in the UK. ADB is expected to destroy the vast majority of these at terrible cost to the countryside and with an estimated financial cost of some £15 billion to the British economy. Recent work at the University of Warwick seems to have 'identified a group of chemicals present in ash leaves which could be used as biomarkers to look for susceptibility or resistance to ADB' so it is possible that ADB resistant trees may be bred to replant the countryside with but 'the same chemicals are used by trees to deter herbivorous insects, so selective breeding for ADB resistance could have the unintended consequence of leaving the UK ash population open to attack by invading pests'.⁵⁷⁵ With the next wave of ash-killing insects already crossing Asian Russia it seems that the native ash is likely to go the same way as the elm. The Emerald ash borer, a herbivorous beetle, has destroyed millions of trees of native ash species in North America and has currently spread into European Russia and Ukraine and is likely to become a major pest in Europe within the next 20 years.⁵⁷⁶ Acute Oak Decline has been observed since the late 20th Century and is a phenomenon that is a symptom of the climate crisis. Oak trees in the UK are 'declining at an unprecedented rate due to drought, flooding, pollution, pests and diseases'.⁵⁷⁷ There is no obvious solution to remedy the effects of these diseases beyond planning to plant other species within the Forest and nationally, either with disease-resistant capabilities, or non-natives that are well adapted to the effects of climate change.

Budget reductions again in 2013 forced the NFC into focussing on increasing contributions from the private sector. The new Common Agricultural Policy was anticipated to bring new grant mechanisms and the government's Grown in Britain programme was aimed encouraging the private sector further in forestry.⁵⁷⁸ *Grown in Britain* was an initiative created in response to the government's reversal of its disastrous attempt to privatise public forestry and was welcomed by the government following the recommendation by the Independent Panel on Forestry in 2012. It included a new framework for some thirty companies to offset their carbon reporting.⁵⁷⁹ The National Forest had been cited both in the Independent Panel on Forestry's report, commenting positively on its success in bringing woodland closer to communities, and in the Government's response, with positive remarks on the rate of the Forest's creation and the move towards systematic woodland management.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁴ Report of the Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs Committee: Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity. Written Evidence. 2012. Available here: <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/commons-committees/environment-food-rural-affairs/TREconsolifinal3.pdf> (Accessed 8th October 2020).

⁵⁷⁵ https://warwick.ac.uk/newsandevents/pressreleases/chemical_clues_in (Accessed 19th November 2020)

⁵⁷⁶ Orlova-Bienkowskaja, M. J. *et al.* Current range of *Agrilus planipennis* Fairmaire, an alien pest of ash trees, in European Russia and Ukraine. *Ann. For. Sci.* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13595-020-0930-z> (2020).

⁵⁷⁷ <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/tree-pests-and-diseases/key-tree-pests-and-diseases/acute-oak-decline/> (Accessed 8th October 2020).

⁵⁷⁸ National Forest Company. *The National Forest Company Annual Report and Accounts 2013- 2014*. Moira 2014 p: 4.

⁵⁷⁹ Bonfield, R. *Grown in Britain: Creating a Sustainable Future for Our Woodlands and Forests*. PDF of the original report available here: https://www.bre.co.uk/filelibrary/pdf/GiB_Final_Report_10.15_11Oct13.pdf See also: <https://www.charteredforesters.org/2013/10/grown-in-britain-announce-a-way-forward-for-uk-forests-and-woodland/> (Accessed 8th October 2020).

⁵⁸⁰ National Forest Company. *The National Forest Company Annual Report and Accounts 2012- 2013*. Moira 2013 p: 8.

The report of DEFRA for the Triennial Review of 2013 contained the interesting possibility of merging the NFC with the National Forest Charitable Trust (NFCT) and reported that the NFC had undertaken work on the detailed legal, financial and other implications of that possibility, with a merged body taking on charitable status. The Triennial Reviews had been initiated by the Cabinet Office in April 2011 to challenge the requirement for all NDPBs to continue operations and to review the governance arrangements of those that survived the reviews. That the NFC would work towards attaining charitable status had been a consideration for many years, but the Triennial Review stated clearly and boldly that ‘the conclusion of the Review is that the functions of the NFC are still necessary [...] and that the NFC should remain a Non-Departmental Government Body’ and furthermore that ‘the NFC should work towards independence from Government by 2024’. The Triennial Review instructed the NFC to include a roadmap for a staged progression for independence from government by 2024 in the Strategy 2014-2024, planned for completion in the summer of 2014.⁵⁸¹ This was not entirely news to the NFC of course, and the long-anticipated adoption of charitable status began to be planned for. The potential merge between the NFC and the Trust had in fact been under discussion between the two organisations for some considerable time. Under the Chairmanship of Dinah Nicholls, the NFC began to think about the longer-term future and the two began discussions on integrating their organisations. In 2010 a Memorandum of Understanding between the Trust and NFC was signed. This was supported by a series of protocols defining how the organisations would work together and during these discussions the NFC persuaded the Trust to change its name from *Heart of the National Forest Foundation* to its current name. These discussions on integration continued in 2011 under the NFC Chairmanship of Catherine Graham-Harrison and it was decided at that time that, whilst it made sense for the two organisations to merge, it was something that would be easier to do once the NFC was no longer a NDPB funded by the Government.⁵⁸²

In 2014 Churchill decided that she needed to move on to new and different challenges and committed herself to a life change which would require seeking a replacement CEO to lead the company forward beyond the end of the year.⁵⁸³ The 2014-2024 strategy is a short document (5 pages in total, radically shorter than the 106 pages inherited by Churchill in the 2004-2014 Strategy), without overly elaborate detail. This brevity was quite deliberate, reflecting Churchill’s decision to allow the incoming Chief Executive a broad sweep and not committing or over committing that person to a series of actions that may not reflect the Forest’s requirements over the forthcoming decade;⁵⁸⁴ the *Consultation* of 2008 had, after all,

⁵⁸¹ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. *Triennial Review of the National Forest Company*. See Executive Summary and Summary of Conclusions, pp: 1- 3. Available here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/260307/pb14051-nfc-triennial-rev-2013.pdf (Accessed 8th October 2020).

⁵⁸² Pers. Comm. Series of email exchanges with Mike Ballantyne, Director of the National Forest Charitable Trust between June and September 2020, as we deemed the COVID-19 outbreak making meeting in person too risky.

⁵⁸³ In an article in *Civil Service World* magazine, she stated that ‘One morning I decided that I shouldn’t still be using the same Ladies’ in a year’s time. Definitely.’ The article hints at Churchill’s frustration with ministerial inaction and governmental short-termed vision, and she speaks of becoming depleted and of the tiring nature of the work. *Civil Service World* January 2015. Article available online here: <https://www.civilserviceworld.com/news/article/build-your-skills-sophie-churchill> (Accessed 7th October 2020).

⁵⁸⁴ Pers. Comm. Email exchange with Carol Rowntree-Jones, Media Relations Officer at the NFC 9th- 13th October 2020.

realigned the Company's priorities significantly and Churchill must surely have been aware that she could not predict or foresee future challenges, just as Bell could not have possibly been able to predict a global recession and other dramatic events part way through the 2004-2014 Strategy. This compact new Strategy demonstrates the concise brevity and pointed succinctness, allied with a friendly and yet pragmatic, bold and direct clarity that characterises Churchill's management style. Although slight in build, her presence belies her stature, and she had steered the Company through perhaps its most challenging period with grace and wit, manoeuvring the NFC into a position to move forward to 2024. Churchill's work in the National Forest was formally recognised in 2011 when she was awarded an OBE in the Queen's honours list for her services to the environment.⁵⁸⁵ She left the company at the end of December 2014.⁵⁸⁶

The Strategy 2014-2024 inherited by Churchill's successor, John Everitt, did, however, point the way to the requirements of the Forest and the Triennial Review. Everitt came to the NFC in January 2015, having been Chief Executive at the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, and Director of Conservation for the Wildlife Trusts prior to that.⁵⁸⁷ The succinct new Strategy had some significant signposts to eventual independence from government and as part of that the NFC attained charitable status in April 2016, whilst retaining, currently, its position as NDPB at arms' length from DEFRA. This allows the NFC to increase its fundraising as a charity and helps with the long-term strategy of merging the NFC and NFCT.⁵⁸⁸ The relationship between the NFCT and the NFC is amicable, the two working towards similar ends, the one focussed on the heart of the forest, the other on the wider forest. The relationship 'continues to develop since John Everitt joined the NFC. Regular meetings were held with the NFC chairman Sir William Worsley and it is hoped that the relationship will become closer with the recently appointed new NFC chairman'.⁵⁸⁹ (The chair referred to here is Lord Duncan of Springbank).⁵⁹⁰ The NFCT and NFC were instrumental in the repurposing of the Ashby Wolds Regeneration Forum into the Heart of the Forest Forum; the Regeneration Forum had lost its impetus as the heart of the forest area had been reclaimed and regenerated, tree cover achieving some 27%, up from its pre-Forest cover of only 1%. The Trust and NFC had led the development of a *Vision and Action Plan* for the Heart of the Forest and all stakeholders had signed up to a programme of actions. The Trust and NFC thought it would be useful to have a locally based forum to guide the implementation of the *Vision and Action Plan* and proposed the creation of a new forum covering a larger area than the Ashby Wolds, and this was agreed by the Ashby Wolds Regeneration Forum and other partners.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁵ <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/local-news/hard-work-is-recognised-156493> Accessed 23rd September 2020.

⁵⁸⁶ The farewell party was on December 5th, 2014 at the Miners Welfare Club, Moira, where the author had the honour of singing and making a short farewell speech.

⁵⁸⁷ <https://www.linkedin.com/in/john-everitt-b052b7132/?originalSubdomain=uk> (Accessed 10th October 2020).

⁵⁸⁸ National Forest Company. *National Forest Company Annual Report and Accounts 2016- 2017*. Moira 2017 p:2. See also: <https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/national-forest-to-apply-for-charitable-status.html> (Accessed 13th October 2020).

⁵⁸⁹ Pers. Comm. Series of email exchanges with Mike Ballantyne, Director of the National Forest Charitable Trust between June and September 2020.

⁵⁹⁰ <https://www.nationalforest.org/about/who-we-are/our-people> (Accessed 15th October 2020).

⁵⁹¹ Agenda from the inaugural meeting of the *Heart of the Forest Forum*, 8th February 2011 (author's copy).

The new focus allowed interested local bodies to take part in a project intended to tell ‘this story of the extraordinary landscape change, celebrating the areas rich industrial past, whilst providing opportunities to learn about and appreciate the local wildlife’ A three-year programme of volunteering, training, events and interpretation ensued, the *Black to Green* project, which sought to ‘reconnect with this new landscape whilst conserving its past’ focussed on the post-industrial Heart of the Forest, which has seen the most significant landscape transformation.⁵⁹² The total value of the project was just under £1 million and over three years it enabled and assisted many sections of the communities in the focus area across a wide range of age groups to start to understand and record their natural and social histories, alongside encouraging community participation in a range of events, certainly more than 150 individual history talks and walks, wood fuel and tree thinning days, film making events, amongst a wide range of others.⁵⁹³ The regeneration of the Ashby Woulds and the wider Heart of the Forest project has seen the most dramatic change over the course of the Forest’s history, but the entire Forest area has seen landscape change and consequent rise in tourism and economic benefits. According to a July 2020 newspaper report, the current value of tourism per annum is £455m, supporting 5,367 jobs.⁵⁹⁴ The Charnwood Landscapes project currently being undertaken by the National Forest Company through the Heritage Lottery Fund’s Landscapes Partnership Scheme focusses on telling the story of Charnwood and that area maintains its own distinct identity within the wider Forest.

As part of its strategy to 2024, the NFC has had a long-term aim of creating a Forest for Learning, launching a five-point plan for outdoor learning through engaging every primary school within the Forest area in a monthly programme of outdoor learning sessions in an outdoor wooded learning space, with the intention of embedding outdoor learning in the learning outcomes for schools.⁵⁹⁵ The strategy also foresees moving towards outdoor education in secondary schools and beyond, involving a much wider audience through the creation of a new forest festival, *Timber*. Timber festival is an arts festival, and contrary to its unfortunate appellation, which gives the impression of the cutting of trees for lumber or creating a product for consumption and a commodification of the natural world which brings to mind man’s worst excesses in the rain forests of Brazil, is in fact intended to examine and celebrate our interaction with nature through the arts, and ‘challenges us to re-examine our relationship with the world’ through a series of lectures, debates, experiences and performances of music, poetry and song.⁵⁹⁶ In drawing people from a wide spectrum of the public and from across the UK and beyond, the ‘International Forest Festival’ brings people into the Forest and into contact with nature through the medium of the arts. What it also

⁵⁹² Various undated documents in the authors’ possession, having served (latterly) on the Ashby Woulds Regeneration Forum and in the then newly created Heart of the Forest Forum. The information is also available through the Black to Green Project website, although as that is now completed it may not be available permanently: <https://www.blacktogreen.org.uk> (Accessed 13th October 2020).

⁵⁹³ I am indebted to Jo Maker of the NFC for detailed information about individual case studies, also see here: <https://www.blacktogreen.org.uk/case-studies/> (Accessed 14th October 2020).

⁵⁹⁴ <https://www.derbytelegraph.co.uk/whats-on/national-forest-attractions-you-can-4287178> (Accessed October 15th 2020).

⁵⁹⁵ National Forest Company. A Forest for Learning. Unpaginated and undated, inferred date 2018 or ‘19. Also available here:

https://www.nationalforest.org/sites/default/files/components/downloads/files/144%20TWD%20NF%20Report%20v4_3.pdf (Accessed 15th October 2020).

⁵⁹⁶ <https://timberfestival.org.uk> (Accessed 15th October 2020).

does, (and this is arguably true of many festivals) is to create a Temporary Autonomous Zone by eluding structures of control, a place outside or beyond the mundane and everyday, a temporary parallel society, or the liminal forest as a shadow of, and temporary alternative to, civilisation.⁵⁹⁷ The difference between Timber and other festivals is that it exists specifically to reconnect people with the natural world, or at the least to point out that we are disconnected; its purpose is to draw attention to that very separation that for most of us is a lived experience. Timber was launched in 2018 with funding from the Arts Council and was an immediate success, drawing crowds from across the UK and beyond, and being voted Best New Festival 2018.⁵⁹⁸ This was a significant achievement for a festival in its first year and a high bar has been set for future years.

The middle years of the National Forest, under guidance from new and determined leadership at the NFC, supported by continuity in team members there and with partner groups turned out to be positive ones. New associations were formed with new partners as opportunity allowed. The unachievable planting targets were modified, the Forest was presented as a true exemplar of sustainable development and restrictions demanded by government cuts and budget reductions in responding to a global recession were absorbed, alongside surviving threats to the NFC's future when brought into question by government. In fact, not only did the company survive, but it prospered and grew in stature. In its report to government in 2010, EFRA, in endorsing the creation and the work of the NFC noted that the company had achieved 'full public support and co-operation from all the public agencies'⁵⁹⁹ The Triennial Review of 2013 is testament to the strength of the NFC and to the support it receives from partner groups and a recognition of the goodwill felt towards the Forest by locals and the general public. The 2014-2024 Strategy set a new planting target of up to 150 hectares a year, a systematic long-term approach to forest management which includes non-wooded areas, continuing to develop the theme of a Forest for Everyone, building the National Forest brand to increase sponsorship and commercial operations, and planned for stronger local representation (more, localised bodies such as the Heart of the Forest Forum could be established across the Forest to fulfil this function), the company began its long transition to a charitable organisation no longer part of government and to 'Protect, Improve, Expand', supporting national forestry priorities. This last is a reference to the publication by DEFRA of the Government's response to the Independent Panel on Forestry's Final Report, itself brought about by the Coalition Government's disastrous attempt to sell of the public forestry estate into private ownership. The Government's response included a case study of the National Forest, which it discussed in glowing terms.⁶⁰⁰ The National Forest and the NFC had

⁵⁹⁷ Robinson, R. *Music Festivals and the Politics of Participation*. Routledge, London 2016 p: 178. For a fuller discussion of Temporary Autonomous Zones, see Bey, H. T.A.Z. *The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*. Autonomedia, New York 2003.

⁵⁹⁸ <https://www.festivalawards.com/2018-winners/> (Accessed 15th October 2020).

⁵⁹⁹ House of Commons. Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee. *The National Forest Fourth Report of Session 2009–10*. The Stationery Office London 2010 p:18.

⁶⁰⁰ The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. *Government Forestry and Woodlands Policy Statement. Incorporating the Government's Response to the Independent Panel on Forestry's Final Report*. January 2013 p:22.

Copy available online here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/221023/pb13871-forestry-policy-statement.pdf Accessed 12th October 2020).

survived a global economic crash, another change of political direction which called into question the very existence of the company and the Forest itself, a disastrous attempt at a fire-sale of the public forestry estate, questions over the potential effects of the UK leaving the European Union and a third change of leadership. The transition to a future whereby the Forest is created not by a branch of government, even an arm's length NDPB but by a charity will see further challenges for the team. These challenges are already being addressed and the final chapter on the future of the Forest will examine and address some of these.

6. Folk of the Forest: Towards a New Identity.

Our individual and group identities are constructed from a variety of ontological, psychological and physical inputs and our surroundings and the landscapes in which we live are not the least of these.⁶⁰¹ This chapter argues that in planting a large new forest, the identities of the people within the National Forest have adapted to begin to absorb and adjust to the landscape and continue to adapt as the Forest grows to assimilate and reflect those changes. It is not just a different appearance; some parts of the Forest have undergone a complete and radical change to an entire way of life. In the Heart of the Forest area those changes not only entailed the planting of trees but a wholesale change of the identity as the previous 200 years of identity formed around coal mining, clay extraction and heavy industry came to a close. Alongside the environmental regeneration and restoration of areas exploited for their mineral wealth, farmland and other landscapes across the Forest have been planted with trees, subtly changing the way in which land is used and landscapes are seen and deployed in identity creation by the next generation. The increase in housing and change of land use, coupled with changes to types of employment has seen an influx of people living in the area but commuting to work outside the Forest, changing not only the people themselves but the nature of how they construct their identities. Once industrial villages have become dormitory villages for commuters; towns and villages with a once clear background in heavy industry have had to absorb change and this has not always been straightforward.⁶⁰² As we will see, identity construct was planned for and deliberately inculcated by the Development Team and the NFC from the earliest points in their history. The chapter argues that the NFC itself struggles to understand the nature of what it is has had a hand in creating through the blurring of its own mission with that of supporting this new identity and identities within the Forest especially through its own social media presentation, conflating the Company with the geographical area and vice versa.

The linking of the ancient forests of Needwood and Charnwood formed a major part of the proposal to develop the National Forest, connecting the two ancient forests through the regeneration of the derelict post-industrial land that had fallen into neglect and disuse in the central belt between them and in the Trent valley, along with agricultural and other land through the act of planting millions of trees. These ancient forests bound the National Forest on west and east, along with remnant ancient woodland within the heart of the forest; change to these landscapes on a vast scale inevitably holds a variety of problems as well as benefits and opportunities, creating a new identity or identities for the people who live there not the least. The NFC and the Development Team before them recognised this challenge and sought to plan for and adapt it into the Forest strategy from the outset, deliberately planning for and

⁶⁰¹ The subject of identity creation and its history is subtle, mercurial and ongoing, it is summarised here as simply as possible to avoid otherwise long-winded and everchanging complexities. Izenberg, G. *Identity: The Necessity of a Modern Idea*. Pennsylvania University Press 2016 pp: 450-452.

⁶⁰² For example, report by GL Hearn for SDDC. *Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2019 to 2028 Executive Summary*. January 2020 pp: 2-3. House numbers across the district rose by 22% in the period 2001 and 2011 and a further 11% between 2011 and 2019. Not all of South Derbyshire is in the National Forest. Since 2008, almost 11,000 new houses have been built in the area surrounding the Burton on Trent alone: <https://www.derbytelegraph.co.uk/burton/new-map-shows-huge-scale-3789277> (Accessed 1st March 2020).

positively addressing the creation of a Forest identity.⁶⁰³ The draft Strategy of 1993 recognised that distinct identities connected to differing landscapes and land uses across the Forest area existed, mapped those distinct areas and developed a strategy to connect them whilst supporting their regional character.⁶⁰⁴ Those regional character assessments are discussed in the introduction but are relevant here as the landscapes reflect the uses to which the areas were put in the past and connect to identity creation. The chapter also argues that the connection between the ancient woodland and the new plantations, and how trees would be both the catalyst of change and the mordant that binds the process together, will demonstrate an understanding how these various factors combine to affect the identities of those who live and work in the Forest. Identity is not a fixed concept and can adapt as internal and external influences change, it is informed by a variety of factors and this understanding of layered and multiple identities, and fluctuating identities, is part of the *standpoint theory* of identity which asserts that we all have multiple identities that overlap to form our unique standpoints, including intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality, amongst many other facets.⁶⁰⁵ *Intersectionality* theory refers to investigations into power structures that inform identities and this can also be influenced by attitudes towards the natural world based on lived experience and identity formation. In discussing how individual people respond to the climate crisis using intersectionality theory, for example, researchers Kaijser and Kronsell noted that ‘An intersectional analysis of climate change illuminates how different individuals and groups relate differently to climate change, due to their situatedness in power structures based on context-specific and dynamic social categorisations’.⁶⁰⁶ The relevance here is not in intersectionality’s development out of eco-feminist theory but in one of its strands of humanist focus on intersectional studies into human-nature power relations, and that people form identities based on their relationship(s) with and feelings of connectedness to the natural world, and in this instance with the emerging Forest.

Trees individually and the wider Forest are both agents of stability and agents of change, in deliberate maintenance of the old and in the creation of new identities and connections. One self-image of the English, and a national sense of common identity is bound up with woodland imagery and this may be readily seen in the traditional notion of ‘hearts of oak’ and the countryside symbolising community.⁶⁰⁷ The landscape of England, and perceptions of it have long, of course, shaped the nation’s history in multiple ways.⁶⁰⁸ Cultural associations with woodland imagery abound, Trees loom large in the English (and indeed the wider Western) collective psyche, informing literature from Shakespeare to Tolkien and more recently in cinema (for example John Boorman’s *The Emerald Forest*, Bill Kroyer’s *Fern Gully*, Peter

⁶⁰³ See, for example, *Forest News* No1. May 1992. Published by the National Forest Development Team through the Countryside Commission.

⁶⁰⁴ The Countryside Commission. *The National Forest Strategy; draft for consultation*. Cheltenham 1993. See especially sections 2 & 9.

⁶⁰⁵ Littlejohn, S.W., Foss, K.A., *Theories of Human Communication*. Belmont, California, Thomson-Wadsworth 2008 p:92.

⁶⁰⁶ Anna Kaijser & Annica Kronsell (2014) Climate change through the lens of intersectionality, *Environmental Politics*, 23:3, 417-433, DOI: [10.1080/09644016.2013.835203](https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2013.835203).

⁶⁰⁷ Tabbush, P. *The Cultural Value of Trees, Woods & Forests*. Forest Research, the research agency of the Forestry Commission 2012 p:11. Bronner, S.J. *The Folklore Historian* Volume 8. Indiana State University 1991 p:32.

⁶⁰⁸ Strong, R. *Visions of England*. London, Bodley Head 2011 p:32.

Jackson's adaptation of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* or James Cameron's *Avatar*) and many others.⁶⁰⁹

We, as humans, often try to (re)connect with the wildwood, or the nearest thing we have to wild space, be that parkland, green space or urban forest and are regularly urged to do so to improve our health and wellbeing.⁶¹⁰ Given this regular exhortation, and given also the cultural functions of forests, especially the symbolic and spiritual roles we assign to them, it is notable that these values are not addressed in the same way as the economic values; the commodified, perceived 'worth' of either the trees as lumbar or the space they occupy for development, be that for farmland (through historic enclosures) or for other uses; pressures of housing development or the HS2 line linking London to Birmingham cutting through ancient woodland being a case in point.⁶¹¹ HS2 will destroy many ancient woods and puts a further number at risk of secondary effects such as disturbance, noise and air pollution during phase one. The actual numbers are disputed, with HS2 Ltd seeking to play down the overall effect⁶¹² and giving the impression that only 43 woodlands will be affected and of those, 80 per cent of the total area will remain intact and untouched. The Woodland Trust claims that 108 are at risk of loss or damage. A report in the *Guardian* newspaper in January 2020 gave further information on the destruction already being unleashed on the countryside: 'HS2 will destroy or irreparably damage five internationally protected wildlife sites, 693 local wildlife sites, 108 ancient woodlands and 33 legally protected sites of special scientific interest, according to the most comprehensive survey of its impact on wildlife'.⁶¹³ Associations and connection with trees creates very strong feelings of attachment and these woodlands have become and continue to develop into the battlegrounds for government contractors on the one hand and environmentalist groups and protesters on the other. Contractors felled trees throughout the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, throughout the nesting season, an illegal act in itself, taking advantage of Natural England's decision not to send out field officers during the pandemic. Cases of illegal activity by HS2 contractors have been reported in the local and national press.⁶¹⁴ The battle is partly one of identity; protesters and environmentalists sometimes define themselves, their identities, through their environmental activities, seeing their activities as a requirement in defending the living world, often coming into conflict with both hired security or the police through acts of direct action

⁶⁰⁹ See for example, Collick, J. *Shakespeare, Cinema and Society*. Manchester University Press 1989 p:91; Sponsel, L.E. *Spiritual Ecology: a quiet revolution*. Santa Barbara, Praeger 2012 p:139; Bates, B. *The Real Middle Earth: Magic and Mystery in the Dark Ages*. Basingstoke, Pan MacMillan 2002 pp: 41-61.

⁶¹⁰ Independent Panel on Forestry Final Report p:1-2 Available here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/183095/independent-panel-on-forestry-final-report1.pdf (Accessed 18th April 2017).

⁶¹¹ Ritter, E. & Dauksta, D. *Human-forest relationships: ancient values in modern perspectives*. Environment, Development and Sustainability Journal 2013 No. 15: p: 645. Also available here: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-012-9398-9>.

⁶¹² <https://www.hs2.org.uk/building-hs2/environment-sustainability/hs2-and-woodlands/> (Accessed 17th October 2020). Also: www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-with-us/our-campaigns/hs2-rail-link/ (Accessed 19th April 2017).

⁶¹³ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jan/15/hs2-will-destroy-or-damage-hundreds-of-uk-wildlife-sites-report> (Accessed 17th October 2020).

⁶¹⁴ See here: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jan/10/hs2-destroyed-trees-in-way-of-train-line-without-permission> or here: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/oct/10/hs2-may-be-guilty-of-wildlife-by-felling-trees-illegally-say-lawyers> or here: <https://hs2rebellion.earth/2020/10/15/hs2-security-assault-a-69-year-old-man/> (All accessed 17th October 2020).

or civil disobedience. The rise of a new radicalised environmental movement in Britain during the 1990s was a response to both the road building strategy of the government of the day, and a reaction to the 'institutionalisation' of groups like Friends of the Earth and to a degree, Greenpeace, with more recent environmental activist groups like Extinction Rebellion and specifically in the case at hand, HS2 Rebellion, taking leading roles in challenging both authority and the legality of actions perceived to continue to harm the living world.⁶¹⁵ As the National Forest continues to develop, we can expect our attachments to the individual trees and collective woodlands to increase. Campaigners for an expansion to the southern boundary of the National Forest could exploit our seemingly innate attachment to trees, harnessing the strength of feeling and sense of loss felt as ancient woodlands fall to the advancing chainsaws to strengthen support for their campaign.⁶¹⁶

That identity is linked to place and represented by trees and defended by people who would not consider themselves to be radical environmentalists is evident in the continuing confrontation in Sheffield. The city of Sheffield has around 36,000 street trees and Sheffield City Council (SCC) entered into *Streets Ahead*, a financial agreement with a private contractor to manage the streetlights, roads, pavements and the trees associated with them. Where trees are themselves damaged, dangerous, or diseased, or damaging to the roads and pavements SCC's plan was to allow the contractor to remove and replace them.⁶¹⁷ Unfortunately for the council, and however necessary action to manage the trees may have been, the people of Sheffield have not seen the contract in the same light. The low quality of some instances of the contractors' work (with film footage of rubbish rolled into new road surfaces, amongst other footage on social media) has not contributed beneficially to the situation.⁶¹⁸ Protests against tree removals across the city have become a regular feature and underscore the fact that people connect with trees on an emotional level, and that trees become markers of place and identity. Identity matters, we associate who we are with where we are from and changes to our homes, locales and places we associate with who we are must be made with sensitivity and cooperation. In creating a sense of Forest identity as the Trent Washlands Project is unrolled, the sense of attachment and belonging to place could be deployed by ESBC to create a genuine sense of civic pride and connection to the wider Forest. Homes and wider dwelling places such as villages, towns, and cities, provide bounded space in which we 'fix' or make predictable and familiar our surroundings. We put down roots in such places and make it distinctive, they become places of stability and order.⁶¹⁹ Yet it seems that we need the wildwood and the forest to go to, to be in and amongst, not as a place to dwell, order and stability are different there, but a place to escape the trappings and traps of the humdrum, the predictable, the routine, and the familiar. There seems to be a fundamental need within the human psyche that requires this reawakening of connection

⁶¹⁵ Seel, B., Paterson, M., & Doherty, B. *Direct Action in British Environmentalism*. Routledge, London 2000 p:16- 17.

⁶¹⁶ <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/local-news/ambitious-plan-expand-national-forest-4526095> (Accessed 19th January 2021).

⁶¹⁷ <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/home/roads-pavements/managing-street-trees.html> Accessed 9th October 2017.

⁶¹⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/sep/28/michael-gove-seeking-way-to-end-bonkers-felling-of-sheffield-trees> (Accessed 9th October 2017).

⁶¹⁹ Jones & Cloke, *Tree Cultures*. p:137.

with trees and forests.⁶²⁰ The countryside has been altered over time by city dwellers, imbuing sites with cultural, social, economic and metaphysical meaning. Rural culture is held up as an icon, scenery has been commodified and rural values are exploited for contemporary consumption. An erosion of vernacular identity and homogenisation of landscape, often regarded as the destructive effect of capitalism on place, has resulted in a dilution of the distinctive character and variety in the English countrysides.⁶²¹ This commodified, idealised rural landscape is one that has to be assimilated into the radical identity shift by the forests' inhabitants; woodland is a complex symbolic terrain for rival definitions of Englishness.⁶²²

It may well be that overall the National Forest is also inadvertently complicit in this move towards homogenisation, with the identities of the various areas within the forest being broken down and reformed in a new group forest identity. If that is the case, consideration should be given to understand if this is a positive change, and to investigate whether we have lost something in the transition of the places that we live. Many of the former industrial villages in the heart of the forest now have colliery winding wheels as a kind of commemoration or reminder of their connections to their industrial past as they make a transition to dormitory villages for commuters into the towns and cities of the West Midlands, a river of cars heading west each morning and east again each evening. When responding to a questionnaire about the proposed creation of a sculpture or art trail across the forest in 2011, many inhabitants requested winding wheels as a permanent installation in their village, despite the last colliery headstocks having been closed and demolished in 1990.⁶²³

This clinging to a lost, indeed, now bygone identity is one of the great challenges of the creation of a new forest and a new landscape; encouraging the inhabitants to not only accept but to modify their identity to a new type of place, melding into a new woodland people: identity has meaning but it is not fixed, permanent or immutable. For many in the central zone of the National Forest the association of an identity related to the former coal mining industry is understandable; the sociology of coalfield areas and communities being inextricably linked to their industrial past, especially when the settlement grew up around the deep mining industry, creating homogenous self-contained towns and villages.⁶²⁴ Coalville itself is a good example of this and although Swadlincote had other, related industries, this town too, along with many of the villages around and between the two towns formed their identities around coal mining. Coal mining was hard, physical and dangerous work and, as remarked upon in the essay *Sustainable Development, forestry and coalfield communities*, the characteristics of the communities and the people living in them tended to reflect the attributes required for such work, with place identity being strongly connected to coal and coal mining.⁶²⁵

⁶²⁰ See for example Wilson, E.O. *Biophilia*. Harvard University Press 1984 or Kellert, S. *Kinship to Mastery: Biophilia In Human Evolution and Development*. Island Press 2003.

⁶²¹ Muir, R. *Approaches to Landscape*. Palgrave, London 1999 pp: 278-280.

⁶²² Daniels, S. *Fields of Vision; Landscape Imagery & National Identity in England and the United States*. Oxford, Blackwell 1993 p: 7.

⁶²³ The questionnaire was devised by the author for use in his undergraduate final year dissertation and was presented and responded to at a number of village open days, fetes and coffee mornings.

⁶²⁴ Kitchen, L. In Marsden, T. (ed) *Sustainable Communities: New Spaces for Planning, Participation and Engagement*. Elsevier. Oxford 2008 pp:226-8.

⁶²⁵ Kitchen, L. In Marsden, T. (ed) *Sustainable Communities: New Spaces for Planning, Participation and Engagement*. Elsevier. Oxford 2008 p:227.

Searching for meaning and identity in place, in landscape, is part of what makes us who we are, and importantly, who we think we are, so it is unsurprising that having identified with a series of particular backgrounds, in this case the heavy industries of mining and clay, that locals tend to cleave to this and memorialise their history and heritage through the clinging on to the headstock wheels of a recent industrial past rather than a current 'Forest' one, or for that matter their previous agricultural one. Others see the relatively new Forest as a different space from the past and identify with the area in its current form; a generation that does not recall the heavy industry, or newcomers to the area may both have a different view. Regarding the landscape as a palimpsest allows layers of meaning to be projected onto various landscapes, promoting entanglement of concepts and ideas over time and space. Thus, the forest can hold multiple meanings, sometimes apparently contradictory ones, for a range of people and purposes at the same time and over time, consequently allowing them to coexist conceptually, and sometimes physically. These intricacies of meaning therefore contain aspects of historic, current and future impacts on both physical and metaphysical environments, from human and non-human origins.⁶²⁶ The layers within the landscape demonstrate the ongoing interconnection between human activity and the environment. This deep link with the landscape can be apprehended in a number of ways that reveal the profundity of our entanglement with the world, and eventually to comprehend our utter dependence on the health of biosphere. Retrieving the older layers within the landscape enhances the intensity and richness of a sense of place.⁶²⁷ The past is not separate from the present, in that it moulds human thought, and it shapes the landscape through both human and non-human activities. Sometimes the two work in tandem. People live and work in the forest, they raise families, they live, and they die and have always done so. Paths that have been trodden (both physically and metaphorically) for centuries may have changed their purpose but have left lasting and permanent marks on the landscape. Meaning can therefore be imbued and derived from the present and the past, and to an extent from an imagined future, a Forest identity can absorb what was, as well as what is and will become.

Re-imagining an identity of a region with differing sub-regional identities has occurred in the past, either deliberately as with the construction of a unique regional identity created in the inter-war years around the corpus of writings about the Cotswolds, idealised then as a microcosm of Englishness, or with the forest identities of the New Forest or the Forest of Dean; the rural village and countryside became idealised in the ideology of Englishness.⁶²⁸ The area covered by the National Forest has traditionally been a borderland or a boundary, even a frontier or a place between places. The rivers Trent, Tame, Mease and to a lesser extent the smaller tributaries, the Anker, Sence, Gillawiskaw and Hooborough have provided physical boundaries, and the dialect distinctions demonstrate historical ones. The ancient Danelaw boundary, roughly contemporaneous with the modern A5 trunk road, divides the dialect regions of the Viking north from the Anglo-Saxon south and west. The southwest boundary of the National Forest approximately follows the line of the dialect boundary,

⁶²⁶ Layne, M. (2014). *The Textual Ecology of the Palimpsest: Environmental Entanglement of Present and Past. Aisthesis. Pratiche, Linguaggi E Saperi Dell'Estetico*, 7(2), p: 63 [Online] (Accessed 7th February 2018).

⁶²⁷ Drenthen, M. in Martin, A., Drenthen, M., Jozef-Keulartz, F.W. & Proctor, J. (eds) *New Visions of Nature: Complexity and Authenticity*. Springer, London 2009 p:220.

⁶²⁸ Giles, J. & Middleton, T (eds). *Writing Englishness 1900-1950. An Introductory Sourcebook on National Identity*. Abingdon, Routledge 1995 pp: 193-5.

meaning that almost but not all of the forest falls within the ancient Danelaw.⁶²⁹ This area is neither northern nor southern England but lies on the fringes of both, and on the fringes too of east and west. Other, older, divisions cut through the area too, Celtic tribal boundaries roughly followed the line of the Trent (Corieltauvi/ Brigante), the Anglo-Saxon name *Mercia* itself translates into modern English as *frontier* (and the name continues in a modernised form, the Welsh *Marches*), and then the modern delineations between East and West Midlands may stand as examples here too. These various liminalities also serve to differentiate the Forest region historically, the trees themselves now differentiate the area physically.

Researchers Jake Morris and John Urry noted in 2006 that there were very positive perceptions of the National Forest not only from the institutions involved in the Forest's creation, the National Forest Company, the Woodland Trust and the Forestry Commission and other partners, but also from local residents responding to research questions. The locals framed their responses in excited terms and were happy to talk about 'potential landscapes' not only whilst walking through them but also in non-forest settings where a potential landscape had to be imagined. Some respondents discussed a vision for the future based on transformations elsewhere in the Forest. The invocations of the partially imagined Forest to come were often tinged with expressions or tones of impatience and the time that natural processes of landscape change take, thus really demonstrating the new identity rooting and beginning to take hold and develop.⁶³⁰ Cosgrove and Daniels point out the difficulties with looking at the landscape as a palimpsest though, a conservative view of a 'deep' England with stable layers of historical accretion, the attempts by historians, over time, to 'bring stability to the perceived chaos of the modern world'. They describe a post-modern perspective whereby the landscape is less like a palimpsest and more of a series of writings on a computer screen whose meanings 'may be created, extended, altered, elaborated or obliterated'.⁶³¹ Both approaches are possible, in tandem, informing us of our past whilst remaining wary of false or imagined narratives. Either or both approaches still lend themselves to the creation of a new sense of identity and sense of place.

Place, like identity, is multi-layered and many faceted, informing our understanding of ourselves, rooting us and connecting us, pervading and providing us with our sense of who we are. In considering the effect of woods on locales, place can be influenced and even defined by individual trees and woodlands because of their various attributes, longevity, size, shape, specific tree types, alongside characters that seem to act on their surroundings. The interconnectedness of trees themselves has begun to be understood more fully over the last decade. Trees create woods and forests by being and belonging. They are also the dwellers and occupants of these spaces, along with many of the flora and fauna that occupy and dwell within the forest alongside and amongst them. These flora and fauna have developed to become reliant on the trees for food and shelter, as the trees are in turn reliant on them for, in some cases the spreading of pollen and seed, in others, the transference of nutrients or

⁶²⁹ See for example Bandle, O. *The Nordic Languages: An International Handbook of the History of the North Germanic Languages (Volume 2)*. Berlin, de Gruyter 2005 p: 2065-6, or Hadley, D.M. *The Northern Danelaw: Its Social Structure c. 800 – 1100*. Leicester University Press 2000 p:3.

⁶³⁰ Morris, J., & Urry, J. *Growing Places: A Study of Social Change in the National Forest*. Forest Research, Farnham 2006 p:22.

⁶³¹ Cosgrove and Daniels, S. (eds). *The Iconography of Landscape*. p: 8.

information in the form of chemicals (in the case of mycorrhizal network- the use by trees and other flora of the labyrinth of fungal root filaments) in an enormous evolutionary symbiosis. The forest can be thought of as interconnected entity. In 2009 scientists studying the architecture of the *wood-wide-web* as it has been termed demonstrated that the ‘mycorrhizal network architecture suggests an efficient and robust network, where large trees play a foundational role in facilitating conspecific regeneration and stabilizing the ecosystem’.⁶³² Broadly speaking, the more mature forest trees provide a hub for the forests’ health and continuity, veteran trees support the younger trees of differing species in establishing themselves and support each other and the forest in general through difficult times- drought or attack from disease or insects for example, through the mycorrhizal network, the filament length of which may individually be many decametres in length.

Mature trees are colonised by multiple rhizomes and therefore may have many hundreds of meters of filament connecting many trees and plants of different species, sending and receiving water, nutrients and chemicals back and forth. Warnings can also be transferred, in the case, for example of attack by aphids or other parasitic creatures. This ability has long been known above ground, that trees can release airborne chemicals that warn other trees that attack is imminent, allowing the other trees to release tannins or other defensive chemicals into their systems, but the discovery that it was also deployed through fungal filaments over a vast scale was new.⁶³³ Ultimately, the forest is totally interconnected. The study went on to state that the mycorrhizal symbiosis is not just between two or more organisms but is a complex assemblage of fungal and plant individuals that spans multiple generations.⁶³⁴ Therefore, the felling of a mature forest tree can have a damaging effect on the forest far beyond the immediate apparent loss of a single tree. According to one researcher in the field, these filaments bond trees so intimately that to view any tree as an individual becomes a difficult exercise.⁶³⁵ It may be a step too far to suggest that agency, awareness and a form of ‘tree sentience’ are overtly demonstrable but it is possible to show that the forest has a hitherto contested awareness and reacts to external stimuli in a verifiable, provable and attestable manner. That the agency of trees, in the long, slow manner of their growth and lifecycle, affects identity is apparent in British culture and held up as such. Following the abandoned attempt by the Conservative administration to sell off the public woodland estate in 1994 and a successful campaign spearheaded by the Ramblers’ Association to keep the public forests in public ownership, the MP and Rambler’s Association Vice-President Paddy Tipping was quoted as saying: ‘These woodlands have been ours for centuries, Robin Hood and his colleagues would rise from the grave if they knew what this

⁶³² The term ‘wood-wide web’ was first coined by the journal *Nature*. See here for further comment: <http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/nature/2016/08/wood-wide-web-world-trees-underneath-surface> (accessed 12th September 2017). Beiler, K. J., Durall, D. M., Simard, S. W., Maxwell, S. A. and Kretzer, A. M. (2010), *Architecture of the wood-wide web: Rhizopogon spp. genets link multiple Douglas-fir cohorts*. *New Phytologist*, 185: 543–553.

⁶³³ Wohlleben, P. *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate- Discoveries from a Hidden World*. Greystone Books. Vancouver 2016 p 7-8.

⁶³⁴ Beiler, K. J., Durall, D. M., Simard, S. W., Maxwell, S. A. and Kretzer, A. M. (2010), *Architecture of the wood-wide web: Rhizopogon spp. genets link multiple Douglas-fir cohorts*. *New Phytologist*, 185: 543–553 doi:10.1111/j.1469-8137.2009.03069.x

⁶³⁵ Frazer, J. In *Scientific American*: <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/artful-amoeba/dying-trees-can-send-food-to-neighbors-of-different-species/> (Accessed 10th September 2017).

wicked government was doing'.⁶³⁶ In a stroke, Tipping acknowledged the long struggle between the few wealthy and powerful landowners on the one hand and the (often poor) landless many on the other over rights of access to the countryside, referencing history and recruiting popular folklore narratives. The political and symbolic meaning of woods has deep roots, influencing current attitudes to ownership of and access to woods.⁶³⁷ Woods and forests have long been contested spaces with highhanded approaches from landowners evidenced over the centuries.

That contestation is still the case and can be seen in both the attempts by government to sell off the public forest estate in 1994 and again in 2010, along with attitudes evinced by *Forestry England* in the National Forest more recently. In this case local identity came into question and was misunderstood or not felt important by Forestry England over the naming of a wood planted after they had purchased an area of land in the heart of the forest. Seale Wood was originally the name of a large woodland on the northern quarter of the parish of Seale (now the parishes of Overseal and Netherseal, and the boundary with two further parishes. Apart from one or two small copses, it was completely cut down, converted to farmland and the timber sold during the eighteenth through to the early part of the twentieth centuries, but was inadvertently replanted (although not renamed as such) through NFC tender scheme land conversion as part of the creation of the National Forest.⁶³⁸ On the south side of the two parishes, Forestry England purchased land from the Seale Lodge estate, planted it and renamed it Seale Wood in 2003, creating a confusing geographical clash and an unwanted change to the two villages' history. When contacted more recently to request that the wood be renamed Seale Lodge Wood or similar the request was immediately refused on the grounds that 'It is now well known and documented as Seale Wood, with many other groups and organisations who use the area, and list it on their websites, so changing its name is not simply a case of replacing the existing site signage. As a result, it is unlikely that the woodland name will be changed'.⁶³⁹ Further emails have so far elicited no response.

Trees also lend their names to the places that we live, village, town or street names, even given or family names, examples in the Forest being Ashby de la Zouch, Oaks-in-Charnwood, Willesley, Barton-under-Needwood, Nether- and Over- seal, Alrewas and very many others. Trees come to identify place in a very practical sense; they also become part of the identity of that place, as do we as shared inhabitants of these localities. Thus, people become connected to place partly through the planting, care for and the very fact of a tree or trees being in and belonging to place, creating it even. This connectedness may be demonstrated when threats to much loved local trees, or trees as symbols and guardians of memory are threatened; the recent defence of trees in Sheffield being a case in point. The materialism of western culture seems to have created a greater focus for the need for this connection with natural space; identity and community are entwined with trees, forests and place.⁶⁴⁰ This connectedness has been described as 'a sense of kinship with all life, as well as a partnership

⁶³⁶ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/appeals-to-halt-forestry-sell-off-privatisation-plans-attacked-after-report-claims-safeguarding-1393057.html> (Accessed 16th October 2020).

⁶³⁷ Tabbush, P. *Cultural Values of Trees, Woods and Forests*. Forest Research, Farnham 2010 p: 12.

⁶³⁸ Owen, C. *The Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfield 1200- 1900*. Moorland, Ashbourne 1984 pp: 44, 103, 114.

⁶³⁹ Pers. Comm. Email dated 21st July 2020 from Alan Dowell, Area Manager for Forestry England.

⁶⁴⁰ Konijendijk, C.C. *The Forest and the City: The cultural landscape of urban woodland*. Springer 2008. p: 13.

with working landscapes,' linked to 'community and companionability that is traditionally fostered by villages and traditional urban neighbourhoods'.⁶⁴¹

In their 2002 book *Tree Cultures- the Place of Trees and Trees in Their Place*, Owain Jones and Paul Cloke posit their evidence that trees have agency in the world. Their argument does not propose that trees possess the particular and extraordinary capabilities of humans but that they possess very significant forms of active agency which have previously been assigned to only human activities. The crux of their argument is that trees bring creative abilities and tendencies into consideration, have far reaching effects on ideas about place, and that non-human organisms should be seen as active subjects capable of transforming nature and adapting to ecosystems that they themselves construct. Therefore, the division between society and nature must be worn away and removed;⁶⁴² dualistic approaches that are seen in Actor Network Theory as relational effects.⁶⁴³ Cloke and Jones cite David Harvey in his contention that trees are associated with transformative, purposive and reflective agencies, not the same as human agency but agency, nonetheless. This agency is not passive but transformative and creative.⁶⁴⁴ They go on to use numerous examples throughout *Tree Places*, namely, orchards left untended, cemeteries where trees have been allowed to naturally regenerate, unmanaged street trees that come under threat of destruction, and reclaimed industrial landscapes that have grown naturally regenerated woodlands, to demonstrate how swiftly trees and woodlands become markers of place and identity, and how humans seem to connect with trees as representatives of an idealised state of nature. This reaction to external stimuli, that human awareness and personality constructs are affected by nature connectedness, the connection of the self to and with the natural environment, is exploited by psychologists in their treatment of people with mental health problems and in investigations into experiential connection with the natural environment. Research into contact with nature demonstrates the feeling of happiness and being connected to nature as having a high correlation.⁶⁴⁵ Empirical studies have demonstrated further benefits of 'being in nature' as mentally restorative effects, the enhancement of mental alertness, an increase in vitality and positively enhanced perceptions of physiological, emotional, psychological and spiritual health in ways that cannot be satisfied by alternate means.⁶⁴⁶ These benefits of being in nature and connecting to the natural environment form a part of the National Forest Company's 'Greenprint for the Nation'.⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴¹ Hiss, T. *The Experience of Place: a new way of looking at and dealing with our radically changing cities and countryside*. Random House, New York. 1990 p:176.

⁶⁴² Jones & Cloke, P. *Tree Cultures*. pp:46-54.

⁶⁴³ Law, J. in Turner, B.S. (ed.) *The New Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*. Wiley & Sons Chichester 2009 p: 147.

⁶⁴⁴ Jones & Cloke, P. *Tree Cultures*. pp:52-54.

⁶⁴⁵ Capaldi, C., Dopko, R. & Zelenski, J. (2014) 'The Relationship between nature connectedness and happiness: a meta-analysis in Health' *Frontiers in Psychology* 5: 976. Creative Commons Attribution License. [Online] Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4157607/> (Accessed 17th October 2017). See also Sempik, J. Aldridge, J. & Becker, S. *Wellbeing and Social Inclusion: Therapeutic Horticulture in the UK*. The Policy Press, University of Bristol 2005.

⁶⁴⁶ Wilson, M. 2011. *Encounters with Nature as a Path of Self-Realisation: A Meaning-Making Framework*. *Journal of Transpersonal Research*, 3: 3 [Online] Available at: <http://www.michaelwilson.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Wilson-M.-accepted-version-03.2012.pdf> (Accessed 17th October 2017).

⁶⁴⁷ The National Forest Company. *Our 25 Year Vision for the National Forest: a greenprint for the nation*. Moira 2019 p:29.

Acknowledgement of the importance of nature, wild places and nature has a long history in education too, coming into its own in the UK in the 1960s with *Outward Bound*, which began in Aberdovey, Wales, in 1941, with the initial purpose of giving 'young seamen the ability to survive harsh conditions[...] by teaching confidence, tenacity, perseverance and to build experience'.⁶⁴⁸ *Outward Bound* was initially very popular but by the late 1970s, for a variety of reasons related to the UKs' economic difficulties of the previous decade, had begun to wane. After rescue by the Duke of Edinburgh's Award in the late 1980s, *Outward Bound* again became independent in 2000.⁶⁴⁹ Education programmes in the outdoors and wilderness settings are considered to promote a number of outcomes, including 'humility, a sense of wonder, and a connectedness to nature'.⁶⁵⁰ Again, these outcomes are reflected in the NFC's Greenprint, in the logic and considerations behind its Timber Festival, and through its target to engage 80% of the population of the Forest in participation of regular outdoor activities, including outdoor learning for schools, forest volunteering and a significant move towards preventative health care through engagement with the natural world in general and the Forest in particular.⁶⁵¹

Connectedness to nature theory posits that the relationship between people and the natural world has a tangible positive consequence and that affective relationships between nature and people modifies physical and mental wellbeing and positively influences behavioural traits. Place attachment is significant for its potential to predict environmentally responsible behaviour. Although person-to-place bonds may vary enormously between individuals and are mediated by person, process, and place dimensions, the shaping of an individual's personal identity through attachment to place can be significant. Strong connections to nature and place can construct a firm basis for stewardship ethic.⁶⁵² Research in psychological studies demonstrates that higher levels of connectedness ultimately lead to commitment to and inclusion with nature. Nature connectedness becomes 'the extent to which an individual includes nature within their cognitive representation of self'.⁶⁵³ Pro-environmental behaviour is now recognised as an indirect approach to better health. The propensity to act in an accordance with reducing impact on the biosphere in an ecologically sustainable way, especially over growing concerns with ecosystem destruction, climate change and other effects of anthropogenic activities has direct health benefits for individuals through pro-environmental behaviours such as recycling, dietary considerations (reduced red meat consumption for example), or transport decisions.⁶⁵⁴ In 1992, the biologist Edward O. Wilson wrote that: 'We do not understand ourselves yet and descend farther from heaven's air if we forget how much the natural world means to us. Signals abound that the loss of life's diversity endangers not just the body but the spirit'.⁶⁵⁵ A very timely observation, as we shall see in the concluding chapter.

⁶⁴⁸ Miles, J. (1987) *Wilderness as a Learning Place*. The Journal of Environmental Education 18. 2. p:1. <https://www.outwardbound.org.uk/about-us/history-of-the-trust/> (Accessed 15th January 2018).

⁶⁴⁹ <https://www.outwardbound.org.uk/about-us/history-of-the-trust/> Accessed 15th October 2017.

⁶⁵⁰ Miles, J. (1987) *Wilderness as a Learning Place*. The Journal of Environmental Education 18. 2 p:1

⁶⁵¹ The National Forest Company: *Our 25 Year Vision for the National Forest: a greenprint for the nation*. p:30.

⁶⁵² Conrad, E. in Bieling, C. (ed) *The Science and Practice of Landscape Stewardship*. CUP 2017 pp:44-45.

⁶⁵³ Layne, A. W. in ARCC Spring Research Conference 2007. *Green Challenges in Research, Practice and Design Education*. University of Oregon 2008 p:243.

⁶⁵⁴ van den Bosch, M., Bird, W. (eds). *Oxford Textbook of Nature and Public Health: the role of nature in improving the health of a population*. OUP 2018 pp: 89-90.

⁶⁵⁵ Wilson, E.O. *The Diversity of Life*. 1992 Harvard University Press p:351.

Practitioners of Nature Connectedness studies are aware that our human comprehension of the 'nature' we bond with is affected by our individual disposition as much as by the reality of nature itself, we understand landscapes and 'nature' through the prism of the individual human experience, which may be partly or entirely inaccurate.⁶⁵⁶ This recognition that connection to nature and landscape and a strong stewardship ethic does not necessarily directly correlate with environmental and ecological ideals is an important one, tensions between socially desired directions of landscape change and the determinations by planners and architects are one obvious source of concern.⁶⁵⁷ Anthropocentric worldviews on both- or all- sides of the discourse over environmental issues are part of the effect of Western rationalism, modernity and lifestyle, alongside the exploitation of the resources of the natural world for gain beyond sustainable levels.⁶⁵⁸ This is not to state that indigenous cultures do not exploit the natural environment but that the question of scale puts the different levels of exploitation into perspective, particularly with regard to sustainability. Increasing urbanisation and urban densification has led to increased levels of nature-health related issues such as respiratory problems and cancers related to biological, chemical and physical pollution of air, water and land; diseases related to inactivity, the increase of slums and social isolation; diseases related to inadequate sanitation, the rise in mental illness, among others. The requirement for restorative environments and their health benefits based on many studies from around the world over several decades seems inarguable.⁶⁵⁹ The National Forest has regenerated and continues to regenerate landscapes that have been exploited for mineral wealth and denuded of trees for centuries, deploying those same regenerative and rejuvenative capacities holds significant potential for the future of the people of the Forest and their identities, changing how they consider who they are in relation to their immediate environment and ultimately all of the natural world.

The cultural values that we place on trees, especially ancient trees are interesting, sometimes irrational ones, and we often apply or view these ancient beings through an anthropomorphic lens, giving trees names like 'the old man of the forest' and associating them with good or bad luck. We often go to great lengths to preserve the trees for their cultural associations, as with the Major Oak in Sherwood, or for reasons associated with wellbeing as in the Bretby cedar of Lebanon. The connection between the cedar tree planted as a memorial to the 2nd Earl of Caernarvon's second wife who died following a miscarriage in 1677 at the family home in Bretby, Derbyshire, and the family became the source of a legend that when a branch fell from the tree it foretold the death of a family member, who would die shortly after. The tree grew to the east of the hall and the legend persisted until the tree was felled in 1954.⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁶ Conrad, *Science and Practice of Landscape Stewardship*. p:45.

⁶⁵⁷ Conrad, *Science and Practice of Landscape Stewardship*. p:45-46.

⁶⁵⁸ Kamanzi, A. *Connectedness in Evolution: The Discourse of Modernity on the Ecosophy of the Haya People in Tanzania*. Africa Institute of South Africa 2014 p:3-5.

⁶⁵⁹ van den Bosch, M., Bird, W. (eds). *Oxford Textbook of Nature and Public Health: the role of nature in improving the health of a population*. OUP 2018 pp: 58-61.

⁶⁶⁰ Campbell-Culver, M. *The Origin of Plants: the people and plants that have shaped Britain's garden history since the year 1,000*. Random House, London 2001 p: 83.

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Figure 65. The Bretby Cedar. Photograph courtesy of the Magic Attic.

The nearby 'Old Man of Calke' a pendunculate oak estimated to be 1,200 years old is fenced in (like the Major Oak) by the National Trust at Calke Park, to prevent 'over trampling of the ground and root damage by visitors'.⁶⁶¹ That so many people visit this and other similar trees as to warrant protection from sheer volume of foot traffic is remarkable in itself.



Figure 66. The Old Man of Calke in the grounds of Calke Abbey in the National Forest. © Copyright Mike Bardill and licensed for reuse under Creative Commons Licence CC BY-SA 2.0.

⁶⁶¹ The National Trust *Calke Abbey Trail* leaflet. Undated, unpaginated.

The Major Oak in Sherwood is so chained and propped and fenced off, with its naturally hollowed-out trunk filled with cement to prevent its collapse as to have become a mockery of the natural cycle of trees, preserved to stand as a symbol of our idea of what a tree ought to look like or to 'be' (alongside its symbolism and associated cultural meaning- and, of course, its marketing value to tourism in Sherwood), rather than allowing its natural span of years to progress normally.⁶⁶² The Major Oak has become a cultural artefact and through centuries of tales of Robin Hood, a representative of an 'alternative' way of life.

Ecocriticism and eco-spirituality.

The development of the National Forest and sense of association between local people and the Forest itself have been deepened by more profound feelings towards trees and the growth of eco-spiritual movements. These are also something that the NFC and other stakeholders can take advantage of in the future to continue fostering the sense of identity with the Forest. Concepts of ecocriticism and eco-spirituality also serve as analytical tools that can be deployed to understand how trees and tree-places have aroused feelings of collective ownership, kinship and belonging. The study of the relationship between literature and the environment came into being and to be understood as a distinct subject area through a process of development during the 1980s and 1990s; it negotiates a theoretical discourse between the human and non-human and interacts in an immensely complex global network, in which energy, matter and ideas connect and interconnect. In examining the cultural artefacts of language and literature, ecocriticism takes as its subject the skein of interrelationships between nature and culture, arguing that everything is connected to everything else. Ecocriticism includes the entire ecosphere in its examination of the relationship between writers, texts and the planet, between human culture and the physical world.⁶⁶³

The current environmental crisis, whereby humanity is heading for catastrophe of unknown proportions, potentially apocalyptically so, is an unwitting by-product of our own culture and our own making. We are aware that human action is damaging the planet's basic life support system and ecocritical theory provides one method of helping to understand human impact on the natural world.⁶⁶⁴ The context is wide, including urban and agricultural landscapes as features of this theorising, alongside environmental justice themes and feminist theory, amongst many others.⁶⁶⁵ In acknowledging the complex interplay of environment and culture, ecocriticism has used the guide provided by the long development of feminist perspectives to understand its own discontinuities of recognition in the comprehension of the complexities of environmental issues.⁶⁶⁶ Feminist ecocriticism – ecofeminism – argues that there is a connection between environmental degradation and the subordination of women. In fact,

⁶⁶² Peterken, G.F. *Natural Woodland: Ecology and Conservation in Northern Temperate Regions*. 2001 CUP p: 149.

⁶⁶³ Gofeltly, C., Fromm, H. (eds). *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. University of Georgia Press 1996. pp:18-19.

⁶⁶⁴ Gofeltly & Fromm, (eds). *The Ecocriticism Reader*. p:21-22.

⁶⁶⁵ Parham, J. (ed). *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature*. Routledge, Abingdon 2016. Introduction.

⁶⁶⁶ Vakoch, D. (ed). *Feminist Ecocriticism: Environment, Women, and Literature*. Lexington Books, Plymouth 2012 p:2.

ecocriticism has developed into a bewildering, vertiginous, myriad of directions, each as valid as the other, and seems set to continue to do so. Strands of these will help to negotiate the purposes to which the National Forest has been deployed, for its existence goes far beyond the straightforward creation of a new economic base/leisure facility/environmental stance as originally envisioned. One of the strands to which trees, and the planting of a new forest is deployed is seemingly almost religious in aspect. Trees planted as memorials, such as those at the National Memorial Arboretum (see chapter 7), or individual trees planted as markers of the passing of a loved one or other important occasion take on extra significance in identity creation. Others choose to identify themselves as connecting to nature, and trees specifically, through a more religious or sacred connection.⁶⁶⁷

The term *nature religion* arose at around the time that the first Earth Day celebration was enacted in 1970, and is increasingly used in common parlance to represent *nature-as-sacred* religions and spiritual beliefs.⁶⁶⁸ The green movement and neo-paganism, although not exactly coeval, evolved simultaneously with distinct crossover points; these nature religions often demonstrating aspects of anti-capitalism, feminism and environmental activism, offering a critique of consumer and capitalist tendencies to see the world as a collection of natural resources to be exploited to satisfy human and corporate requirements, standing against the idea that the earth is a repository of means employed under a consumer and capitalist system for economic ends alone.⁶⁶⁹ In that respect they align with many of the world's indigenous religions. Indigenous peoples often describe and understand the world in very different terms to those of the Western world, sometimes in radically disparate and seemingly incongruous ways. Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Vivieros de Castro describes the radically different indigenous peoples' and westerners' worldviews as 'perspectival multinaturalism', suggesting that the world is 'inhabited by different sorts of subjects or persons, human and non-human', which all act in the world but with a variety of sensory apparatus and implying a unity of nature and a multiplicity of cultures and multinatural worlds with a diverse corporeality and variety of perspectives.⁶⁷⁰ In this worldview therefore, a tree or a river, or a rock, mountain or forest might have individual physiognomies (described by some indigenous cultures as 'earth beings') that may be apprehended by a human individual and understood as identifying the entity's character and personality. This animistic belief that non-human entities have agency in the world is dissimilar to Actor Network Theory approaches (ANT) which allow us to begin to apprehend an understanding that may not otherwise be possible. That trees have agency as individuals or as a group can be demonstrated, or at least described, using ANT but there are many caveats, and the proposal remains controversial. By approaching the world from an alternate viewpoint, such as one of the different cultural understandings of the world and its inhabitants as embodied by one of the many that are posited by peoples from indigenous cultures, it becomes possible to begin to perceive the world from another perspective and comprehension, one that is no less real or valid than that of western rational thought. Stories, folk tales and representations of the green man, Jack-in-the-Green, Robin Hood, Old Meg, fairies and other personifications of nature spirits are the more obvious

⁶⁶⁷ *The Circle of Albion* for example, or the *Charnwood Grove of Druids*. Other examples in the National Forest may be readily found. See here, for example: <https://charnwoodgrove.com> (Accessed 19th April 2021).

⁶⁶⁸ Taylor, B.R. *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*. University of California Press 2010 p: 6.

⁶⁶⁹ Crosby, D.A. *A Religion of Nature*. State University of New York Press, Albany 2002 p:59.

⁶⁷⁰ Adamson, J in Iovino, S. & Opperman, S. (eds). *Material Ecocriticism*. Indiana University Press 2014 p:261.

symbols of this animistic thought process in western literary and artistic culture. That these nature spirits were conceptualised and understood as real entities in the National Forest area in the past is attested to by the few surviving folk tales, animistic carvings and foliate faces that remain scattered across the area.⁶⁷¹ That the belief in a 'living wood' would cross over from literature to science through the relatively recent research by scientists discussed above, resulting in the understanding of the interconnectedness of forests in a 'wood-wide-web' has given a further insight into the apparent reality of the living awareness of the forest that can now be at least partially explained in terms of western rationalism. Subjects such as these have begun to be explored within the National Forest, tangentially through the installation of works of art or the recreation of local wassail and other local cultural events connected to more intangible cultural heritage; and more directly through the Timber Festival, which, amongst a wide array of arts relating to forests, trees and the natural world more generally, has speakers from around the world holding workshops and talks with subjects including the immediacy and immanence of the living world in a more-than-human way.

The obvious pillaging of the natural world and the unwelcome legacy of the coal mining domination of the central zone of the National Forest, the slag heaps and the clay heaps, alongside the opening holes left behind by derelict mineral extractive processes; opencast coal and clay mines-coupled with the collapse of the industry at the end of the 1980s manifested as high unemployment, industrially related illness and social exclusion. The creation of the National Forest was in part intended to address these welfare issues through drastically improved natural environment as well as regenerating and stimulating the local economy. The national governmental shift of forestry policy away from timber production towards sustainable development encompassing environmental, economic and social issues since the 1990s was informed by a relatively small number of publications; *Nature Conservation and Afforestation in Britain* (Nature Conservancy Council 1986), *Forestry Policy for Great Britain* (Forestry Commission 1991) and most influentially *Forestry in the Countryside* (Countryside Commission 1987) all of which called for a clear shift away from a timber production orientated national policy to a national forestry policy based on multiple objectives. This shift away from commercial, industrialised forestry with some small additional side benefits towards a planned woodland that benefits society in general and the localised communities specifically.⁶⁷² A number of terms were coined to describe the 'new' forestry being envisioned; 'rural development forestry', 'post-productivist forestry' and the one that came to be applied to the National Forest and used by the NFC in their literature- 'multi-purpose forestry'. One of the clearly stated aims of the NFC was to not only link up the sparsely separated and 'broken' aspect of what woodland there was, but also to bring it under management rather than be left to run wild, managed woodland being a requirement of sustainable development and management, the Woodland Trust describing the process on their website: 'Sustainably-managed forests meet the needs of wildlife while supporting livelihoods and providing many other ecosystem services, such as carbon storage and flood

⁶⁷¹ Although a longer discussion is outside the span of this work, foliate faces and a 'Sheelagh-na-gig' are carved into the structure of Melbourne church for example, and folk beliefs in the efficacy of 'holy springs' and their associated protectors, alongside trees with supernatural powers &c are captured in places across the Forest area. "Old Meg", for example, is a localised version of Jack o' Lanterns, or marsh spirits. Interestingly, it is the only known version that is represented as female.

⁶⁷² Kitchen, L. In Marsden, T. (ed) *Sustainable Communities: New Spaces for Planning, Participation and Engagement*. Elsevier. Oxford 2008 pp:228.

risk mitigation'.⁶⁷³ The principles for the Sustainable Management of Forests were established and adopted by the United Nations at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) established by the UN that year and the implementation of Agenda 21, a comprehensive plan of global action to mitigate the effects of climate change through a variety of actions was put in place and then reaffirmed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002.⁶⁷⁴

Management of woodland is a priority for the NFC, and encouraging connection with woods, whether managed or wild is part of the positive creation of a woodland identity. There are areas within the National Forest that fall somewhere between the descriptions that Oliver Rackham used to define differences in tree places of a larger size: woodlands and wildwoods. Rackham uses the term 'wildwood' in referring to unmanaged woodland and contrasts that with the term 'woodland' for managed woods that are named, owned, and bounded.⁶⁷⁵ There is no primary, untouched or authentic wildwood within the National Forest; there are woods that have been managed in the past, but which have been left to their own devices for many years, sometimes decades. Ultimately though, there are no untouched primary forests in the National Forest, or indeed for that matter in the United Kingdom, as all forests and woodland have been used by man in various stages of their existence, whether for animal pasture within woodland or managed for other uses. Much of the National Forest is already in management and the NFC continues to encourage and participate in woodland management as part of the drive towards sustainable woodland management, quoting against targets in its annual reports.⁶⁷⁶ Woods, wild or managed, contribute to the sense of place, and the sense of identity constructed around and by those places, especially as they mature into identifiably 'real' woodlands and forests.

Woodlands and forest, managed or otherwise, are also places of difference and provide an opportunity to escape the routine and familiar, particularly for the town dweller. Identification with forests is often determined most strongly by ancient trees and much focus is placed on the special ecological and cultural significance of these, such as the Major Oak in Sherwood Forest, the Bleeding Yews of Nevern, or the Boscobel Oak in the West Midlands. Immature plantations in general do not appear to induce such a rich feeling of connection that mature woodland creates which is partly why such efforts have been made in the National Forest to connect the two ancient forests on east and west with the remnant ancient woods in the central area. There are though, significant examples of contradictions to this general statement, and it is interesting to consider how swiftly attachments to new woodlands are formed. Jones and Cloke put forward an example of this in *Tree Cultures*, describing how an area of reclaimed land near Camerton in Somerset, also an ex-mining area, had been planted with conifers. This new woodland was appropriated by the community as a recreational space, with the trees providing cover and fabric for this process and it came to be defended by the locals when under threat of being cut down.⁶⁷⁷ Similar attachments have

⁶⁷³ <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2018/07/what-is-a-sustainable-forest/> (Accessed 17th October 2020).

⁶⁷⁴ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/outcomedocuments/agenda21> Accessed 17th October 2020.

⁶⁷⁵ Konijendijk, C.C. *The Forest and the City: The cultural landscape of urban woodland*. Springer 2008. p:3-4.

⁶⁷⁶ The National Forest Company. *Our 25 Year Vision for the National Forest: a greenprint for the nation*. p:20.

⁶⁷⁷ Jones & Cloke, *Tree Cultures*. pp:171-2.

been formed in new and relatively young orchards planted in the heart of the forest, whilst conversely others have been left untended after planting. Of those that have been enthusiastically planted and tended for, a couple are worthy of note here. Villagers in Donisthorpe and Overseal have created orchards and use them for rejuvenated (or newly created) wassails, May Day celebrations and Apple Day events, whereas nearby Linton planted a community orchard but in allowing it to become overgrown through lack of management let it become unusable as a public space, although recent attempts to reclaim that space are underway. Apple Day itself is a modern urban creation; conceptualised by the group *Common Ground* in Covent Garden, London, in 1990 as an attempt to create a 'celebration and a demonstration of the variety we are in danger of losing, not simply in apples, but in the richness and diversity of landscape, ecology and culture too'.⁶⁷⁸ Apple Day has grown to become a national phenomenon with events taking place annually on or around 21st October across the country and calls for the day to become a national holiday, which was *Common Ground's* intention from the outset. Apple Day has been taken up enthusiastically in many towns and villages across the Forest, with events taking place in village orchards and town squares.⁶⁷⁹ The villagers of Donisthorpe and Overseal have claimed the space of formerly disused or neglected sites and made them viable public spaces. This appropriation of space and the agency of trees in the process is of vital importance for the National Forest and has become the focus of connection with place over the last few years. Overseal's orchard was initially a site of contested ownership, having not been formally handed over to the care of the District Council after a housing development company had been liquidated. Following a thirteen-year-long legal wrangle, the land came into ownership of the District Council in 2012 and an agreement was entered into between the District and Parish Councils, the National Forest Company and a newly formed local volunteer group to make use of the reacquired space. The District Council own the land, the Parish Council contribute towards the laying of surfaced paths and its general mowing and upkeep, the National Forest Company provided funding for the orchard trees that were planted, and the trees are cared for by the local volunteer group. The volunteers also organise regular annual events in the orchard. In addition, the trees chosen for planting were all heritage varieties, coupled with a tree planted for each of the soldiers lost in the first and second world wars. The space has become a multi-layered and multi-dimensional one, a landscape palimpsest in miniature; for some an area for celebration, for others a place for quiet contemplation, for others still a pleasant place to exercise the family dog. Orchards are discussed further in chapter 7.

Our connection and our dependence upon trees goes beyond our general good physical and mental health. Our wellbeing as humans is intimately connected to the wellbeing of trees and forests, indeed, without the continued production of chlorophyll life on planet earth would not exist in any way meaningful to mankind. Our continuity as a species is bound up with the future of our forests.⁶⁸⁰ Creating forests for multiple uses and purposes, as recommended by Augustine Henry in 1919 and the Countryside Commission in the mid 1980s, and as put into place by the creation of the National Forest, is vital to our future; giving those forests a viable economic life beyond the financial value of the lumbar makes them a feasible and attractive prospect for long-term investment by landowners and government bodies.

⁶⁷⁸ www.commonground.org.uk/apple-day/ (Accessed 24th February 2018).

⁶⁷⁹ Swadlincote, Overseal and Donisthorpe stand here as examples, others are readily found.

⁶⁸⁰ Jones & Cloke, *Tree Cultures*. pp:66-7.

The National Forest has always been intended to be a multi-purpose forest and this in itself creates difficulties with the balancing of the various and sometimes contrasting ideas of what the forest is and how it is used, begging the question 'whose forest is it anyway?'. There are clear contradictions between planting trees and creating modern tree spaces that fit with the established ancient woodland and its use in the past and in the present. For example, there is the question of how a balance is struck between the idealised, commodified landscapes of the woodland of the weekend pleasure seeker, the archetypal, *metaphysical* even, wildwood required by those seeking 'wilderness,' pitted against the daily realities of providing places to live and work for the forest's inhabitants. The National Forest Company focus has tended towards the planting of trees, the company's primary function after all, but which all along has recognised the need to keep the goodwill that played so large a factor in deciding the final location of the forest during the late 1980s. By and large the majority of residents within the National Forest area do not take an active role in forest creation, preferring to take a passive stance although there is also a small but active series of groups across the forest with focus on specific activities or interests. These have been well supported and often initially created and underpinned by the National Forest Company. These include wood fuel groups, volunteer forest park rangers, footpath groups, an industrial heritage group, amongst others.

The National Forest Strategy: draft for consultation document of 1993, produced by the National Forest Development Team for the Countryside Commission, recognised this requirement for locals from the forest to become stakeholders at an early stage: 'Local people must feel they are part of the Forest and so able to influence its development [...] 'much work has been done by the National Forest Development team to encourage local support and commitment'.⁶⁸¹ The document goes on to suggest ways in which community involvement might be developed, including practical conservation projects, tree planting schemes, village orchards, waymarking and footpath maintenance, along with recommendations to involving schools and developing educational the educational potential of the forest. Many, and more besides, (community wood fuel groups, for example) were taken up in the event and have gone on to become self-sustaining or developing a life of their own, having no direct input from the National Forest Company itself. Apple Day, wassails and footpath groups are prime examples of this, with groups developing uses of their village or of community orchards with no input from outside bodies. This involvement of locals though, despite being seen as and certainly becoming a key part of the long-term success of the National Forest, only occupied the final five paragraphs of the Strategy, an eighty-eight-page document. This early recognition by the National Forest Development Team of the need for local support, and for the change of identity that would come, was developed throughout the 1990s as forestry began in earnest, and once the trees began to make the forest a growing reality, so the locals slowly began growing towards properly embracing a forest identity. This process is not so straightforward as it might at first seem, the mixture of urban, semi-urban and rural areas across the forest gives rise to a mixture of identity structures. Several of the mining villages conformed in 1990 to Harvey's description of urban identities within a rural setting, therefore the community focus was not a forest or even a rural one, perhaps a semi-urban one in a

⁶⁸¹ The National Forest Development Team. *The National Forest Strategy: Draft for Consultation*. The Countryside Commission, Northampton 1993 p:72.

hybridised, industrialised-rural landscape; and therefore creating a new identity when locals were clinging to a former lost one would be a difficult challenge to overcome.⁶⁸²

In developing a forest identity people surely need to feel connected to the forest. Our ontological connection with nature is not neutral, our understanding of it is a cultural construct, we interpret it through the prism of a set of 'assumptions and beliefs that unavoidably frame and colour our experiences'.⁶⁸³ These experiences may be personal ones, the effects of childhood and our personal connection to where we grew up, whether that be rural or urban; they are also cultural— our attitude towards landscape and nature shaped by social, societal and cultural attitudes developed over very long time frames. Landscape played a critical role in the development of the aesthetic through attitudes towards land use in the Enlightenment, and in the sometimes anti-industrialisation art movements of the Picturesque and the Romantic, which themselves blur the boundary between art and nature (in that the arts represent nature in a particular way and then we see nature through the lens of that art).⁶⁸⁴ The modern stands of plantation do not seem to provide that deep bond and connection to place with the immediacy and depth that mature woodland creates, so it is as important in developing a forest identity to connect the young woodland with the ancient forests as it is for creating physical connections in developing modern green corridors for wildlife movement between stands of old woodland and forest. It is certain that the ancient woodlands lend credence and authority to the plantation of the new; the ancient forests of Needwood and Charnwood, especially, along with the relict ancient and secondary ancient woodlands within the National Forest boundaries, lend an authenticity to the growing forest as it matures and develops into a perceived 'real' forest. They impart on the National Forest a legitimacy which might otherwise appear to be missing, and for the simple reason that all woodland has been (quite literally) *manipulated* and reflects our unique, ancient, motley, and long-established relationship with the landscape. Modern plantations simply do not have that connection, that sense of deep history. They have not been altered by felling and regrowth, by hunting, by wood pasture of domesticated livestock, by the traditions of coppice and pollarding, by charcoal burning, by collecting for firewood and building, and by all the very many other uses to which the wildwood has been put and subjected to over millennia. The flora and fauna that develop over those very long periods of time are not established in plantation woodlands. It simply isn't possible in the time that the new plantations have been there for us to have developed that same sense of connection with them; they are not part of the story of our long relationship with the land- or more accurately perhaps, they represent a newer, less well regarded or not-yet-trusted newcomer to the tale.

It is partly for the reasons set out above that we do not seem to connect as readily with immature plantation as with mature ancient woodland. According to the Woodland Trust, 'ancient trees are living relics of incredible age that inspire in us feelings of awe and mystery. They also support wildlife that cannot live anywhere else. Over the centuries, they have

⁶⁸² Kitchen, L. In Marsden, T. (ed) *Sustainable Communities: New Spaces for Planning, Participation and Engagement*. Elsevier. Oxford 2008 pp:230.

⁶⁸³ Di Palma, V. *Wasteland: A History*. Yale University Press 2014 pp: 4- 5.

⁶⁸⁴ Fay, J. *What is the Picturesque?* National Trust guidebook in association with the University of Oxford, also available online here: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/what-is-the-picturesque-> (Accessed 14th August 2020).

inspired artists, writers, poets and scientists and are mentioned in sacred texts'.⁶⁸⁵ Despite this observable preference for ancient trees, there has been a discernible change in the way people interact with new tree plantation in the National Forest, especially as they themselves are maturing and becoming more established. New village and town traditions have begun to develop, new customs are evolving, and Mayday celebrations and wassails have been resurrected or newly created by local people. It seems that a new identity *is* being formed, in part from the top down, but in large part by the people of the National Forest themselves. There is now a generation of people who were born into the forest and do not have personal memories of an industrialised or post- industrialised, unwooded area. Their identities will surely be formed around a sense of belonging in a forest. How these new identities of the communities within the National Forest adapt and mutate as it matures from plantation to hoary and ancient wood will be of interest and of great consequence to the success of the National Forest project.

Even in areas of designed mixed broadleaf woodland, the plantation follows the forester's approved method of planting in rows of orderly lines like so many soldiers on parade. Is this what people either in the local communities or visitors to the area want to see? If the plantation is designed for its picturesque qualities within the landscape is it feasible to follow a more natural-looking plantation method?⁶⁸⁶ This question was partially addressed in *Growing Places*, where locals complained of feeling 'walled in by trees' and noting that newly-planted sites can present an eyesore due to the regimented appearance of rows of saplings, each with its plastic tree guard (see also chapter 7) that for some look like a 'war cemetery' and whilst realising that the plastic guards are temporary but not understanding that because the trees are 'double planted' that they will eventually be thinned out, thus lessening the regimented impression, the unnatural appearance of new plantation will be reduced.⁶⁸⁷ Morris and Urry go on to point out the politically sensitive nature of landscape change and the contested nature that is involved; people, locals, need to feel involved, to *be* involved, in the decision making processes for the Forest. The same point was made by Sophie Churchill, she acknowledged that the Company 'hadn't always got it right' and that 'a policy of Forest creation not too close to residential areas, certainly not on their boundaries' had been followed by the Company for some time.⁶⁸⁸

Cultural change within the National Forest.

This connection with trees as markers of place and identity can range from the local to the national. In September 2012 the Director General of the National Trust called for a culture change across society to reconnect us all, and particularly children, with nature, and in March 2013 the Independent Panel on Forestry recommended changes by government that would alter the way society views woodland and woodland economy.⁶⁸⁹ The latter argued that the

⁶⁸⁵ <http://www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk/ancienttrees/what> (Accessed 19th April 2017).

⁶⁸⁶ Pers. Com. Question posed by Mike Ballantyne, director of the National Forest Charitable Trust in a meeting 23rd July 2012.

⁶⁸⁷ Morris, J., & Urry, J. *Growing Places: A Study of Social Change in the National Forest*. Forest Research, Farnham 2006 p:22.

⁶⁸⁸ Pers. Comm. Conversation with Ms. Churchill, August 2013.

⁶⁸⁹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/blog/2012/sep/27/children-playing-outdoors-recession> (Accessed 24th April 2013) Independent Panel on Forestry Final Report 2012 p:14-16 Available here:

economic, social, psychological and environmental benefits of woodland underscored the national and international cultural and economic importance of publicly owned and managed forests.⁶⁹⁰ Woodland has also, of course, often been idealised in British culture and also been perceived as a mark of British, and especially English, identity, despite - or perhaps because - of the relative lack of tree cover compared to many other European countries. The Independent Panel report also emphasised how important it was to (re)connect with the wildwood or its closest substitute such as parkland, green space or urban forest, partly to improve health and wellbeing.⁶⁹¹ The Independent Panel on Forestry was created in 2010 after the British government proposed legislation which would allow the sale of publicly owned forestry. The outcry from the general public was such that by February 2011 the government was forced into an embarrassing climb-down.

This public response was as vigorous and sustained as it was unexpected. According to one poll, 84% of the English public were opposed to the proposed sale and politically disparate groups, ranging from staunch Conservatives, to environmentalists, to the Socialist Workers Party were united in their opposition to the proposal.⁶⁹² The government had not reckoned on that within woodland and trees which looms large enough in the human psyche to cause political protagonists to unite in their defence. The fierce debate following the proposed sale which led to the formation of the Independent Panel culminated in the compilation of a series of recommendations to government; the final one elicited the following response from the government: ‘...it is unsustainable to expect Forest Enterprise England to continue to finance itself through land sales which simply serve to diminish the value of its asset base. We are, therefore, rescinding the previous policy of disposing of 15% of the Public Forest Estate.’ The panels’ recommendations included promotion of a woodland culture for the nation; changes that propose, at heart, a transformation of societal values and the adoption of new national identity. The Independent Panel considered the economic benefits alongside the improvements to our well-being through improvements to the environment to be paramount in developing a woodland culture for the 21st century.⁶⁹³

The National Forest has been in many ways a proving ground for much of the Independent Panel’s comments and recommendations. The relatively sudden end to the centuries of deep coal mining and the slower culmination to the end of the clay industry in the heart of the forest has given way to the plantation of millions of trees. The plantation has not been confined to the former industrial areas alone, much farmland has been and continues to be converted to new woodland, whether by private, corporate or public bodies and landowners. This is a significant cultural change for landowner, local inhabitant and visitor, connecting people and communities together in a new matrix, in a way they had not been linked before, crossing parish and county boundaries along with class and cultural boundaries. Areas of people with recognisably distinct social and cultural backgrounds now form part of a new fledgling forest culture

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/183095/independent-panel-on-forestry-final-report1.pdf (Accessed & downloaded 31st May 2013).

⁶⁹⁰Independent Panel on Forestry Final Report pp: 14-16.

⁶⁹¹ Independent Panel on Forestry Final Report pp: 1-2.

⁶⁹² *The Guardian* online: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2011/feb/16/forests-sell-off-cameron-urn> (Accessed 24th April 2013).

⁶⁹³ Independent Panel on Forestry Final Report p:14-16.

In creating a 200 square mile forest and calling it the *National Forest*, the implication is that it is a forest for the nation. The intention was, from the outset, to create a lowland forest in the middle of England as large parts of Wales and Scotland are already afforested, having forest planted by the Forestry Commission from the 1920s onwards. These areas were quite deliberately ruled out so the use of the word *National* in the title brings into consideration older antagonisms between England and the other member states of the United Kingdom. Visitors do come from across the country, but the majority are from within an hour's drive of the forest.⁶⁹⁴ As a case in point as to how truly *national* the National Forest actually is, the Welsh Assembly announced a National Forest of its own, with a launch in March 2020 and the symbolic planting of an oak tree on Coed Brynau. In this case though, the forest will be truly a national one that will stretch continuously the length and breadth of the country. Over the next twenty years the ambition is to plant a forest that links together in a network that will improve the environment through increases in biodiversity, create an improved economic outlook for the country and act as a carbon sink.⁶⁹⁵ The plan for a vast new forest across northern England came in 2018 with the announcement by the Woodland Trust that they, along with partners The Community Forest Trust will be planting trees, creating a vast new forest across the north of England, stretching from coast to coast. As explained in their news bulletin announcing the planned forest, the *Northern Forest* as it has been called, with government support, will plant 50 million trees over a 25-year period and will link Liverpool and Southport in the west with Bridlington and Hull in the east.⁶⁹⁶ Besides Liverpool and Sheffield, the Northern Forest will include many large cities and conurbations, including Manchester, Leeds, Bradford, Chester, York and Hull. It will also link five community forests (the Mersey Forest, the City of Trees, White Rose Forest, South Yorkshire Community Forest and the Heywoods project). The estimated cost will be £500 million, with the government providing £5.7million and the rest to be raised by charity.⁶⁹⁷ In a plan loosely resembling that of the National Forest, the first planting began in March 2018 at the Woodland Trust's flagship site at Smithills, in Bolton.⁶⁹⁸

The LCAs initially drawn up by the Development Team continue to be used by the NFC as the Forest develops and the LCAs are updated as required. LCAs were updated in 2008 and then Charnwood again in 2019, see introduction.⁶⁹⁹ These assessments describe the landscapes themselves but also partially define the identities within the Forest. In some cases, there are strong, distinct identities already at various levels- town, village, county or area, and the strongest independent identity is probably that found within Charnwood, with Needwood perhaps following behind that. Some of the urban areas have identities based on their town boundaries or similar, without reference to the wider region as described in the character

⁶⁹⁴ The National Forest- *Destination Plan 2015-2025* Amion Consulting Ltd Liverpool 2015 p:7.

⁶⁹⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/12/wales-launches-5m-national-forest-scheme-with-pupils-help> (Accessed March 15th 2020).

⁶⁹⁶ http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2018/01/new-northern-forest/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=blogs&utm_content=northernforest (Accessed 8th January 2018).

⁶⁹⁷ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42591494> (Accessed 8th January 2018).

⁶⁹⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/jan/07/government-pledges-57m-to-develop-new-northern-forest-m62> (Accessed 8th January 2018).

⁶⁹⁹ <https://my.landscapeinstitute.org/case-study/charnwood-forest-landscape-character-assessment/bc98293f-b7e6-e911-a812-00224801badc> (Accessed October 17th 2020).

assessment, i.e., Burtonians think of themselves as such rather than a broader identity containing other communities within the Trent valley as defined by the Development Team.

The value of community in developing a forest culture, and community engagement with the National Forest as a living entity rather than a corporate one to create a Forest identity was understood by the Countryside Commission, the Development Team and the fledgling NFC as vital to its future. That the people of the area would come to grasp and treasure it, embracing the concept and in doing so binding their future identities to it was a recognisable target and required outcome, as evidenced by so much of the early literature produced by the Development Team and NFC. That the NFC hasn't yet been able to let go and allow those communities to 'own' the Forest themselves is a matter of time rather than corporate planning. That the NFC wants to retain control of the 'brand' is understandable, it needs to pursue an economic outcome as well as an environmental one. That the company still calls itself 'The National Forest' rather than the National Forest Company is regrettable but not, ultimately insurmountable. The problem is an historical one within the company and the Development Team before them and has transferred under successive changes of leadership; under Sophie Churchill for example, the acronym TNF (The National Forest) was promoted as an alternative for the NFC and for the National Forest, as may be observed in literature of that period. This was a deliberate use to avoid using NF as an acronym to avoid staining the company by association with the National Front, an unpleasant political party of the 1970s and 80s that promoted racism and violence.⁷⁰⁰ Despite the protestations of the National Forest Company that creating a Forest identity is key to the success of the Forest in the long term, there is a real sense in some quarters that the Forest is not owned by those who live within its boundary; the Forest logo may not be used without permission, the name itself 'The National Forest' is used interchangeably with the 'National Forest Company' both by people who live within the Forest and by the Company itself in, for example, some of its social media (its Twitter account partially acknowledges its status as a company, although not clearly, after calling itself the National Forest it is tagged as @NatForestco, and its Facebook account simply calls itself 'The National Forest').

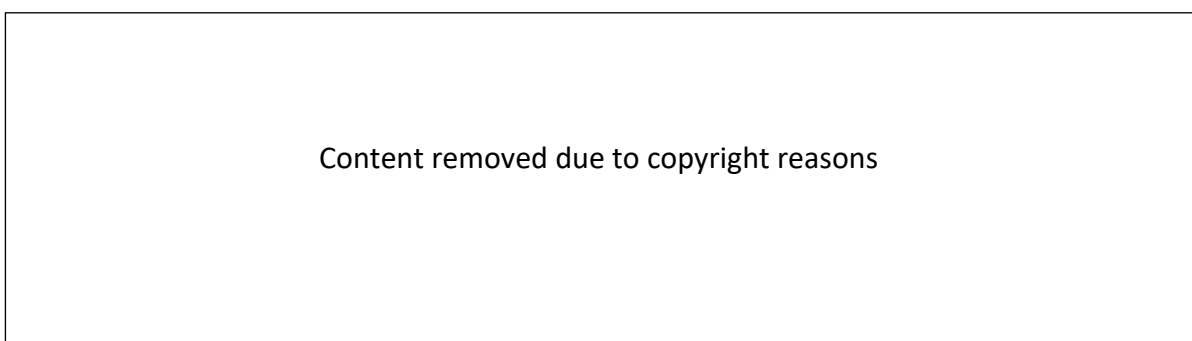


Figure 67. The National Forest Company on social media. Is it a company or is it the entirety of the Forest? Screenshots from the National Forest Company's social media accounts 25th June 2020.

Others too seem to use the two interchangeably, and for an example that stands for many, the National Memorial Arboretum (NMA) on its website recognises the role of the Company in contributing to the creation of the NMA but states that 'initial planting took place thanks

⁷⁰⁰ Pers. Comm. Conversation with Sophie Churchill. The use of TNF is confined to her tenure at the helm of the NFC.

to grants from [...] the National Forest' when it clearly means the National Forest Company.⁷⁰¹ None of this interchangeability helps with the creation of a Forest identity.

In the 2020 'Greenprint' the NFC itself stated that: 'It is also clear that the identity of the Forest is not felt by all communities or reflected within all our settlements. More needs to be done to use the character of the Forest to create a stronger local identity, to increase understanding and encourage greater engagement, pride and belonging.' And that 'We need more access, a stronger identity and better engagement'.⁷⁰² In 1995 it was saying much the same thing: the *Implementation Plan* drawn up by the Development Team immediately prior to the creation of the National Forest Company in 1995 echoed the sentiment of the need to continually *involve local people*, where they were listed as being amongst the 'Key Players' in the future of the Forest and indeed its survival: 'The *continuing support and enthusiasm of local people*, individually and through a host of interest groups, is crucial to the Forest's success. *They must feel that they are part of the Forest and able to influence its development*. They will need to be kept fully aware by the new Company of the scale of the undertaking; what is happening to the Forest, what it might mean to them, how they can involve themselves and *how they can be heard*'.⁷⁰³ A quarter of a century later, and virtually the same words; certainly, the same sentiment...

It is possible to discern a dissociative identity occasionally at work in the Forest, a kind of benign schizophrenia (if such a thing exists). The National Forest is ultimately an artificial creation, a line drawn on a map. Woodland plantation is funded through grants and tender schemes, in large part by the British taxpayer, and without the National Forest Company to administrate and continue with Forest creation it would not increase in size and no more trees would be planted. The trees themselves will eventually create the physical Forest but the work the NFC plans for the next 25 years will create the social Forest that a forest identity requires to become something more than just an ephemeral aspiration.

The work of the last 30 years is a remarkable achievement but just as in the early years of planting the Forest itself seemed a mirage of the future, so the growing of an identity associated with place takes time to root. It is clear that the NFC recognises the problem with identity creation and continues to attempt to address it. The targets it has set in the *Greenprint* will certainly contribute strongly towards creating that new mindset. As the forest grows, so, with care and nurturing, will the connection between people and place become ever more entwined until one day, the people of the National Forest will, if asked their place of origin, be able to say: 'I come from the National Forest'.

⁷⁰¹ <http://www.thenma.org.uk/about-us/who-we-are/> (Accessed July 2nd 2020).

⁷⁰² The National Forest Company. *Our 25 Year Vision for the National Forest: a greenprint for the nation* p:27.

⁷⁰³ The National Forest Development Team. *The National Forest Implementation Plan*. Donisthorpe. Undated but inferred date 1st quarter 1995 p:8 Author's italics.

7. Conclusions: The Future of the Forest.

In conclusion, this chapter argues that projects like the National Forest should be seen as a beginning in a new stage of our relationship with the natural world, whether from a rural or urban perspective. The chapter argues that forestry can be brought into urban settings through the use of orchards, and their celebration through reinvented traditions can bring us into a closer relationship with the natural world. Over the course of the thesis, we have seen how our relationship with the world is a product of our societal and cultural values. We have become reliant – dependant even – on cars and plastics and an examination of the effects of these reveals that we must rethink our future strategies, especially in relation to forestry. This chapter argues that past and future are connected through the use of monument trees and arboretums (focussing on the National Memorial Arboretum – NMA) and that using trees as a focus for public remembering is an ancient tradition that we can use into the future as one of the strands of refocussing our attention on the importance of the natural world. Precisely because the NMA was sited in the National Forest on land that became available rather than selected as being a perfect site, it can only really be reached by the road network and this has a negative effect on its usefulness as an intermediary with nature. The chapter also argues that rewilding is a valuable tool in promoting an improved environment and in combatting the climate crisis we are currently experiencing, and that our reliance on plastics can undermine our best efforts. It maintains that projects like the National Forest must be seen as first step in negotiating a new, more harmonious relationship with the environment, and that we must not allow ourselves to be fooled into believing that they are an end goal in and of themselves. In responding to the environmental considerations of the 1980s, the Countryside Commission and its partners created the political will and generated enormous public enthusiasm for an environmental project of national scale. By focussing on positive public engagement, regeneration of landscapes scarred by decades and centuries of exploitation and largely denuded of trees the Commission ensured that political commitment to the early stages of the project was forthcoming. That requirement for us all to improve our environment has not decreased in the intervening years, if anything it has increased in urgency, as global warming has accelerated to crisis levels. Commitment to halt and even reverse the environmental harm of the last two centuries is urgently required. Commitments to the future through projects like the United Kingdom’s National Forest, on unprecedented scales, are required internationally, and the National Forest stands as an example of what can be achieved, given the political will and government backing, as we move forward into an uncertain future.

In the words of David Attenborough, ‘a crime has been committed’ against the planet, perpetrated by humans and the only way for us to save the planet, and therefore ourselves is to ‘rewild the planet’.⁷⁰⁴ In the UK, we must now proceed with other environmental projects like the National Forest, and other grander rewilding projects in places where that is possible (and they are many and varied, possible even at local scale). For Attenborough, initially a climate change sceptic, and a man whose documentaries are watched by millions around the

⁷⁰⁴ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/david-attenborough-climate-change-a-life-on-our-planet-60-minutes-2020-09-27/> First broadcast 27th September 2020, (Accessed 20th October 2020).

world to call for a ‘rewilding of the planet’ is an astonishing turn of events.⁷⁰⁵ The reforestation of large parts of the globe as the first step in a recovery plan to avert the worst of the effects of the global climate catastrophe that awaits us. The human race stands at a crossroads as never experienced before. We are the inadvertent architects of a doom of our own devising, the recipients of an inheritance created by our forebears and continued by us to this day, in our headlong rush for ever more energy use and our continual consumption of the natural world. The effects of the climate crisis are now being felt and observed globally and on every continent. As carbon dioxide levels continue to rise, as the targets set by the various governments around the world begin to look like pipe dreams; new and urgent action must happen and to swiftly counteract ever-increasing rises in ocean temperatures caused by atmospheric carbon emissions and global deforestation, tree cover around the world must increase dramatically and urgently. According to the FoE, the United Kingdom needs to double tree cover, currently at around 13%, by the year 2045 to achieve the government’s declared target of zero net emissions of CO₂.⁷⁰⁶ The announcement of the Northern Forest in 2018, linking the cities of the North West of England with those of the North East will contribute towards this, but more is needed, much more. The original plan for the National Forest excluded cities and at that time there were ten Urban Forests planned across the country which, if the Midlands cities had been included, may have then clouded the importance and integrity of both the Urban Forests and the National Forest and its announcement; but the ever-increasing crisis of global climate heating has pushed such considerations beyond their 1990s limits. The expansion of the National Forest to include the cities of Derby and Leicester and the inclusion of larger towns larger towns like Loughborough, Lichfield and Tamworth is now a necessity and a review of the extent of the current boundary, in reality a line on the map, would increase tree cover and locate the National Forest in the minds of many more people; location identity itself something the National Forest has battled with since its inception.

Trees act as symbols of nature to urban and rural dweller alike and to bring the forest into the heart of these great Midlands cities and towns would engage many hundreds of thousands of people in the creation of woodland, bringing the wildwood into the heart of these former (and current) industrial and urban places. We have seen through the Sheffield tree protests that people living in an urban setting can be engaged with and genuinely attached to their own localities and with nature the time to increase that attachment with the wider forest is upon us.⁷⁰⁷ Derby and Leicester have significant green spaces within their boundaries, their arboretums, for example, or Aylestone Meadows in Leicester, which forms the southern end of the Leicester riverside that stretches through the centre of the city to Watermead Country park in the north.⁷⁰⁸ Derby Arboretum demonstrates how local initiatives

⁷⁰⁵ Although reports vary on whether Attenborough was a complete sceptic or just cautious until the science was confirmed, it was not until his films like the Blue Planet that he began to speak out very publicly. See here, for example: <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/11/30/world/amanpour-david-attenborough/> (Accessed 18th April 2021). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was established in 1988, so if Attenborough was awaiting confirmation, he was late in accepting the science.

⁷⁰⁶ https://friendsoftheearth.uk/trees?gclid=CjwKCAjwxOvsBRAjEiwAuY7L8uUYB3pW3fG0QUxzcvPVus6C1PS-ag9xxCus6SJnJKVmPa5QzeJ0hbhoC-CAQAvD_BwE (Accessed 7th October 2019).

⁷⁰⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/sep/28/michael-gove-seeking-way-to-end-bonkers-felling-of-sheffield-trees> (Accessed 9th October 2017).

⁷⁰⁸ *Aylestone Meadows Visitor Guide*. Undated pamphlet published by Leicester City Council.

in provincial towns helped foster municipal innovation in Victorian Britain;⁷⁰⁹ the National Forest demonstrates that same initiative in modern Britain. Creating a forest in the English Midlands and the opportunity to plant beyond the current boundary and linking the cities of Leicester, Derby and Nottingham to each other through a central forested belt is a natural conclusion, and an obvious and dramatic statement if it were to be made by government in response to their declaration of a climate emergency in 2019. On the 1st of May that year, Jeremy Corbyn, then Leader of the Opposition called on the House to declare an environment and climate change emergency, saying ‘this is no longer about a distant future; we’re talking about nothing less than the irreversible destruction of the environment within our lifetimes.’ He spoke of the student climate change protests and said this was an opportunity to listen to young people, who he called ‘ahead of politicians’ on the issue and demonstrate that they had been heard. Responding for the Government, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs thanked members across the House and the devolved assemblies for work on climate change. He said ‘The environment belongs to all of us. The cause of climate change is a fight which unites us. All of us in the House have a common humanity that we need to defend.’ The motion was passed without a division.⁷¹⁰ The call so far has fallen on a public keen to listen and for some to take action, with millions of people internationally protesting in cities and towns across the world. The Extinction Rebellion movement forced the United Kingdom government to become the first in the world to declare a state of climate and ecological emergency through a campaign of action which brought on board opposition parties in parliament to sway the government into understanding the mood of the country. The Welsh and Scottish assemblies, along with many towns and cities across the nation had already declared a state of environmental emergency.⁷¹¹

The call for rewilding means more than planting trees, and the term itself is a loaded one and raises the hackles of a wide range of parties with vested interests in the status quo. The status quo itself though is tipped in favour of the continued exploitation of the natural world and thinking about what rewilding means is a useful way to understanding how change may be effected, and how quickly and successfully a true balance can be restored. If the term *rewilding* is replaced with *restoring*, then the baggage attached to rewilding schemes may become more palatable to land managers, owners and corporations; who, after all, would not want to restore and replenish their own stocks and, importantly, be seen to be doing so? The experience of the National Forest has demonstrated how the actions of a small and dedicated team, with the appropriate support at government level, can make a difference; through partnership working from the outset, the Development Team were able to influence and cajole support at every level of society.

Orchards: the wildwood tamed in the heart of urban centres; tree celebration and the wassail as a reinvented tree tradition.

Rewilding (or restoring) can take many forms and can readily be brought into urban areas through more indirect means, one of these is the urban orchard. The traditional orchard has

⁷⁰⁹ Elliott, P.A., Watkins, C. & Daniels, S. *The British Arboretum: Trees, Science and Culture in the Nineteenth Century*. Routledge, London 2011 p:135.

⁷¹⁰ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2019/may/mps-debate-the-environment-and-climate-change/> (accessed 30th October 2019).

⁷¹¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-48126677> (accessed 30th October 2019).

itself become something of a fanciful memorial to times past, to an imagined golden age when life moved more slowly, and people were more connected to the land. In reality, orchards have been lost at a very rapid rate since the end of World War Two, when agricultural policy was focussed on the growing of wheat, potatoes and other staples. Wiltshire lost ninety-five per cent of its orchards after 1945, Devon lost ninety per cent, Gloucestershire lost seventy-five per cent since 1945, Worcestershire lost 63 per cent since the 1970s, and the list goes on. These figures represent just the traditional orchards, but the commercial orchards have declined rapidly too. In 1970, the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food recorded 62,200 hectares of orchards and this number had reduced by two-thirds in 1997, when the figure was just 22,400 hectares. The driver of this decline was mainly due to the intensification of agriculture, and the importing, purchase and consumption of cheap fruit from abroad, with large-scale growers in the UK receiving subsidies from the EU to grub up commercial orchards with monies intended to reduce over production in countries like Italy and France. Traditional orchards are under constant threat from development within towns and villages, with infill housing driving their loss.⁷¹² According to conservationists Benedict Macdonald and Nicholas Gates, orchards are so rich in biodiversity, they eclipse most recognised conservation areas.⁷¹³ A valuable productive tree space in a town or village can be good not only for biodiversity but for supporting and building communities too. Common Ground's Apple Day event in October 1990 was very well received and tapped into the feeling of the moment, and momentum increased with local councils, supermarkets, local growers, farmer's markets, and many other statutory and other bodies becoming involved. In August 1991 the CPRE argued in favour of traditional orchard conservation, and in January 1992 John Major MP, the then Prime Minister, made a speech promoting the value of the traditional varieties of British Apples.⁷¹⁴ A new tradition had begun; from the first Apple Day in Covent Market, London, 1990, a blue touch paper seemed to have been lit; in 1991 there were 60 events across the country, that figure had increased to 300 by 1997 and exploded to over 600 in 1999. The event seems to be established in the nation's traditional calendar.⁷¹⁵

Several small community orchards have been planted in the Forest, Moira, Donisthorpe and Linton have planted them, and the NFC have assisted in financing these; for example, the company covered the cost of purchasing additional trees for Donisthorpe Community Orchard, along with the first batch of trees in Overseal's Croft Orchard.⁷¹⁶ Community orchards can just as easily be planted in urban spaces as well as rural ones, tree places can be productive in bolstering communities in more than just the production of apples, the associated community events that can be introduced prove ever popular. For example, within the Forest, and in a recreation of the past, or perhaps a reimagined one, both Donisthorpe and Overseal have introduced Apple Day events in October, along with a re-invented Wassail event held in their respective orchards each January.⁷¹⁷

⁷¹² Keech, B., *et al.* *The Common Ground Book of Orchards; Conservation and Community*. Common Ground, London 2000 p: 32 .

⁷¹³ Macdonald, B. & Gates, N. *Orchard: a Year in England's Eden*. Harper Collins 2020.

⁷¹⁴ Keech, B *et al.* *The Common Ground Book of Orchards*. pp: 210- 211

⁷¹⁵ Keech, B *et al.* *The Common Ground Book of Orchards*. p: 123

⁷¹⁶ *The National Forest News* Spring Issue 1997 see under the heading 'An Apple a Day'. The National Forest Company, Moira 1997.

⁷¹⁷ See here for example: <https://www.staffordshire-live.co.uk/news/local-news/your-pots-pans-out-ward-1040462> (Accessed 19th July 2020).

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Figure 68. Apple Day 2019 in Croft Orchard, Overseal. Author's photograph.

They have proved to be very popular, so much so that the wassail has been exported to nearby Tamworth, with a new event there in a local pub in the lee of the castle, supported by the Tamworth Civic Society and the Tamworth Brewing Company.⁷¹⁸ The origins of the wassail itself are ancient and are found in the rites of fertility and harvest celebration, although modern wassail traditions have been reworked and reinvented to suit societal and cultural agendas, in local cases to use the celebration of the orchard trees to bolster communities in flux.⁷¹⁹ Orchards are a living demonstration of how humans and nature can work together, the continuing popularity of their celebration through Apple Day and wassail events is a reminder of our deeply-felt connection to place, and community. The government recognises the value of community orchards and provides a how-to guide to create or conserve them.⁷²⁰ The NFC has supported the creation of orchards in the Forest and could promote and plan to plant more through urban orchard groups, and encourage orchard planting alongside the reintroduction of some of the 'lost' varieties for healthier palettes, challenging agribusiness and the importation of large numbers of tasteless, flavourless apples that have spent long periods aboard shipping containers, reducing their nutritional value; the further the 'fresh' food has travelled the greater the deterioration of the mineral and vitamin content.⁷²¹

⁷¹⁸ See here: <https://www.facebook.com/events/tamworth-brewing-co/wassailing-in-the-hop-yard-tamworth-cider-launch/526301264907190/> (Accessed 19th July 2020). Overseal wassail organisers were asked to help set up a new event in the town and support it annually until it becomes established. Pers. com. A series of telephone calls with George Greenaway of Tamworth Brewing Company, January 2020.

⁷¹⁹ Crosby, J. *A History of the Wassail Bowl*, in McWilliams, M (ed). *Celebration: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2011*. Prospect Books, Devon 2012 p:76.

⁷²⁰ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/11466/1973262.pdf (Accessed 31st May 2020).

⁷²¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2003/may/10/foodanddrink.shopping6> Accessed 2nd March 2021.

In the United Kingdom, there are many examples of localised and relatively small scale rewilding projects, perhaps the most well-known project being that of Knepp Castle in Sussex, which focusses on enabling natural processes rather than interventionist commercial farming techniques, creating a highly successful land ‘management’ programme that has resulted in extraordinary increases in populations of wildlife, including rare species that have returned and are breeding in this country for the first time in decades, demonstrating that ‘low-cost methods of ecological restoration can be highly effective, producing dramatic and profitable results for failing or abandoned farmland.’⁷²² It signifies that rewilding projects can support established nature reserves and wildlife sites by providing an expansion of habitats and wildlife that may one day connect up on a landscape scale’, and the successful reintroduction and breeding of the first white storks in the UK for over 600 years is a sign of hope for the future of British wildlife.⁷²³ The overspill success into the surrounding area has created improved resilience in the local economy, with additional tourism resulting in an upturn for local pubs, shops and guest houses. The Knepp project has also created nature-based tourism and camping facilities and offers ‘safaris’ for visitors to the site.

There are others, including those from a grass-roots foundation rather than from a Government body, private landowner or other authority and of interest here by way of contrast and comparison to the National Forest in the English Midlands us that of Carrifran in the Southern Uplands of Scotland.

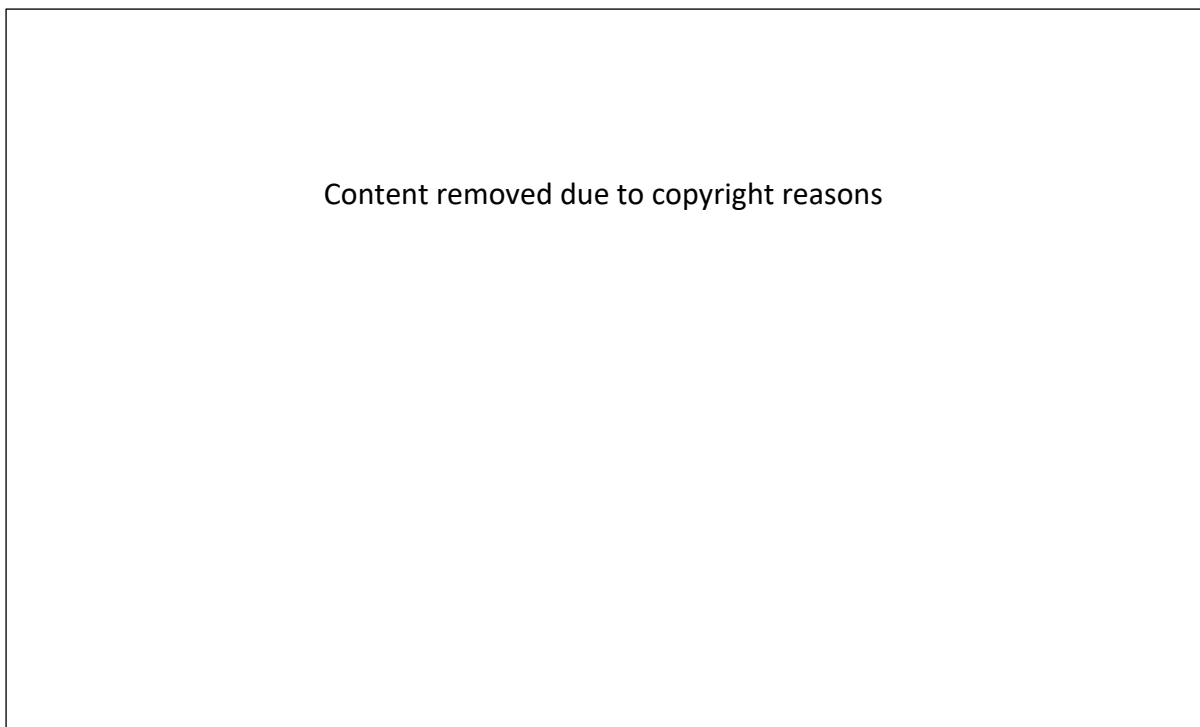


Figure 69. Carrifran Wildwood indicated in pink showing its location relative to the town of Moffat.⁷²⁴

⁷²² Tree, I. *Wilding*. Picador, London 2018.

⁷²³ <https://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/rewilding-projects/knepp-castle-estate> Accessed 31st October 2020.
<https://knepp.co.uk/white-storks> (Accessed 6th November 2020).

⁷²⁴ Ashmole, M., & Ashmole, P. *The Carrifran Wildwood Story: Ecological Restoration from the Grass Roots*. Borders Forest Trust, Jedburgh 2009 p:35.

In the late 1990s a group of environmentalist friends were concerned that after centuries of sheep grazing, although beautiful, the hillsides of the Scottish borders were barren, almost entirely denuded of trees of any species, native or otherwise. The friends started a grassroots campaign to purchase a significant area of land and in 2,000 CE had enough funding to purchase 600 hectares, the valley of Carrifran. The purchase of the land stimulated the creation of the Borders Forest Trust, who have gone on to make further land purchases in the area, three distinct sites totalling 31 square kilometres and the Trust has notionally linked all of the land which is forested or has the potential to be forested and is 'reviving the wild heart of Scotland'. A discussion with Peter Dreghorn, who was involved in the project since its inception in 1998, revealed similarities and differences in approach with the early years of the National Forest. Seed provenance is very important to Carrifran and less important to the Forestry Commission who grant aided it. All the seeds are gathered by volunteers from recognised sites in Scotland and the Lake District and were then grown on. The native trees that once grew on Carrifran thousands of years ago were established by taking cores of pollen samples, so only species that once grew there were introduced back to the area, and a surprising discovery was that no pollen from Scots pine or yew was discovered in the core samples and consequently none has been reintroduced. Dreghorn also commented that 'Definition of forests and woodlands has been a difficulty within the relationships in the media and public i.e., the difference between non-native conifer plantations and broad-leaved native woodland. Only now after 20 years is Carrifran admired and recognised by the general public as well as environmentalists, because it looks like a woodland now'.⁷²⁵ The same understanding of the definition of what a forest is was felt in the National Forest too, and patience is required in the early years, the trees themselves take time to grow and become part of the landscape, slowly coming to define place in new ways as the woods take root and slowly mature.

The alternative models presented above underscore the possibilities that are available for rewilding projects at local levels, whether privately or through grass-roots groups. On their own they offer relatively small-scale models for different approaches for success but what is really required is national commitment from the UK Government. This is not to denigrate the care and long-term commitment by these different approaches, their work is laudable, but government supported bodies like the NFC have demonstrated that real difference can be made to significant sized areas of land at relatively small expense to the public purse. The planting of new and the good management of current forests and woodlands is a symbol of our care for our collective future. To date, the National Forest has successfully transformed former industrial sites and farmland to create a woodland that is a home to wildlife and a working forest that is home to people and communities. Extending the reach of the forest to encompass the great cities of the East Midlands would add to the tree cover of the country and soften the harsh concrete environment of our towns and cities. As Burton on Trent welcomes tree planting along the Trent corridor into and through the heart of the town, so too could the forest expand to embrace the cities on its periphery.⁷²⁶ The tree places within

⁷²⁵ Pers. Com. Email discussion with Peter Dreghorn October 31st to November 4th 2020. The passage about Carrifran and the Borders Trust is largely made up from discussion, with him, with supporting information from the Borders trust website and the book *The Carrifran Wildwood Story: Ecological Restoration from the Grass Roots*. Written by Myrtle Ashmole, one of the founding members of the Carrifran group. Peter has acted in a variety of capacities with the Carrifran Wildwood group and personally planted 4,000 of the trees.

⁷²⁶ <http://www.eaststaffsbc.gov.uk/washlands-project> (Accessed 17th October 2019).

the cities, the arboreta, parks, street trees and semi wild places, the wastelands and edgelands all would then be drawn into the wider forest itself, integrated into a wider, wilder wood. This would bring benefits for fauna as well as flora, providing green pathways along which animals and insects could travel much more safely, and much more naturally, than along the tarmac and concrete of urban streets. It would help to demonstrate that government bodies do listen and act as appropriate and might go some way to assuaging the genuine concerns felt by people who otherwise experience disenfranchisement. Leadership is required, the government must act boldly and decisively; extending the reach of the National Forest would demonstrate a genuine commitment to strong environmental action. Grass roots activity can show the way, as with the Carrifran project, private landowners can make a difference, as demonstrated at Knepp, but UK government support through leadership like that demonstrated for more than a quarter century by the NFC is now urgent and vital. The NFC has demonstrated that forestry can provide a model for large-scale sustainable development for the future, converting farmland, urban sites and regenerating industrial wastelands.

The National Memorial Arboretum

Conversion of denuded landscapes can take other shapes that benefit both wildlife and human communities, whether through the creation of public green spaces, town parks or arboretums. Opportunistic planting and conversion of industrial sites is one of the early hallmarks of the National Forest, and the Development Team, rarely slow in chasing an opportunity when it presented itself, saw one such chance when approached with the outline plan for a National Memorial Arboretum (NMA). One of the former edgelands spaces to have gained a new purpose through the change from industrial wasteland to prime visitor attraction is the unlikely site of a former gravel pit in the Trent Valley, near to the village of Alrewas. The NMA was introduced into part of the wider Forest plan from at least as early as 1993 and is specifically mentioned in the National Forest Public Relations Plan of Action for 1993-1994, with the projected launch of a Memorial Arboretum Appeal, and with a suggested outline launch date of February 1994.⁷²⁷ The NMA website information on its own history holds a brief history of events leading up to the establishment of the NMA. According to this the NMA was conceived by Commander David Childs CBE who believed that a new non-London based national focus for remembrance was required. After meeting with Group Captain Leonard Cheshire VC, an appeal was launched in 1994 supported by then Prime Minister, John Major. According to the NMA website it was then that:

The future of the project became assured when three proposals were agreed. These were: for the site to be the location of the Armed Forces Memorial; for the Ministry of Defence to pay a significant grant-in-aid to allow for free entry, and that The Royal British Legion would accept the gift of the site as the focus for the Nation's year-round Remembrance.⁷²⁸

⁷²⁷ Prepared by Susan Newsome. *The National Forest: A Public Relations Strategy and Supporting Programme of Activity for 1994*. Susan Newcombe Associates, Leamington Spa 1993 p:9. Copy kept in the SDDC archive and lent to the author May-July 2020 .

⁷²⁸ <http://www.thenma.org.uk/about-us/who-we-are/> (Accessed 9th July 2020).

The former NMA website contains a little more information about its early history; the site states that Childs originally conceived the idea of a national memorial arboretum following a visit to Arlington Cemetery in Washington USA (the national focus for remembrance in that country), which was followed much later by a conversation with Leonard Cheshire, who himself held concerns over the forgetting of those who had died in wars and conflicts of the twentieth century.⁷²⁹ This is borne out by Childs' narrative of events. At some point before 1993 there must have been some liaison between Childs and the Development Team, (Cheshire had died in July 1992); Childs later recalled that he had read a newspaper article mentioning the planned National Forest and wrote to Susan Bell with the idea for a memorial arboretum and that Bell was immediately supportive, her own father having been killed whilst on military service in Korea, but gives no date for that correspondence.⁷³⁰ Given the wavering support for the Forest from ministers at this stage, it seems unlikely that the opportunities surrounding the creation of a National Memorial Arboretum in the fledgling Forest area would have escaped the notice of the Development Team in strengthening their position in increasing commitment to the project from Government. Certainly, the mention of the concept in the public relations strategy leads to the conclusion that an agreement had been reached, that it was a concept in line with the National Forest's principal mission, and that it had made its way into policy documents, probably after November 1992 as the concept did not feature in the strategy drawn up for 1993.⁷³¹

The eventual site for the NMA in the Trent valley was provided by Redland Aggregates (later to become Lafarge Redland Aggregates, then Lafarge Aggregates, currently Tarmac Aggregates Ltd.) in 1995 and comprised some 200 acres (~81 hectares) having previously been a gravel extraction quarry. The main attraction for the World Memorialisation Fund (Leonard Cheshire's charitable organisation, through which David Childs was now pursuing the creation of the memorial arboretum) was that Redland Aggregates were prepared to lease the land for 999 years at a peppercorn rent of £1 per year. Little else about the site appeared promising, on a visit organised by Bell, Childs noted that the restored site was 'badly drained and marshy [...] the gravel pit had been filled in with pulverised ash from the nearby power station that no-one knew the effects to trees of [and that] further disadvantages lay underground, the site being crisscrossed by high pressure gas pipes'. Childs himself freely admits that he convinced himself the site was ideal for the Arboretum as the overriding virtue was that it was virtually free. Childs also acknowledges the contribution made by Bell and the NFC team in securing a future for the Arboretum through their determination and work ethic.⁷³²

The connection to the wider Forest through the medium of trees ought to be an obvious one with an easy relationship. Trees 'interface between humans and nature, they reach back and forward through time to past and future generations' and as such, as living organisms with lifespans many times longer than our own, are often used in memorialisation and

⁷²⁹ <http://www.wwwbeeson.co.uk/OldSites/arboretum/history.htm> (Accessed 9th July 2020).

⁷³⁰ Childs, D. *Growing Remembrance: The Story of the National Memorial Arboretum*. Pen & Sword Military. 2008 p: 6.

⁷³¹ Susan Newcombe Associates. *The National Forest: PR Plan of Action 1993*. Leamington Spa, November 1992. Copy kept in the SDDC archive and lent to the author May- July 2020.

⁷³² *The National Forest News*, Issue 8 August 1995. Copy held in SDDC Archive and lent to the author May-July 2020. Childs, D. *Growing Remembrance: The Story of the National Memorial Arboretum*. Pen & Sword Military. 2008 pp: 6-7.

commemoration.⁷³³ Trees around the United Kingdom and beyond connect us directly with our past and our future. The relationship between the NMA and the National Forest was an opportunistic one in its beginnings and seems to have remained slightly jarring or ill-fitting. What ought to be an obvious and seamless interface between arboretum and wider Forest feels awkward, as if the connection were an afterthought. The National Memorial Arboretum Guidebook, for example, some 180 pages long, contains not a single reference to the National Forest, and whilst it does detail the significance of some of the trees within the site with examples, it does not explain the contribution the ~50,000 trees in the arboretum make to the overall Forest, nor the mutual support the organisations gave each other in their early creation.⁷³⁴ The choice of location for an arboretum is an unusual one, even an unlikely one, driven by expediency rather than preference. It is difficult to get to by any means other than car and there is little in the way of public transport, certainly nothing directly to the Arboretum itself. The NMA website tacitly acknowledges this on its website (after stating that the location is ideal for access from the motorway network, foregrounding car culture), giving walking instructions from the nearest bus stop, a hair-raising 20-minute walk along busy roads with little in the way of pavements, with the alternative of 'special pre-booked taxi rate' from its recommended taxi supplier.⁷³⁵ The roads approaching the site are fast and dangerous. The NFC launched its National Forest Trail in 2014, starting (or ending) at the NMA but it is no pleasure to walk to or from. This is a problem, especially in thinking about both our own future, the future of forests, and how the two are intertwined if the human race is to survive the climate crisis. Car culture is a symptom of our lack of connection with the natural world, especially as it is the only realistic way to access the NMA. We must use arboretums, and especially the NMA to promote our connection with remembrance and our past into the future. Using trees in a memorial arboretum allows time for reflection on time and space, on our connections with the world and how trees can act as intermediaries over generations and sometimes very long periods of time. As a former gravel extraction site on the Trent floodplain, and where the nearby Rivers Tame and Mease converge with the Trent, it is not the obvious first choice of area for a visitor centre and not the especial habitat of non-wetland tree species. The NMA has had to close due to flooding on several occasions, sometimes fully and sometimes partially and on occasions throughout the calendar year. June 2016 was a wet summer and there were areas of the site that were completely inaccessible. The same had happened the year before at the same time of year, and the site has been closed completely in the past (November 2012 stands here as an example, others can be found).⁷³⁶ Speaking in 2012, a spokesman for the NMA stated that 'the Arboretum had been built on a floodplain but hoped the drainage would be improved in the future'.⁷³⁷ It is difficult to see how drainage could be improved when the site itself is on a major floodplain at the confluence of three rivers.

⁷³³ Elliott, *British Urban Trees* p:5

⁷³⁴ National Memorial Arboretum Guidebook. Edition 5. No publisher information, inferred date 2018.

⁷³⁵ <https://www.thenma.org.uk/visit-us/plan-your-visit/getting-here> (Accessed 17th November 2020). Walking to and from the site is an alarming experience and not one personally recommended.

⁷³⁶ See examples here: <https://www.itv.com/news/update/2012-11-26/national-memorial-arboretum-closed-due-to-flooding/> or here: https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g4212590-d1379697-i195892838-National_Memorial_Arboretum-Alrewas_Staffordshire_England.html or here:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-stoke-staffordshire-20508777> (Accessed 9th July 2020).

⁷³⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-stoke-staffordshire-20508777> (Accessed 9th July 2020).

Increasing recognition that afforestation schemes have a major part to play in flood prevention, and future development of the National Forest, for example through the Trent Wetlands Project in Burton, will help enable floodplains to absorb more water and crucially slow flow rates. Winter and autumn floods are becoming a regular feature of British weather as the climate crisis deepens.⁷³⁸ Derby's flood barriers were activated in the flooding of November 2019 and the flooding rivers Derwent and Don in Yorkshire remain a danger to life and homes and continue to disrupt transport and industry. Both rivers' levels peaked at record levels on 9th November 2019.⁷³⁹ The EA deployed emergency flood barriers and issued seven 'Danger to Life' flood warnings, alongside evacuating thousands of individuals, and evacuating in one case an entire village as the River Don rose five metres above normal levels, higher than the 'catastrophic 2007 floods' in which two people lost their lives.⁷⁴⁰ The 1998, 2002 and 2007 floods in Pickering, Yorkshire, resulted in a series of measures being undertaken by the Environment Agency and other authorities, including the local District Council, after the case attracted attention of geographers funded by the Economic and Social Research Council a series of 'bund model' mini dams were introduced, which replicated the natural effects of beavers on rivers and watercourses- referred to as 'Leaky barriers' by the environment Agency in the *Working with Natural Processes to reduce flood risk* documents.⁷⁴¹ Along with this, the planting of riparian woodland upstream of the town was introduced. The erection of concrete flood barriers in the town had been rejected, largely due to a reluctance by the locals to have the town street scene spoiled by the barriers and the effect that would have on the tourist economy, so eventually a scheme was devised that combined the natural processes with some flood barrier and storage areas within the town.⁷⁴² During the Boxing Day floods of 2015, flood peaks were reduced by an estimated 15-20%, attributed by the Environment Agency to the processes outlined above. Computer modelling of catchment woodland and leaky barriers demonstrates very significant reduction in flood flow (7.5% reduction due to leaky barriers and between 3 and 70% due to catchment woodland), it is clear that flood frequency may be reduced very significantly by catchment woodland. Other studies by the Environment Agency demonstrate a 5 – 20% reduction in peak flows and circa 50% reduction across all events.⁷⁴³ Water quality along the River Trent is impacted by pressures originating upstream of Burton, from catchments draining the city of Stoke and from tributary rivers, including the River Tame, draining Birmingham and Tamworth, along with the entire catchment being deemed by the Environment Agency as a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone, this being caused by agricultural pollutants associated with agrarian farm processes, planned to be at least partially addressed by the Trent Washlands project.⁷⁴⁴

⁷³⁸ https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/climate/understanding-climate/uk-extreme-events-_heavy-rainfall-and-floods (Accessed 6th November 2020).

⁷³⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/nov/09/severe-flood-warnings-remain-in-midlands-and-north-of-england> (Accessed 10th November 2019).

⁷⁴⁰ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/11/09/700-villagers-told-evacuate-new-danger-life-flood-warning-issued/> Accessed 10th November 2019.

⁷⁴¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/654440/Working_with_natural_processes_one_page_summaries.pdf (Accessed 11th November 2019).

⁷⁴² Castree, N. *Making Sense of Nature*. Routledge, Abingdon 2014 pp: 268-270.

⁷⁴³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/654440/Working_with_natural_processes_one_page_summaries.pdf (Accessed 11th November 2019).

⁷⁴⁴ <https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/OperationalCatchment/3472/Summary> (Accessed 10th November 2019).

The current Washlands Project in Burton on Trent recognises the value of continuing to use the washlands as a floodplain for flood management purposes, in effect storing huge volumes of water that in different circumstances might otherwise be canalised and forced downstream and potentially causing devastation elsewhere. The value of natural floodplains has long been recognised but as in the case of the Thames in southern England, long stretches of the river, especially upstream, have been straightened and the natural floodplains drained and developed for housing and business.⁷⁴⁵ The Washlands Project plans to integrate the floodplain as a recreational facility, maintain access and to maximise biodiversity. Working with natural processes is not a new initiative and there are many examples of its successful application across the United Kingdom and beyond. It reduces the risk of flooding by slowing, storing and filtering water, complementing rather than replacing engineering and flood management strategies, and always achieves multiple environmental benefits beyond those planned in flood defence programmes.⁷⁴⁶ Riparian woodland planting has many significant and beneficial events on both freshwater quality and wildlife; maintaining water temperatures, cleaning the water of nitrates and other agricultural pollutants from farm run-off, improving the environment for fish and other aquatic fauna, along with the provision of new wildlife habitat for land-based fauna.⁷⁴⁷ This is alongside the multiple benefits associated with woodland for people, the opportunities for beneficial effects on human welfare too are valuable in terms of mental and physical health. Population densities in Derby and Leicester are high, 3,237 and 4,494 per square kilometre respectively; any potential for increasing the immediate health improvement opportunities must surely be acted upon. The obvious alignment between the Washlands Project and National Forest objectives is key to integrating the town further into the forest itself and stands as what will become an exemplar of connection between forest and town, rural and urban; and it offers a clear vision of how the different Midlands cities might be connected to a wider, wilder environment, with improved habitats and water quality, improvements in air and health benefits, an increase in aesthetic quality, some small but valuable improvement in climate regulation, alongside the uplift in property values associated with these landscape improvements which is projected at around 3%. The tourism and recreational benefits are difficult to calculate financially but they are highly valued by locals and visitors.⁷⁴⁸

Case study: Environmental problems with plastic tree guards and other plastics in the National Forest and beyond.

We live in an age of plastic. In 2002 approximately 98 million tons of plastics were produced worldwide.⁷⁴⁹ By 2018 that number had risen to 359 million tonnes.⁷⁵⁰ The amount of plastics

⁷⁴⁵ BBC Radio 4. *Costing the Earth: Thames Revival*. First broadcast 5th November 2019.

⁷⁴⁶https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/654440/Working_with_natural_processes_one_page_summaries.pdf (Accessed 11th November 2019).

⁷⁴⁷ Broadmeadow, S. & Nisbet, T.R. *The Effects of Riparian Management on the Freshwater Environment: a literature review of best practice*. Hydrology and Earth System Sciences, 8 (3) 2004 pp 286- 288.

⁷⁴⁸https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/654440/Working_with_natural_processes_one_page_summaries.pdf (Accessed 11th November 2019).

⁷⁴⁹ Stevens, E.S. *Green Plastics: An Introduction to the New Science of Biodegradable Plastics*. Princeton University Press 2002 p:6.

⁷⁵⁰https://www.plasticseurope.org/application/files/9715/7129/9584/FINAL_web_version_Plastics_the_facts2019_14102019.pdf (Accessed 24th February 2020).

produced globally is forecast to double over the course of the next two decades.⁷⁵¹ National economies are affected by the plastics industry and it is estimated the European plastics industry alone had a positive trade balance of 15 billion euros in 2018.⁷⁵²

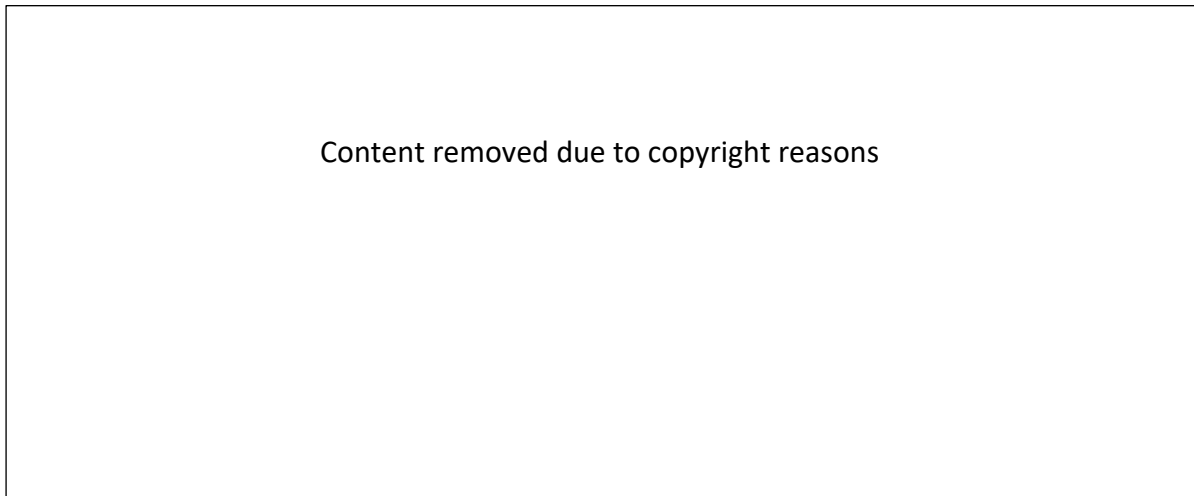


Figure 70. Between the years 1950 and 2017 the total worldwide production of plastics is estimated at 8.3 billion tons and is forecast to continue to increase.⁷⁵³

‘Plastic’ is a catch-all term for a wide variety of man-made materials derived from the petrochemical industry, and plastics are a remarkable group of materials with uncountable uses upon which the modern world relies; they are low cost and versatile and it is difficult to imagine modern life without them.⁷⁵⁴ They are used everywhere from industry to the home, from military applications to medical uses and beyond. They are also used in forestry, for – amongst other things – twine, plastic cable ties, root bags and tree protectors or guards.

Across the National Forest approximately nine million trees have been planted, and the planting of approximately three million of those has utilised plastic tree guards, in keeping with forest management across the United Kingdom and beyond.⁷⁵⁵ These plastic tree guards provide protection for the young trees against damage from voles, deer, rabbit, hare and other mammals, along with shielding against herbicides overspray, and are deployed to discourage grass and other plant growth during the establishment of the whip and sapling juvenile trees. These tree shelters were developed in 1979 by Graham Tuley, who initially wrapped polythene sleeves around plastic mesh guards to create a mini- greenhouse effect around individual trees. Since that date, tree shelters have often been referred to as ‘Tuley tubes’, as well as *grow- tubes*, *tree- tubes* and other similar epithets. Many of these have since been registered as trademarks.⁷⁵⁶ There is no doubting the efficacy of these tree shelters (although wider net guards are often used to allow for more natural movement of young trees) and they offer a convenient solution to many of the problems of establishing juvenile

⁷⁵¹ Galgani, L. Beiras, R. Galgani, F. Panti, c. Borja, A. *Impacts of Marine Litter*. *Frontiers in Marine Science* Vol. 6: Article 208 2019 p:6.

⁷⁵² <https://www.plasticseurope.org/> (Accessed 24th February 2020).

⁷⁵³ Abbing, M.R. *Plastic Soup, an Atlas of Ocean Pollution*. Island Press, Washington 2019. p:7.

⁷⁵⁴ Stevens, E.S. *Green Plastics: An Introduction to the New Science of Biodegradable Plastics*. Princeton University Press 2002 p:6.

⁷⁵⁵ National Forest Company Press Release dated 28th September 2018.

⁷⁵⁶ Potter, M.J. *Treeshelters*. H.M. Stationary Office 1991 p:48.

trees – being eaten by wild or domesticated animals – or damage from mowing, herbicide overspray or other woodland management activities. The use of these tree shelters is environmentally problematical however, a situation which seems to have gone largely unnoticed until very recently.⁷⁵⁷ The guards are made from plastic, usually polypropylene, which can be bio- or photo- degradable. Initially, an anti-ultraviolet additive was added to the tree shelters (ultraviolet rays from sunlight cause degradation over time in plastics) but in proportions which prevented the plastic from breaking down in a relatively short space of time; some of these tree shelters from the late 1970s and early 1980s have yet to begin to degrade in any meaningful sense of the word.

The point of stabilising the plastic against UV breakdown for a minimum (or maximum) time span is moot anyway, the fact that the tree guards are made from plastic is a cause for environmental concern in itself. Part of the problem, along with a lack of real understanding on behalf of the layman of the difference between bio-degradable and compostable, is one of just how much the plastic degrades in the environment. In simple terms, biodegradable simply means that the plastic, in this case in the form of tree-guards, breaks down into increasingly small pieces. It was considered, or not properly understood, that these would not create a problem over the long term. This fragmented plastic does not disappear completely however, microscopic degraded plastic fragments find their way into the water table and create a hazard. They are accidentally consumed by wildlife and create a further danger to life. They are absorbed into the soil, ecosystems generally and eventually into the human food chain.⁷⁵⁸



Figure 71. Used tree guards as litter at Littleworth, less than half a mile from Feanedock. Author's photograph.

If a material is designated as compostable it means that the material structure will break down into its component chemicals and be absorbed naturally into the environment without concern. Even this is problematical, very often this ability to be composted is under industrial composting conditions only and the materials may well still present a biohazard in the environment. The very fact that millions of tree guards have been introduced in the National Forest and beyond without any kind of planned removal is a matter of concern in itself.

⁷⁵⁷ *Scottish Forestry*. The Journal of the Royal Scottish Forestry Society 2005 pp:59-60.

⁷⁵⁸ Wagner, M. & Lambert, S. in *The Handbook of Environmental Chemistry Volume 58. Freshwater Microplastics: Emerging Environmental Contaminants?* Springer 2017 pp:10-15.



Figure 72. Tree guards in the Forest. Taken at Littleworth, less than half a mile from Feanedock. Author's photograph.

In a press release dated 28th September 2018 the National Forest Company recognised the issue and attempted to begin to redress the balance by offering a strand of the grant scheme specifically for tree guard removal.⁷⁵⁹ The NFC estimated that since the early 1990s as many as three million tree guards have been used in the creation of the National Forest and that nationally, between 2010 and 2015, 11 million trees were planted in the UK, and between 2015 and 2020 the government plans to plant a further 11 million trees. To protect the investment of tree planting, most of these trees will be planted with guards, or protected by fences. Further recognition of the problem of plastics tree guards was made by the NFC in the lead up to the establishment of the inaugural Timber festival in July 2018. In the press release it was stated that work was piloted at Feanedock wood, near Ashby de la Zouch on the Leicestershire/Derbyshire border, in preparation for the National Forest's first Timber festival. Teams of volunteers collected in very many plastic tree guards, which were then sent for recycling into benches, ground reinforcement blocks for outdoor use, allowing grass to grow through them, or for grain store flooring.⁷⁶⁰

The Timber festival itself makes much of its environmental credentials, and deservedly so, the promotion of environmental improvement and solutions to climate concerns alongside sustainability, transport and multiple other environmental problems is laudable. The removal of rubbish from the site prior to the festival itself is understandable but leaves the NFC and their partners open to criticisms of 'greenwashing', appearing to be more environmentally friendly than the facts suggest and pandering to the preconceptions of the festival crowd, which the festival organisers play to in their promotion of the festival as having excellent environmental credentials. The recycling of the plastic tree guards into other plastic products to be used in the forest and still be allowed to break down into micro plastics does not remove the biohazard and may be construed as an ill-conceived approach, demonstrating a lack of understanding of the breadth and depth of the plastics problem, the implications of which have not been fully thought through to their conclusion; the hazard is repackaged and reintroduced in a different guise but not removed. This simplistic approach as outlined by the

⁷⁵⁹ National Forest Company Press Release dated 28th September 2018.

⁷⁶⁰ National Forest Company Press Release dated 28th September 2018.

then Head of Forestry at the NFC, Charles Robinson, demonstrates the general lack of understanding towards our shared reliance on and the ubiquitous nature of plastic across the wider public sphere. Robinson's response in the press release pays lip service to the idea of recycling and falls very far short of seriously addressing the problem. A short walk around the Timber festival site reveals both the use of plastic in the use of ground reinforcement cover and the short-termed nature of its life span.

The choice of rolls of plastic ground reinforcement netting has what at first glance seems like some immediately apparent benefits; it is relatively cheap, readily available, is easy to install and quickly absorbed into the landscape without despoiling its apparent picturesque nature. Vehicular access to the site is limited and a heavy-duty stoned access lane was installed by the NFC at relatively high cost, lighter vehicular access was readily provided using the ground reinforcement matting, helping to prevent rutting of the ground surface by vehicle wheels. Unfortunately, the plastic has begun to degrade and break down into increasingly smaller pieces in less than the two years since it was installed.



Figure 73. Plastic ground reinforcement matting installed at the site of Timber festival. Author's photograph.



Figure 74. Evidence of plastic degradation of reinforcement matting at Timber festival site. Author's photograph.

As the plastic reinforcement mesh matting used by the NFC becomes brittle and difficult to recover, resulting in disintegration of the material due to its inherent susceptibility to degradation over time, it is important that this material is removed from the environment before it can degrade into microplastics, resulting in them being impossible to remove entirely as they wash into the soil where they accumulate and pass into watercourses and river systems.⁷⁶¹ The same statement is true for tree guards, and it may already be too late for some of the millions already introduced into the environment: they may already have begun to break down to the point where they are polluting ecosystems and are now impossible to remove.

Only two weeks before the NFC press release, the European Parliament had called for a number of additional measures that went beyond the European Commission's plans to slash plastic pollution, under the European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy launched in January 2018. These additional proposals were:

- A ban on microplastics in cosmetics, personal care products, detergents and cleaning products by 2020, and concrete measures to tackle other sources of microplastics.
- A complete ban on oxo-degradable plastics – a source of microplastic pollution – by 2020; (Oxo-degradable plastics are supposedly biodegradable plastics, which in reality break down into small fragments and contribute to harmful microplastic pollution in the oceans and other ecosystems).
- The reduction of hazardous substances in plastics, to ensure that what is recycled is free from dangerous chemicals (The European Parliament also reminded the Commission of the commitment, in the EU's 7th Environmental Action Programme, to develop non-toxic material cycles. This is fundamental to ensure that the circular economy is a success for the environment).
- That the priority should be to prevent plastic waste from being produced in the first place, followed by reuse and recycling, with landfill or incineration of plastic waste as a last resort.⁷⁶²

Of the estimated three million tree guards used up to 2018 and following the success of the pilot project at Feanedock, nine further sites within the National Forest were planned to be cleared of old tree guards during 2018 and 2019 using NFC funding. Nearly 40,000 redundant tree guards were to be removed over this period, clearing over 17.56 hectares of woodland.⁷⁶³ This number of removed waste tree guards amounts to approximately 1.3% of the total introduced during the planting, leaving almost 99% of the plastic tree guards still in the forest, a soberingly large amount, for which there is currently no planned resolution.

Tree planting using plastic tree guards is ongoing in the National Forest as demonstrated in the photograph below. These trees were planted in February 2020 and it is to be hoped that they will eventually be disposed of under the Tender Scheme strand specifically for tree guard removal. As the photographs above show though, they are often blown away from their

⁷⁶¹ Wagner, M. & Lambert, S. in *The Handbook of Environmental Chemistry Volume 58. Freshwater Microplastics: Emerging Environmental Contaminants?* Springer 2017 pp:5-7.

⁷⁶² <https://www.greenpeace.org/eu-unit/issues/pollution/1532/european-parliament-biodegradable-plastic-pollution/> (Accessed 24th February 2020).

⁷⁶³ National Forest Company Press Release dated 28th September 2018.

original position and can enter streams and other watercourses, thus ending up as rubbish, nuisance and as a biohazard in an entirely different locale.



Figure 75. New plantation in the National Forest utilising plastic tree guards as of February 2020. Author's photograph.

Although it has a leading role to play in the development of international forestry, the solution to this seemingly intractable problem lies not at the feet of the National Forest Company but with national and international forestry as a whole, and ultimately with national and international governments. Forestry is at the forefront of the solution to environmental damage and is waking up to the fact that its green credentials are not as good as they ought to be and need to be, slowly looking at alternatives to plastic tree guards, or the removal of litter and biohazardous materials where already in use or as leftover waste.⁷⁶⁴ The adoption of new policies and products to change the reliance on plastics is of the utmost importance to the integrity of the National Forest Company, for the Forest, and for forestry as a whole.

The NFC remain at the leading edge of international forestry; they experimented with seed and native species type selection and species adaptation to localised soil and environments throughout the latter part of the 1990s and the first decade of this millennium, and once the scale of the planetary warming began to be realised amongst foresters generally in experimentation of non-native tree species selection to face the forestry challenges brought about by this climate crisis: this experimentation should also include the search for solutions to the wider crisis created by over reliance on plastics, whether as tree guards, root bags, twine use, or in plastic cable ties. The NFC have been and will continue to be a dynamic team working together to advance forestry knowledge and activities, having honed their activities over the last quarter century they are positioned exceptionally well to deliver the right solutions and broadcast and promote that knowledge both locally, nationally and internationally.

⁷⁶⁴ <https://www.charteredforesters.org/2018/02/forestry-without-plastic/> (Accessed 15th December 2019).

A Greenprint for the Nation; how the experience of creating the National Forest can contribute to a decarbonised future.

The scramble for the ‘green’ vote in the 2019 UK general election saw the various parties promising ever increasing tree-planting schemes as part of their election pledges, with even the most climate- sceptical of parties promising a vast tree planting scheme across the UK to ‘spearhead a global tree planting initiative’.⁷⁶⁵ The National Forest presents a model for the planting of a large area of Forest and an exemplar of sustainable development. Of vital importance to the various tree planting schemes promised by the different political parties will be the planned Northern Forest. This scheme is being spearheaded by the Woodland Trust and links the already established woodland and forest planting around some of our major northern towns and cities. These established plantations are several of the Urban Forests planned and planted at the same time as the National Forest, announced in 1990. Those involved in the Northern Forest are the Mersey Forest, stretching from Cheshire to Merseyside; the City of Trees around Greater Manchester; the White Rose Forest around Leeds; and HEYwoods across Yorkshire’s East Riding and Kingston upon Hull. The location maps also include a broad swathe of the country that encompasses the South Yorkshire Forest around Sheffield and Rotherham, and the Pennine Edge Forest around Stockport.⁷⁶⁶



Figure 76. The current Community Forests of Northern England broadened to become the Northern Forest.
https://www.communityforest.org.uk/resources/Community_Forests_map.pdf

The Woodland Trust is already working with the first four above- mentioned partners and the scheme will increase the scope of each of those community forests. Given the urgency of the climate emergency and the precedent being set by this exciting programme of planting, it seems peculiarly contrary to logic that the National Forest would not be broadened to include the cities immediately on its doorstep, and in fact to be bolder still and link up with the Northern Forest, even if only initially with a series of green corridors along all the major

⁷⁶⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/nov/21/nigel-farage-hoping-enlist-help-donald-trump-brexit-party-tree-planting-plan> (Accessed 4th December 2019).

⁷⁶⁶ <https://thenorthernforest.org.uk/delivery/> (Accessed 27th December 2019).

arterial network routes and road networks. These green corridors could initially act as wildlife routes and then may later be adapted to become more significant parts of a vast Northern and North Midlands forest, perhaps increasing tree cover in these areas to the 30% target currently aspired to by the National Forest.

Linkage planting and the subsequent creation of green corridors was part of the National Forest strategy from the outset, primarily to create the appearance of continuous tree cover for the casual visitor or commuter through the Forest area, but also for the wildlife benefits and net gain that those linkage areas provided. Yet the planting practices of the past have not been without side effects and negative aspects, and although now being considered and alternative methods utilised, the core problem remains: the use of plastics in planting is unsustainable and severely dents the credibility of the NFC and its green credentials. If the National Forest is to act as a model and exemplar of sustainable development for the future of integrated urban and rural forestry, then all of its current and past practices must be brought into consideration. An aspect that long went unnoticed, and to date has not yet been properly addressed is that of the use of plastics in the form of tree guards.

The Committee on Climate Change (CCC) published a progress report on 25th June 2020, with an action plan to achieve carbon net zero by 2050. At the top of this list was Land Use; afforestation and peatland restoration, and Agriculture which included tree growing.⁷⁶⁷ An expansion, if not of the National Forest itself, but the concept of the use of public monies and a focussed team, perhaps initially an NDPB that follows the NFC route to become an NGO could contribute very substantially to this.

At a webinar given by Louise Driver, Director of Operations at the NFC and hosted by the University of Derby on June 10th, 2020, in the questions and answers sections following the main presentation, a question was put to Driver about the possibility of expanding the Forest in the future. The answer was an unequivocal 'No!' The future of the Forest as presented at the webinar was of what she termed a 'Social Forest' and the creation of a 'Forest Society'.⁷⁶⁸ These terms are part of the '*Greenprint for the Nation*', the publication by the National Forest Company of 'Our 25-year vision for the National Forest', which, as its title suggests, goes beyond the National Forest itself. The apparent contradiction of the title presumably being squared as the laying out of a greenprint for the nation demonstrated in the Forest itself. Although the NFC will not countenance expanding the boundary of the Forest itself (and this is understandable, considering the small size of the team employed by them), then perhaps 'Great Birnam Wood to High Dunsinane Hill shall come...'⁷⁶⁹ and the areas around the Forest will plant trees and connect it perforce to the wider Midlands and beyond. Indeed, the NFC has recently been in discussions with representatives of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council who are keen to see the Forest expand southwards, and as recently as September 2020 the local press were reporting the Borough Council would seek Governmental support for its aspirations. Given the stance of the NFC it seems more likely that assistance will be

⁷⁶⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jun/25/act-fast-to-stop-uk-carbon-emission-rebound-climate-advisers-urge> Accessed June 25th 2020.

⁷⁶⁸ Louise Driver, Director of Operations. Webinar Presentation hosted by the University of Derby 10th June 2020.

⁷⁶⁹ To misquote Shakespeare. Shakespeare, W. *Macbeth*. in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. Metrobooks, Oxford 1989 p: 874.

offered in advising the Borough Council on planting schemes and as perhaps acknowledged in a comment by Councillor Bray, Leader of the Council, the Borough Council will plant and create woodlands with green linkage corridors to the Forest proper through the local plan.⁷⁷⁰ When the Leader of Leicestershire County Council was approached on behalf of the author by Leicestershire County Councillor Dr Theresa Eynon over the reported possibility of expanding the Forest boundary, the following response was elicited:

The response from the Leader's office was to state that:

Officers of the council continue to work closely with the NFC to promote tree planting within existing boundaries and there are a number of projects that are being planned. This planning is at an early stage and will involve discussions with partners and stakeholders, so details are not available at this point in time. The NFC current position is to maintain the integrity of its current 200 square mile boundary to continue to create the identity of the National Forest, target resources for delivery, and focus effort to achieve its new 25 Year Vision. However, the NFC will also continue to operate outside of the boundary in delivering shared objectives that will buffer, support and strengthen the National Forest environment, economy and communities. In addition, the NFC will share its expertise and learning with partners at a local, national and international level to demonstrate and advocate climate change mitigation and adaptation, with the National Forest as an exemplar of sustainable living.⁷⁷¹

The response went on to mention that the new woodland near to Hinckley was being supported by the NFC despite being outside the Forest boundary as it is 'part of the gateway to the Forest'. No direct response was elicited to the point requesting further information about Charnwood Forest Regional Park.⁷⁷²

Once on the ground it is apparent that the initial creation of the Forest's final boundary, although obviously done with much thought, was equally obviously done from an office desk. Dividing communities by inking a line along a convenient road on a map rather than following ancient boundaries or considering communal ties and local connectivities follows a top-down reasoning rarely seen elsewhere in the Forest's creation. Linkage planting reconnecting the boundary, making it physically porous in environmental terms would also blur the edges and

⁷⁷⁰ <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/local-news/ambitious-plan-expand-national-forest-4526095>
Accessed 5th November 2020.

⁷⁷¹ Pers. Comm. A series of email correspondence between the author and Dr Eynon, 18th May – 3rd July 2020 led to Cllr. Eynon asking the questions of the Office of the Leader of Leicestershire County Council on the author's behalf.

⁷⁷² Pers. Comm. A series of email correspondence between the author and Dr Eynon, 18th May – 3rd July 2020 led to Cllr. Eynon asking the questions on the author's behalf. The questions posed were:

'On the 29th January 2020 the *Leicester Mercury* reported a spokesperson for the Council as saying: 'We are looking into the possibility of working with the National Forest Company to investigate the feasibility of expanding the National Forest's boundaries'.

An aspiration to plant more trees is mentioned in this Council's Tree Strategy. The Environment Strategy refers to a need to protect and enhance the National Forest, but boundary changes and expansion are not mentioned.

- What proposals, if any, exist for planting in the area of the Charnwood Forest Regional Park?
- Are there any plans to expand the current National Forest Boundary?
- Have formal discussions taken place with the National Forest Company,

DEFRA or any government department?'

allow the more intangible aspects of local identities to reconnect. This blurry-edges approach adopted when deciding on the boundary for the Heart of the Forest area, for example, meshes perfectly with linkage planting beyond the Forest's boundaries. That linkage planting, connecting the Forest with the world beyond is a vital part of what the Forest means for the future.

Leicestershire County Council declared a state climate emergency on 15th May 2019 and set a carbon neutral target date for 2030 for its own operations.⁷⁷³ South Derbyshire District Council declared a state of climate emergency on 27th June 2019 and in January 2020 issued an interim Action Plan 2020-2024 which contains the intent and plan for the council to be carbon neutral by 2030 and for the entire District to be carbon neutral by 2050.⁷⁷⁴ Staffordshire County Council declared similarly on 25th July 2019. Once a state of climate emergency is declared the various councils may then set targets and plans in place to achieve a state of carbon neutrality or carbon zero, the difference being that carbon neutral usually calculates in series of carbon offsetting schemes, thus balancing CO₂ emissions with carbon removal; carbon zero requires that no carbon is produced from a product or service, so no offsetting is required. Offsetting carbon usually involves creating a carbon sink through reforestation projects although the international market for these is fragile and its future uncertain.⁷⁷⁵ The Eftec report of 2010 clearly considered that carbon sequestration was one of the clear benefits of planting the Forest: 'The National Forest is also making a significant contribution to carbon sequestration and climate change mitigation/adaptation through tree planting and building of a resilient landscape', as were other reports.⁷⁷⁶ The environmental benefits of creating a forest are apparent, at least as soon as the trees begin to grow, and nature is allowed back in. The cost benefits of the National Forest and planting trees are also readily calculated. We have seen how the gathering economic wave from the National Forest has created jobs and wealth. In an article written for *The Economist*, the current CEO of the NFC, John Everitt, stated that 'The National Forest is a living, breathing example of a green recovery in action. We have been championing these principles for nearly 30 years to transform the landscape from its industrial past, and the impacts and value for money are clear to see [...] The creation of the National Forest so far, has cost little more public money than two miles of three lane motorway'.⁷⁷⁷

The Greenprint steers the NFC away from its long-standing task of regeneration and into newer, challenging and difficult territory. The recommendations and planned actions reflect the Company's move from an NDPB to an independent body that will influence policy by

⁷⁷³ The declaration appears under the *Council and Democracy* page of the LCC website, where ironically, the information is not given, instead a message stating 'error, page unavailable, you do not have access to this document' is found, although a brief resume can be found here:

<https://www.climateemergency.uk/blog/map-of-local-council-declarations/> Accessed (19th November 2020).

⁷⁷⁴ Email correspondence between the author and Councillor Amy Wheelton 17th-18th November 2020. Cllr Wheelton had to request clarification over questions posed by the author over unclear information in the document. The Head of Services and Strategic Director were apparently 'thrilled that someone had read it'.

⁷⁷⁵ Paladino, S., & Fiske, S.J. (eds). *The Carbon Fix: Forest Carbon, Social Justice and Environmental Governance*. Routledge, London 2017. See the foreword, the *Carbon Offsetting Dilemma*.

⁷⁷⁶ Dickie, I. & Thomson, C. Eftec. Final report for DEFRA and the National Forest Company. *Initial Assessment of the Costs and Benefits of the National Forest*. London 2010 p: 4.

⁷⁷⁷ <https://theecologist.org/2020/jul/02/timber-festival-and-national-forest-time-green-recovery> (Accessed 2nd July 2020).

building on the successes of the last 30 years, charting a course towards radical transformation at societal level; it pulls no punches in stating that the environment, society and economy have been pulling in different directions and provides actions to mitigate climate change and a model for sustainable living.⁷⁷⁸ The Greenprint really is, any corporate spin aside, a vision for the future of the National Forest and a signpost for the future of forestry, for the future of society. The creation of a National Forest society will point the way to the creation of a national Forest society, a nation whose society lives within a greener, environmentally sound, economically prosperous and vibrant place. We have lived through the great harvest, now is the time to plant for a future one and the Greenprint points in the right direction. It is of national importance, international importance even, that we adopt the measures within it. The targets are tough ones- creating a circular economy, and achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030, a full *20 years* in advance of the UK Government target not the least.⁷⁷⁹

Trees and tree places are agents and representatives of cultural and personal memories and as such deserve protection and care in the planning and development process, with proper community consultation for how they should be looked after (consider here the problems that Sheffield City Council have encountered by presenting an ill-thought through contract to manage street trees cited in chapter 6). Future housing and infrastructure developments require a properly structured planting plan rather than the apparent afterthought to plant green they appear to be: the agential force of trees in place making, identity creation and place and folk memory has been too long overlooked, and this without consideration of the actual physical benefits of pollution absorption and carbon sequestration. Communities and identities are formed in the landscapes that host them, trees are formative creators of those landscapes and the representatives, hosts, and guardians of communities and communal memories, as well as personal ones, reaching back and forth through time, as they do, creating a convergence of time and space, the meeting place and locus of interplay between humans and the natural world.

For those of us lucky enough to have lived through and witnessed the change the trees have brought, the success of the National Forest is near incredible; the decisions and choices made by a handful of people in their Cheltenham office some 35 years ago have changed the lives of so many people, almost none of whom they knew and almost none of whom know of or have even heard of them. It has been a labour of love and a joy to witness and take even a very small part in. It is not a staggering leap of imagination to realise that the approach pointed out above could easily work across the entire Midlands and beyond, linking the countryside directly with the heart of all of our cities, much like the new National Forest in Wales, announced in the spring of 2020 and planned to link together a network of woodlands across the nation.⁷⁸⁰ A truly National Forest, at least as far as the nation of Wales is concerned, and to extend that idea and create a similarly national linkage between the forests of the English Midlands and the planned Northern Forest is not beyond the bounds of possibility if

⁷⁷⁸ The National Forest Company. *Our 25-year vision for the National Forest. A greenprint for the nation*. Moira 2020 pp: 10-16.

⁷⁷⁹https://www.nationalforest.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/1693%20NFC%20Brand%20Vision%20Report%20AW_SCREEN%20%281%29.pdf (Accessed 6th November 2020)

⁷⁸⁰ <https://gov.wales/first-sites-announced-national-forest-among-very-best-woodland-wales> (Accessed 5th November 2020).

the political will is there, as it appeared to be during the general election of 2019. And once there, why not continue the expansion into the Borders, connecting the wildwood of the Southern Uplands of Scotland with the great forests of England? The same could readily be introduced between England and the Welsh National Forest. For a fraction of the cost of new road infrastructure, or the chronically over-budget HS2 rail project, forests across the nation could be planted and linked using the edgelands potential of green corridors, transforming the nation to one of carbon deficit to carbon neutrality, and contribute enormously to the target set by government for net zero as late as 2050.⁷⁸¹ The model set by the National Forest for sustainable development demonstrates that grass roots supported political will can achieve real, effective and positive lasting change. The National Forest is a success story in almost every conceivable way, from its early opportunistic tree planting to the recent future planning, along the way transforming the landscape by creating over 7,500 hectares of new habitats, forest cover increased from 6.1% to over 21%,⁷⁸² and transforming the lives of the people within its boundary for good – in both senses of the term. The climate emergency demands that we take urgent, radical and decisive action. We are at a crossroads, one at which the possibilities to address and redress decades – centuries even – of environmental degradation are there for us to take. The alternative is to sentence our children and grandchildren to the direst of futures.

The choice is ours.

⁷⁸¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-becomes-first-major-economy-to-pass-net-zero-emissions-law> (Accessed 5th November 2020)

⁷⁸² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-56359259> (accessed 16th March 2021).

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