



THE NATIONAL  
FOREST

# STRATEGY 2014 – 2024

By 2024, The National Forest will be  
a transformed landscape across  
200 square miles of the heart  
of England



Enjoyed by everyone  
Economically vibrant  
Celebrated for its quality  
Sustainable into the future

## Coming of Age: The National Forest 2014 – 2024

# FROM THE CHAIR

The purpose of The National Forest has always been social and economic, as well as environmental. Beautiful wooded sites refresh the spirits and bring communities together. Individual trees support a wide range of wildlife and this is multiplied at the woodland scale. Across a 200 square mile landscape, hundreds of woodlands and other habitats can help to heal fragmented ecosystems and increase climate change resilience. They also support the visitor, woodland and recreational economies, along with inward investment and business growth.

**The National Forest was set up with cross-party support in the early 1990s**, to demonstrate all the many and wonderful benefits of a forest close to a large population. The National Forest area was chosen from a number of potential contenders, due to local support, the low woodland cover and, crucially, the extent to which mining and other extractive industries had laid waste swathes of the central area of the forest.

**The progress of The National Forest is now beyond doubt.** A generation on, community support for the forest is deep and widespread, with 85% of residents surveyed saying that the quality and safety of sites are good or very good. The visitor economy has grown steadily and by the end of this strategy period is projected to be over £600m pa, around double that in 2014. Already, since 2001, there has been c£1bn of investment in and around The National Forest. Meanwhile the population continues to grow, enjoying a well-designed green infrastructure as its setting.

**The landscape is beginning to suggest the ultimate mosaic** of woodlands and other habitats which will wend its way through transport links, factories, farms and settlements: a modern take on the medieval idea of a forest, with working areas and open land, as well as woods. Forest cover has nearly trebled and is currently nudging 20%. The woodland economy now includes recreation, woodfuel, crafts and market opportunities from thinnings. It depends on the good management of woodlands and as evidence of this the public should see many readable, temporary signs over the decade, explaining exactly what is going on in that woodland.

**Trust in the brand is growing** and one of the main messages from the consultation behind the strategy was that people, companies and organisations want even closer involvement in the forest. As one person said to us, 'Everyone wants to be part of success'. This success has only been achieved through partnerships.

**This is the coming of age decade**, a fast-changing 'teenage phase' in which the forest will be well-stewarded to maturity. The refreshed vision for The National Forest is stated simply on the cover.

There is much we cannot predict in the ten years to come, so this document sets a direction rather than providing a blueprint, yet based on evidence and the views of partners and residents. I commend to you a strategy for this exciting decade divided into two periods, with a review in 2019 which sets direction to 2024.

**The strategy prioritises making the most of the asset created and securing the forest's future, through:**

sensitive achievement of the landscape change, with increased targeting to get the greatest benefits

making the most of forest sites (woodlands and other habitats, attractions, connections and views)

increasing engagement, enjoyment and well-being by the widest range of people

effective partnerships taking the forest to the next stage

bringing in new income and investment

the national exemplar role, research and being a centre of excellence

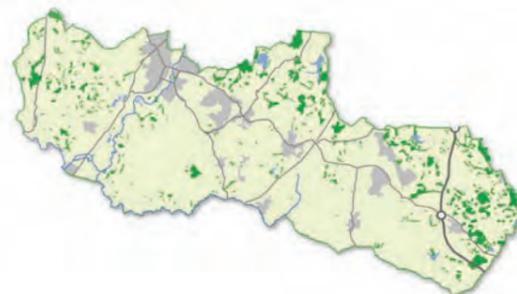
securing a sustainable lead body into the future based on a balanced funding model and the reputation of the National Forest Company (NFC).

Catherine Graham-Harrison OBE  
Chair

“ This strategy marks a significant new phase for the evolution of the National Forest Company. Government investment and the Company's leadership have created an asset that is clearly valued nationally and locally. As the National Forest Company now pursues the conclusions of its Government Triennial Review conducted last year, we will continue to support the Company in making a phased transition towards independence from Government over the next decade. This will bring the future direction of The National Forest and leadership through the Company even closer to the heart of the communities within it and I am sure it will continue to have the support of all sectors and partners as it fulfils its potential as one of the most significant examples of sustainable development in the country. ”

**Dan Rogerson MP**  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Water, Forestry, Rural Affairs and Resource Management

Forest cover 1991 at c.6%



The National Forest at 31 March 2014 with forest cover at 19.9%



# The National Forest Journey 2014 – 2024

## MAKING THE MOST OF THE GROWING ASSET; SECURING IT FOR THE FUTURE

2014

### Coming of age:

After nearly twenty years of investment and growth on the ground, The National Forest is here to stay, visible in the landscape and valued by a very wide range of people and organisations. The strategy consultation told us that people want the investment to continue, including making it very easy to enjoy the forest, whatever your interest. It needs to be well looked after, into the future.

### The Forest's assets

- Growing woodlands and other habitats, visible in the landscape
- Local engagement and appreciation
- Growing national awareness
- Economic growth, investment and potential
- Business and charitable support
- A rising population

### National Forest Company's assets

- Trusted to lead into the future
- Committed partner network
- Capacity to evolve and adapt

### Risks to address

- Tree health
- Sites falling into under-management
- Competition for funding

'Protect, Improve, Expand': The National Forest fully reflects and supports national forestry priorities in 2014, likely to continue to be central into the decade.

### Contributing to the big issues

- Climate change mitigation and adaptation
- Restoring our ecosystems at the landscape scale
- Sustainable economic growth
- Local engagement and leadership
- Health and well-being

2014 – 2019

### Key objectives for the forest:

- Forest cover is increasing and, at the same time, forest sites are well-managed for tree health, climate change, people, beauty and biodiversity.
- The woodland economy grows in line with the maturing forest and sustains good management.
- An emerging visitor destination is promoted and nationally recognised.
- The National Forest brand is adopted widely.
- People from all backgrounds enjoy the forest more readily and experience it as a place for their health and well-being.
- It matures as a national exemplar, a centre of excellence, a test bed for research.

### For the NFC:

- Reinvigorated partnerships.
- New business models and income generation, supporting a journey to independence from Defra by 2024.
- Stronger local representation within a charitable and exemplary Non Departmental Public Body.

"If I said to my grandson 'you've got to clear some bracken tomorrow', he'd have his wellies out ready at dawn."

Resident 2014

## OUTCOMES OF 2019 REVIEW

2019

### Mid-decade review

A rounded review of future investment needed (land and communities), and what kind of leadership, organisational model and resourcing will guarantee the forest's future.

2014 - 2019

## Key Indicators

Forest cover increases to over 21%, adding around 700ha. 2,000ha brought into management including young and mature woods, reflecting national target for mature woods. Damage from diseases and pests minimised. Growing number of jobs in woodland economy. Visitor revenue, numbers of visits, visitor economy jobs. Number and range of bodies using the brand. Value to the forest. Numbers and diversity of groups and individuals enjoying the forest and their views. All key learning disseminated and / or in research programmes. Grant as % of income and performance of new income streams. Local partner and funders' views on governance and performance (2018).



"It's changed the community in its makeup. It's brought new people in and potentially new prosperity; people with new ideas and skills."

Resident 2014

2019 – 2024

### Second half of the decade:

The second half of the decade will build on the progress to 2019 and the evidence from research on the scale and nature of future forest creation.

The impact of new ways of working from 2014 will shape this second five year period, which will build on success and prepare for the years beyond 2024, when The National Forest will be led by a successor to the current Non Departmental Public Body, with support from all sectors.

## Secured for the future

2024

After nearly thirty years of investment and growth on the ground, with ten years of managing forest sites for quality, The National Forest is beautiful, productive and sustainable. The forested landscape is connected up visually and ecologically. It is a prime example in the UK of successfully challenging the fragmentation of ecosystems and encouraging wildlife as a result. Tree health issues have been actively managed and there is a successful woodland economy.

The forest has enjoyed a decade of new investment, enabled by many partners, growing the offer and the quality of the place. It is welcoming to businesses and individuals and its growth profile remains strong.

The forest has matured as a destination, is economically successful and promoted across the UK. People are finding their way around it easily, moving from one quality site to another and enjoying a wide range of forest-based attractions.

It is well known for being accessible to the widest range of people possible and the impact on health and well-being is well-evidenced.

The population is growing and enjoys a high quality green infrastructure, with the forest on its doorstep. The forest is a source of pride for residents and partner organisations and local engagement is even higher than it was in 2014.

The market for forest products has grown and enables sustainable management of the woodlands. Businesses are making the most of the brand.

More and more national organisations are choosing to have a presence in the forest, including arts and cultural venues, sports bodies and environmental leaders.

A successor to NFC as a Non Departmental Public Body is now overseeing a balanced and sustainable financial operation.

# The National Forest 2014 – 2024

## KEY ACTIVITY



Here we summarise the priorities and shifts in key activities to deliver The National Forest to 2024.

This strategy has been informed by consultation with a wide range of partners and individuals. We are grateful for all the responses, which have been carefully considered.

### **National exemplar, centre of excellence and research partner**

The National Forest will strengthen its contribution as a national exemplar alongside being a local success story. It will develop as a centre of excellence, a test bed for innovation through landscape-scale change. Academic partnerships and the engagement of trusts and individuals will shape the future forest and provide new resources.

### **Continued creation of the forest: how and why rather than how much**

The forest creation rate at up to 150ha a year, will be much lower than in the early years, but targeting will expand ecological networks and make the most beneficial impact on the landscape. Green infrastructure near where people live is highly valued and this will be pursued. Over-planting will be avoided and the scale and nature of planting will reflect the forest's varied character. Other habitats as well as woodland will continue to be created and will be counted as part of the ultimate map of forest cover.

### **Forest management: a systematic, long-term approach**

This includes all aspects of the forest, including non-wooded habitats and visitor attractions. The aim is to maximise value of all kind: commercial, landscape, recreational, heritage, wildlife. Professionals, communities and trainees all have a role in the management of the forest. The woodland economy will be supported to expand, creating local demand and supply and supporting timber markets. The threats posed by tree diseases and damage by grey squirrel and deer will be met effectively but proportionately, with collaboration between landowners.

### **A great experience on the ground**

People come to the forest for a very wide range of reasons, seeking varied experiences. The customer journey will be improved through effective marketing and information: it will be easier to find your way into the forest that meets your interests. The quality of

existing infrastructure will be maintained and new investment will continue to make the forest an exciting, evolving destination. Connecting up facilities, experiences and information will be key, making the most of the asset created.

### **Building the brand, more entrepreneurial**

As the brand becomes more and more established there will be opportunities for joint ventures, further sponsors and commercial operations. More businesses will adopt the brand and partners beyond the NFC will lead on telling the story of the forest.

### **'The forest for everyone'**

A wider range of partners and experts will develop the forest as an inclusive, accessible and welcoming place for everyone, including those with particular needs. There will be an emphasis on accessibility. The diversity of the populations of surrounding cities will be increasingly evident in those enjoying the forest, through these partnerships. Community leadership will grow over the decade and there will be mutual learning, across the forest and beyond, about how all can engage more deeply in the opportunities provided by the forest. A wide spectrum of activities will enhance the health and well being of visitors. The Heart of the Forest has a special role to play as a focus for inclusion and engagement.



“The National Forest is one of England's fastest developing destinations, providing a distinctive forest-based experience which nevertheless has great variety for a whole range of visitors. I look forward to seeing it go from strength to strength in the decade ahead.”

James Berresford  
CEO, VisitEngland



### **Background evidence is available at: [www.nationalforest.org/about\\_us/strategy](http://www.nationalforest.org/about_us/strategy)**

- [Review of strategy 2004-2014](#)
- [Community perceptions survey](#)
- [Full list of consultation responses](#)
- [Economic impact assessment](#)
- [Financial assumptions](#)

## The National Forest 2014 – 2024

# LEADERSHIP AND RESOURCING OF THE NATIONAL FOREST COMPANY

### Leadership role of the NFC

Consultees to this strategy have stated clearly that to achieve our shared aspirations, in what will be a decade of exciting development and new activity, the forest will require co-ordination and leadership, which is the role of the NFC.

### Charitable status

The NFC will take charitable status alongside continuing to be an exemplary Non Departmental Public Body as a first step in a phased transition. Its core mission will remain to provide a public good, whilst operating more entrepreneurially, actively managing its assets. It will strengthen and embed local engagement, representation and accountability. Closer partnerships will be an important means of implementing this strategy.

### Government grant a smaller % of income

The financial contribution of central Government to the NFC will diminish in real terms and as a proportion of total income. This correlates with the gradual reduction in the creation phase of the forest and will be managed in a controlled and proactive way, securing alternative streams and new ways of operating, as signalled by the NFC's Triennial Review.

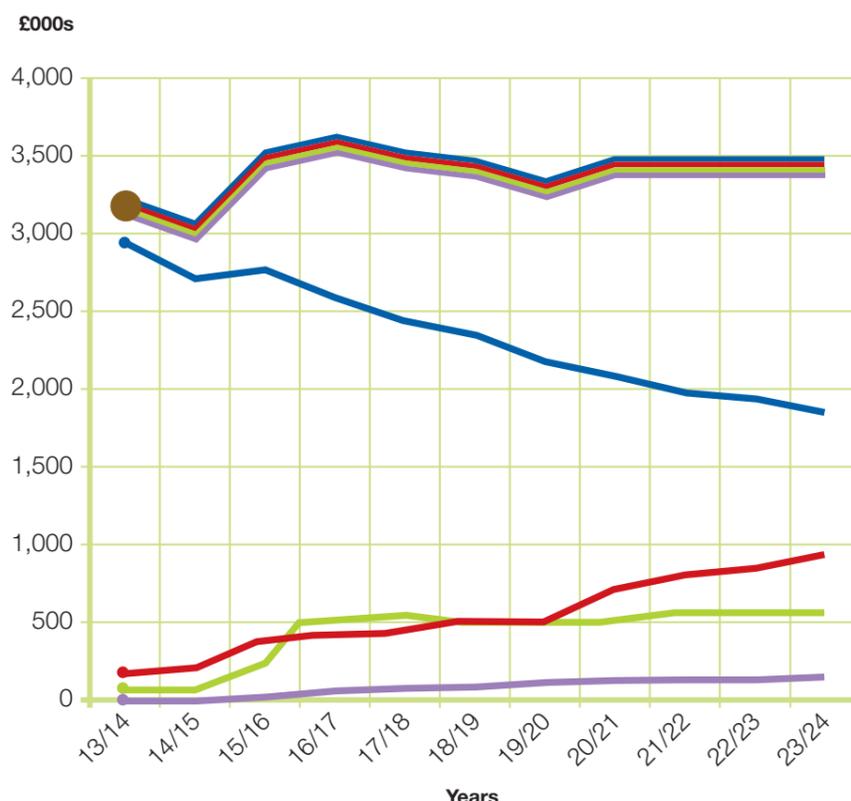
### Sustainability through diversification

Over the decade, in preparation for no longer being a Non Departmental Public Body, a sustainable financial model for the NFC will be implemented through a wide range of sources, including earned income, projects and programmes, private sector sponsorship, charitable trusts and foundations, and public support.

Responses from stakeholders demonstrated that the NFC is highly valued for its record of delivering Government priorities and is well respected by its partners.

National Forest Triennial Review 2013

## A model of National Forest Company gross income 2014 – 2024, demonstrating diversified activity and funding



Our modelling assumes that the NFC's catalyst role continues to be needed at least at the current scale, albeit across a broader base of activity and funding. The graphic sets out a conservative income scenario, with significant reductions in Government grant. In practice, as an exemplar organisation with a strong track record, the NFC may find itself asked to expand its services and partnerships significantly over the period.

This model assumes investing in the capacity to evolve, securing public money for programmes, local and national fundraising, modest earned income, controlled running costs, and roughly a 10% contribution to core costs from funded programmes.

At the levels of gross income shown in the graphic, a sustainable level of net income is achieved.

The model shows that beyond 2024, whilst grant in aid as a Non Departmental Public Body may no longer be received, income will be required to sustain the quality of the public good created, regardless of further programme activity.

- Total gross income
- Core grant (becoming payment for ecosystems services)
- Fundraising (corporates, trusts, public support)
- Programme (supporting economic development, woodland economy, visitor economy, education)
- Earned (sharing expertise, branding)



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