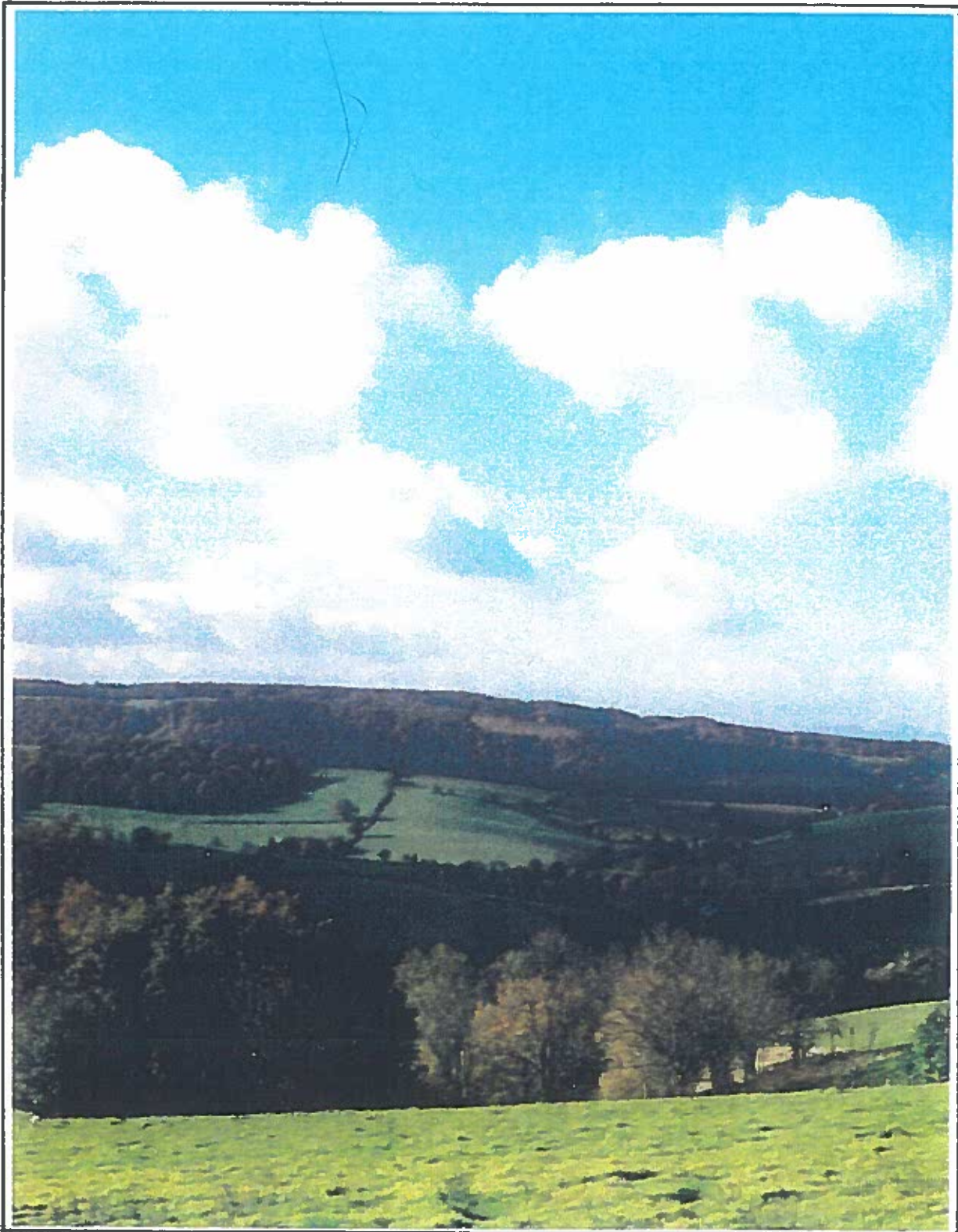
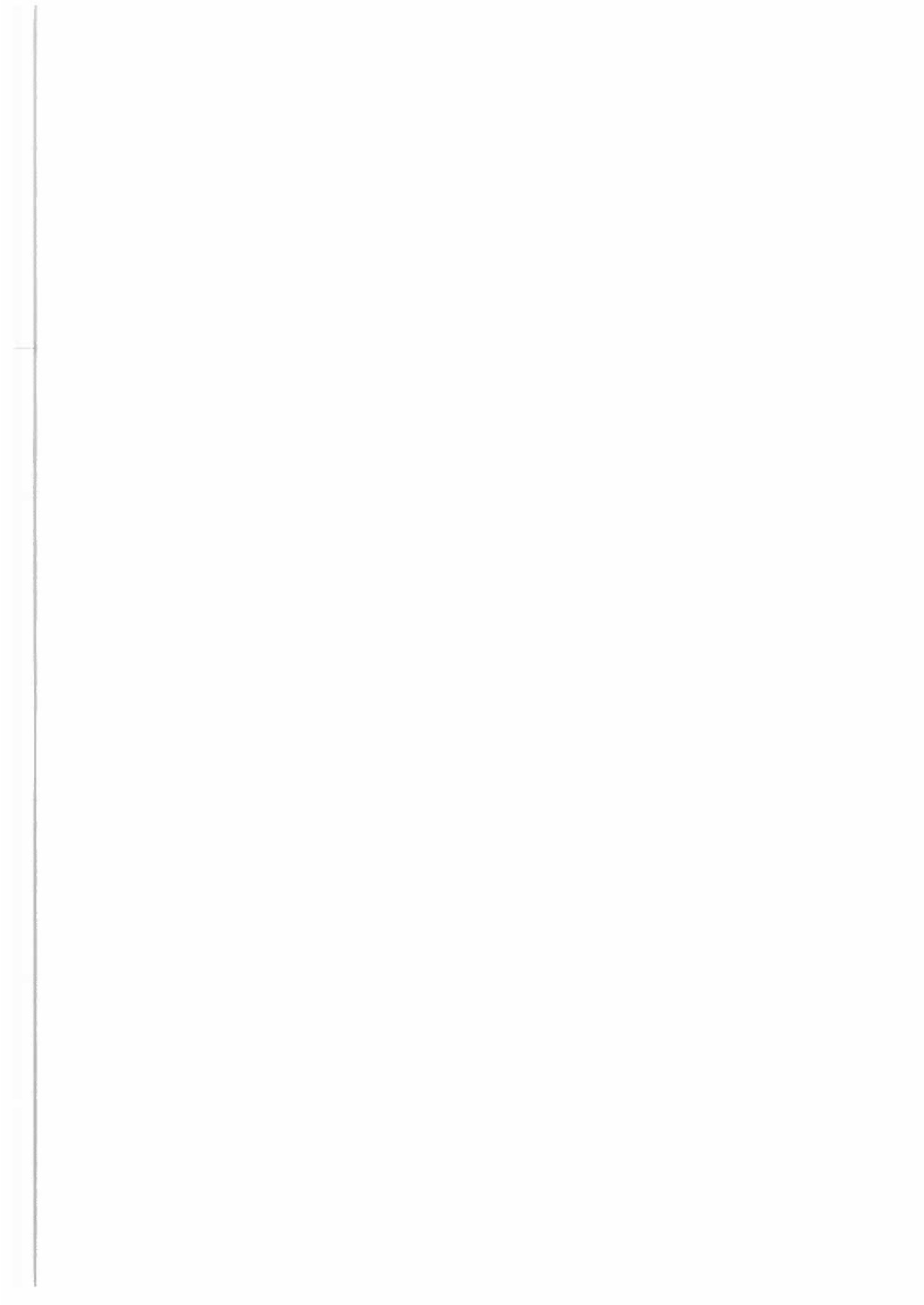


# FOREST OF DEAN

## REVIEW OF SPECIAL STATUS



Report of Findings – Volume 1



**FOREST OF DEAN**

**REVIEW OF SPECIAL STATUS**

**Report of Findings**

**Prepared for the Countryside Agency**  
**by**  
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**April 1999**

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# FOREST OF DEAN - REVIEW OF SPECIAL STATUS

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Background

1. The Forest of Dean has long been recognised as a distinct area with its own unique physical and cultural characteristics. It was declared the first National Forest Park in Britain in 1938. The area was later identified as a possible Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty along with the Wye Valley in the 1960's. However, when the Wye Valley became an AONB in 1971 the Forest of Dean was not included on the grounds that it was a unique entity, and already benefited from protection as a Forest Park.
2. In recent years there has been growing awareness that the special qualities of the area are being eroded by development pressures, and the issue became a matter of widespread public concern in 1997 when potential areas of future mineral working were identified as part of the Gloucestershire Minerals Local Plan preparation.
3. Matters were brought to a head during the 1997 General Election when the Labour Party stated its intention  
*"to offer the Forest of Dean a new "custom built" special status appropriate to its unique history and character, which matches up to the threats it faces while retaining the flexibility necessary to ensure a secure future for the local communities"*.
4. The Government subsequently asked the Countryside Commission, (now the Countryside Agency) to look again at the Forest of Dean and make recommendations on how the broad aims and objectives behind special status might best be achieved. The Countryside Commission decided that this advice should be founded on a thorough technical review of the relevant issues and commissioned Land Use Consultants to undertake this study.
5. The study has involved:
  - An objective analysis of all issues impacting on the Forest of Dean landscape; its conservation and enhancement, public amenity and enjoyment.
  - Determining whether existing and draft policies are effective in conserving and enhancing existing character and providing protection against inappropriate development, enhancing social and economic opportunities for the Dean and providing recreational opportunities for visitors and local people.
  - Ascertaining whether any existing national designation would be relevant to the qualities of the Forest of Dean in affording the appropriate level of protection.
  - Advising on the need for alternative designations should this be appropriate.

## Principal Findings

### 6. Existing Character and Quality:

The study has concluded that the Forest of Dean warrants Special Status on the Following Grounds:

Historical Precedence: The Forest of Dean has been recognised from the earliest stages of National landscape surveys as a distinctive area worthy of conservation.

Landscape Character and Quality: The study confirms that the area of the Forest of Dean has a landscape character and local distinctiveness which sets it apart from other areas. The open landscape between the Wye Valley AONB and ancient forest is of the highest quality and meets the criteria for designation as an AONB. The core of the forest is of exceptional value as an enclosed and secretive landscape, in which cultural heritage is of special significance.

Cultural Heritage: The Forest of Dean is recognised as being an area of national importance for archaeology and industrial archaeology. It also has a major resource in the traditions and skills of its people.

Legal Status: The legislative framework relating to activities in the Forest of Dean has its origins in medieval times. Forest statutes date back over 800 years, and the administration of the area has been treated as an entity throughout that time.

Nature Conservation: The Forest of Dean is identified as a distinct Natural Area, within which the range of habitats represent both upland and lowland conditions. Much of the core area is either notified as SSSI or is regarded as of equivalent status.

Cumulative Effects: Each of the elements described above provides its own justification for regarding the Forest of Dean as a special place, but the degree of overlap between them and the consistency with which they apply to the same geographical boundaries adds even greater weight to the individual strengths.

### Is There a Need for Special Status?

#### 7. The Forest of Dean is a unique and special place, which is under pressure for a number of reasons. These include:

- Proposals for further mineral working of hard rock and opencast coal, in circumstances where existing planning protection is not as strong as it would be if the area had National Park, AONB or equivalent status.
- Increasing strains over recreation and tourism between sections of the local community, the local authority and Forest Enterprise over the most appropriate directions in which to develop recreational facilities like cycleways.

- Concerns that the processes by which land management decisions are taken by Forest Enterprise and the local authority do not involve local people as much as they could.
  - Poor performance of the local economy due to absence of adequate transport links and relative isolation.
  - Failure to capitalise fully on the skills, resources and enterprise of the area.
8. Each of these concerns raises different sets of issues, and requires different types of solution, many of which can be developed within the framework of existing legislation. It is nevertheless the view of the study team that existing planning policies and administrative structures **fail to give the focus, direction and overall co-ordination** which is required to realise the full potential of the Forest of Dean. It is therefore recommended that a purpose made status should be pursued.

### **The Area to be Considered for Special Status**

9. It is recommended that the core area to be considered for Special Status should relate to the Hundred of St Briavels which encompasses the ancient Forest, and the relevant landscape character areas. The precise boundary of the area will need to be determined following full public consultation.

### **What Form should Special Status Take?**

10. It is acknowledged that a number of land use planning concerns could be met by strengthening existing procedures. For example, mineral policies for the Forest of Dean could include the same criteria for consideration of potential workings as apply in National Parks and AONBs. Similarly, voluntary agreements could be introduced by Forest Enterprise and the local authorities, to involve local people more fully in decision – making on land management issues. However, measures of this nature would not have the degree of commitment and support which would be afforded by special status. More importantly, simply re-inforcing existing procedures would miss out on the opportunity for creating a new, more integrated approach designed to bring added benefits and returns to the area, as well as resolving some of its difficulties.

### **What Aims and Objectives should Special Status Achieve?**

Special Status for the Forest of Dean should be designed to deliver the following aims and objectives:

- a clear vision and strategic plan for the area
- greater control over mineral working
- protection and enhancement of landscape quality and character
- protection and enhancement of cultural heritage

- promotion of economic development
- a strengthened image and identity for the area
- a stronger voice for local people
- increased funding sources

### **What Administrative and Management Structure is Required?**

11. A range of different models has been considered for the creation of a new management and administrative structure for the Forest of Dean. These models have included:
  - National Park Status
  - AONB status with an Advisory Management Committee
  - 'Natural Park'/'Cultural Park' using mainland European examples
12. It has been concluded that the area is too small to warrant consideration in its own right as a National Park, unless it were to be combined with the Wye Valley AONB. The length of time required to bring into effect the designation, and general reluctance of Government and other interested parties to introduce further national Countryside designations argues strongly against this route being taken.
13. Traditional approaches towards AONB designation and management are judged to be too narrow to meet the full aims and objectives set out for the Forest of Dean. However, many new and imaginative approaches are being developed for the administration of AONB's and equivalent areas in the United Kingdom. A number of these like the approach to the Sussex Downs offer parallels and prototypes for the Forest of Dean. Elements of the Broads Authority and New Forest Heritage Area management structures, could also be relevant in developing a new approach towards the Forest of Dean.
14. The study has examined experience on the mainland of Europe in setting up and managing Regional Natural Parks. These designations are highly relevant to the concepts which are emerging for the Forest of Dean because they rely heavily on participation of all interested parties in order to achieve a fully integrated approach towards environmental social and economic initiatives. It is concluded that important lessons can be learnt from these examples which should assist in developing a tailor-made solution for the Forest of Dean.

### **Summary of Recommendations**

1. The Forest of Dean warrants special status on the grounds of its unique landscape, nature conservation interest and cultural heritage.
2. The Forest of Dean should be awarded special status in the interests of achieving an integrated approach to its environmental, social and economic problems and opportunities.

3. The boundary of the Hundred of St Briavels should be taken as the starting point for developing an area of the Forest of Dean to which Special Status should apply. The precise boundary of the area of special status should be assessed in the light of detailed public consultations.
4. The boundary of the Forest of Dean as defined under Recommendation 3 should be delimited on maps as a distinct geographical entity. The area should be designated an AONB with Enhanced Status.
5. Specific policies, plans and procedures for safeguarding and enhancing the environmental and cultural qualities, and development of the local economy of the Forest of Dean should be put in place.
6. Special Status should aim to provide:
  - a clear vision and strategic plan for the area
  - greater control over mineral working
  - protection and enhancement of landscape quality and character
  - protection and enhancement of cultural heritage
  - promotion of economic development
  - a strengthened image and identity for the area
  - a stronger voice for local people
  - increased funding sources
7. The core area of the Forest of Dean should be designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty for planning control purposes, but this title and status should be interpreted in a new and imaginative way to enhance social, cultural and economic as well as environmental objectives.
8. A purpose built management and administrative structure should be considered for the Forest of Dean which will deliver an integrated response to environmental, social and economic issues. This structure should draw on the best examples and components of other systems, and avoid being conditioned by established frameworks and precedents. There is an opportunity to develop new concepts and to test innovative ideas, which will draw on the best parallels in Britain and mainland Europe.



# I. INTRODUCTION

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## SCOPE OF THE STUDY

- 1.1. The Forest of Dean has been recognised as a distinct area with its own unique physical and cultural characteristics for many centuries. Formal recognition was given to the area as early as 1938 when the Statutory Forest was declared the first National Forest Park in Britain. The area was later identified by the Hobhouse Commission as a potential conservation area in 1947, and considered as a possible Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty along with the Wye Valley in the 1960's. However, when the Wye Valley became AONB in 1971 the Forest of Dean was not designated, on the grounds that it was a unique entity, and already benefited from protection as a Forest Park.
- 1.2. In recent years there has been growing awareness that the special qualities of the area are being eroded by development pressures, and the issue became a matter of widespread public concern in 1997 when potential areas of future mineral working were identified as part of the Gloucestershire Minerals Local Plan preparation.
- 1.3. In the course of discussions with local interests, the then shadow Secretary of State for the Environment made the following statement:

*"The Forest of Dean is faced with proposals for mineral workings, in particular limestone quarrying, on a scale which poses a major threat not just to the beauty and character of the Forest but also to the adjacent woodlands of the Wye Valley which have been officially recognised as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty...."*

*"We believe therefore that the time has come to offer special planning protection to the Forest of Dean, and we want that protection to reflect the unique character of the Forestry and the needs of people who live in and around it. We don't propose simply to apply any of the existing special categories of protection".*

*"We propose instead to offer the Forest of Dean a new "custom built" special status appropriate to its unique history and character, which matches up to the threats it faces while retaining the flexibility necessary to ensure a secure future for the local communities".*
- 1.4. The Government subsequently asked its official advisors, the Countryside Commission, (now the Countryside Agency) to look again at the Forest of Dean and make recommendations on how the broad aims and objectives behind special status might best be achieved.
- 1.5. The Countryside Commission decided that this advice should be founded on a thorough technical review of the relevant issues and therefore commissioned the study which is the subject of this report.

## CONSULTANTS' TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 1.6. Land Use Consultants was appointed by the Countryside Commission to undertake a technical review of issues which would need to be considered in giving special status to the Forest of Dean. The principle tasks of the study have been to:
- Carry out an objective analysis of all issues impacting on the Forest of Dean landscape; its conservation and enhancement, public amenity and enjoyment.
  - Determine whether existing and draft policies are effective in conserving and enhancing existing character and providing protection against inappropriate development, enhancing social and economic opportunities for the Dean and providing recreational opportunities for visitors and local people.
  - Ascertain whether any existing national designation would be relevant to the qualities of the Forest of Dean in affording the appropriate level of protection.
  - Advise on the need for alternative designations should this be appropriate.

## CONDUCT OF THE STUDY

- 1.7. The study began in October 1998 and was completed in April 1999. It has been divided effectively into three stages.

**Stage 1** entailed a review of published material, site surveys, and preliminary discussions with major interests in the area, including district, county authorities, various actions groups, individuals and developers.

**Stage 2** involved more detailed discussion with interest groups, and analysis of the key issues.

**Stage 3** saw the development of initial ideas and options which have been canvassed through two briefing meetings for interested parties and parish councils. Separate briefing meetings were also held for elected members of the Forest of Dean District Council and Gloucestershire County Council.

## OUTCOME OF THE STUDY

- 1.8. The findings of the consultancy study are contained in this report, and are presented for consideration by the Countryside Agency, which has taken over the functions and duties of the former Countryside Commission following its merger with the Rural Development Commission.
- 1.9. The Countryside Agency will consider the report findings and recommendations before giving its own advice to government on the most appropriate way of proceeding with special status for the Forest of Dean. Officers of the former Countryside Commission



have indicated that a programme of consultation is also planned to take account of wider public views. This process is expected to take place during summer 1999.

## **STRUCTURE OF THE REPORTS**

- 1.10. This report of findings (Volume 1) draws together the principal conclusions from the technical studies, and makes recommendations on the way forward. The individual findings are supported by the Technical Report (Volume 2) which is intended as a source of reference for future work.

This report addresses the following topics:

SECTION 2 describes the Forest of Dean and its setting

SECTION 3 describes the assets and resources of the Forest of Dean

SECTION 4 undertakes an analysis of issues

SECTION 5 reviews the effectiveness of existing policies and designations and concludes that there is underlying need for special status.

SECTION 6 sets out requirements for special status

SECTION 7 considers the relevance of existing national designations and other alternatives

SECTION 8 sets out recommendations and conclusions.

The contents of the Technical Report (Volume 2) are summarised in Box 1

### **Box 1 - Content of the Technical Appraisal**

SECTION 2	History of the Forest of Dean
SECTION 3	Landscape of the Forest of Dean
SECTION 4	Redefining the Value of the Forest of Dean
SECTION 5	Recreation and Tourism
SECTION 6	Economic and Social Welfare
SECTION 7	Minerals
SECTION 8	Analysis of Development Plan policies
SECTION 9	Summary of Findings from the Hobhouse Report
SECTION 10	Summary of Existing Designations
SECTION 11	Summary of Consultations



## **2. THE FOREST OF DEAN & ITS SETTING**

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### **SETTING THE SCENE**

- 2.1. The **Forest of Dean District** occupies the western part of Gloucestershire. (see **Figure 1**) It is bounded by the Malvern Hills in the north, the River Wye to the west and the River Severn in the south and east. The District is centred on, and has its administrative headquarters in, a heart shaped plateau of high land in the south of the district wedged between the Severn and Wye Valleys. This upland area is predominantly wooded and marks the “core area” of the **Forest of Dean**.
- 2.2. The Forest of Dean is a remote “island” of rare character and beauty wedged between England and Wales, and constitutes a relatively unknown natural asset with “open” public access. Steeped in history, from the stone-age cave dwellers of Symonds Yat to the royal hunting forest of the Norman kings and the Freemaners with their ancient rights, the Forest has been a strategic resource of raw materials, food and fuel for at least two millennia. The natural history of this extensive area of native woodland and commercial forestry is interwoven with human exploitation, creating a rich wildlife habitat and a singular cultural heritage that gives Foresters their strong identity and the Forest its special local distinctiveness.

### **WHAT IS MEANT BY THE ‘FOREST OF DEAN’?**

- 2.3. The role and status of the Forest of Dean is interpreted differently by local residents, ‘outsiders’, visitors and even the public authorities which are charged with its administration, protection and enhancement. Different words are used to describe features of the ‘forest’ area including:
- Forest of Dean
  - The Dean
  - Dean Forest
  - National Forest Park
  - ancient forest
  - core forest, and
  - Statutory Forest
- These words are often used interchangeably.

Considerable confusion can arise from the use of these different terms. Consequently for the purposes of this report the terminology set out in Box 2 has been adopted to minimise uncertainty about which areas are being referred to.

## Box 2 - Definition of Key Words

### **Statutory Forest**

The extent of the Statutory Forest is indicated on **Figure 5**. It is the area within which commoners have privileges of grazing, pannage and estovers. The Forest has expanded and contracted over the centuries. When the Domesday Survey was made, the official forest extended south of Hewelsfield and north of Ruardene, enclosed by the River Wye to the west. The appointment of the Commission of 1831, resulted in the perambulation of the Forest of Dean; which is the origin of the Statutory Forest. The perambulation (or delimitation of the Forest) was usually undertaken by a number of regarders, generally twelve in total, by "metes and bounds", through walking/riding, consultations and detailed surveys of documents.

### **Hundred of St Briavels**

The extent of the Hundred of St Briavels is defined in **Figure 5**. It is an area where the Dean Freeminers have rights to mine coal, iron ore and ochre. Any person born within the Hundred of St Briavels; who has worked for a year and a day in a mine (including open cast) is eligible to become a Freeminer. As a result of the Dean Forest Mines Act, 1838, certain parts of the Hundred are exempt from the rights of Freeminers termed "exempted land".

Dr Hart states that the extent of the Hundred, (a term deriving from the Anglo Saxon Charters denoting an area of land held by charter), "seems to have arisen from the area of the Forest at Domesday - before the extensions of the late 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> or early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries". The hundred probably defined the administrative boundaries within the area. Over time the extent of the Hundreds of the St Briavels has altered. The area was initially referred to as "the Hundred of the Forest". It is thought that the name changed to the hundred of St Briavels when St Briavels became the administrative centre, however the name "the hundred of the Forest of Dean" continued for several years. The first reference to the Hundred of St Briavels occurs in 1282. (Hart, The Hundred of St Briavels, 1947).

### **Core Forest**

The extent of the Core Forest is defined in **Figure 5**. The Core Forest refers to the Forest of Dean Character Area identified in the LUC landscape Assessment Report, 1991. The boundaries of the character area are coterminous with the following character areas:

- Forest Fringes and Settlements (Character Area 2),
- Undulating Plateau (Character Area 3),
- Severn Escarpment - Upper Undulating Slopes (Character Area 6),
- Ridges and Valleys (Character Area 9) to the east.
- the north west and north Limestone Hills (Character Area 10).

## DETERMINING THE EXTENT OF THE FOREST OF DEAN

- 2.4. Although the name 'Forest of Dean' is recognised nationally as a distinct location on the English Welsh borders many people have difficulty describing its precise extent and boundaries. Local definitions place the Forest of Dean between the two rivers (the River Wye and the River Severn) but there are marked changes in landscape character between the steeply sided valley of the Wye, the rolling plateau of the Forest and the sweeping shoulders leading down to the Severn Estuary. Determining its northerly limits is even harder since the upland area extends more gradually into the low rolling hills of Herefordshire.
- 2.5. A major task for the present study has been to examine the criteria which might be used to define the boundaries of the Forest of Dean, and to determine how far its influence extends.
- 2.6. The starting point for the appraisal has been to take the **Special Landscape Area** boundaries set out in the Gloucestershire Structure Plan (shown in **Figure 2**), which is broadly contiguous with the boundaries of the '**Proposed Conservation Area**' first suggested by the Hobhouse Committee.
- 2.7. A set of key criteria was then developed in order to determine the approximate extent of the Forest area. These comprised:
- a review of landscape character areas
  - the extent of English Nature's 'Natural Areas'
  - characteristics relating to the area's cultural heritage, and
  - the legal framework and precedents
- 2.8. Each of these elements has been considered in detail, as described in the Technical Report, and the similarities and differences have been noted. By overlaying the resulting maps of the 'Forest area' it has been possible to form a view of its natural extent. These characteristics are summarised below.
- 2.9. **Review of Landscape Character:** Although the Forest of Dean is a place of varied landscape character, there are common characteristics that occur throughout the area and define its local distinctiveness. Common features include:
- the underlying geology of limestone/sandstone and coal measures,
  - upland topography,
  - extensive mixed woodland,
  - distinctive 'Forest' settlements, and
  - vernacular building styles.
- 2.10. The English Character Area assessment undertaken by the Countryside Commission defines an area embracing the Forest of Dean and Lower Wye Valley as *'rich in its variety: varied in history and culture and rich in landscape and natural assets, including historic settlements, industrial archaeology and nationally important woodland'*.

- 2.11. The landscape of the Forest of Dean District was formerly surveyed in 1991 to prepare the Forest of Dean Landscape Assessment (LUC 1991). The findings of this assessment have been reviewed as part of the present study and the degree to which its descriptions and conclusions are still valid has been appraised. This analysis confirmed that the following character areas (Shown in Figure 3) are representative of the core area of the Forest.

*Forest of Dean "core area" character units*

- (1) Forest of Dean
- (2) Forest Fringes and Settlements
- (3) Undulating Plateau
- (6) Severn Escarpment: Upper undulating slopes
- (9) Ridges and Valleys
- (10) Limestone Hills

- 2.12. These character areas embrace the upland mass of land lying between the rivers Severn and Wye, bounded in the north by the A40 but exclude the low lying coastal strip of the Severn Vale and the upland outlier May Hill. They consist of a wooded core, most of which is designated as statutory forest which is encircled by small industrial settlements. These in turn are surrounded by a "green necklace" of farmland.
- 2.13. **Natural Areas:** English Nature has prepared an analysis of Natural Areas for England, in conjunction with the Countryside Commission's Character Area assessment, based on habitat characteristics. The Forest of Dean and Wye Valley are identified as a single discrete Natural Area. Its boundaries are not precise but they follow closely those of the landscape character areas. As in the case of the landscape assessment, the coastal strip of the Severn Vale forms part of the Severn Estuary Natural Area and is regarded as quite separate from the Forest of Dean.
- 2.14. **Cultural heritage:** The historical development of the Forest of Dean has given rise to a unique human landscape and cultural heritage. Landscape is shaped by human activity and heritage characteristics common to an area can be used to define its local distinctiveness.
- 2.15. Physical evidence of local distinctiveness includes features such as
- remains of first settlers of the Dean i.e. iron-age forts/settlements;
  - historic sites of mining activity e.g. the "scowles" and disused quarries and coal mines;
  - old sites of iron production i.e. "bloomery" furnaces;
  - historic transport routes such as trackways, tramways and mineral railways.
  - wharves, ship yards, and
  - Field patterns and ancient hedgerows,
- 2.16. The influences of historic land use patterns and practices are of equal importance to physical features in determining the cultural landscape of an area. In the Forest of Dean a unique set of cultural traditions are represented by ancient customs, rights and privileges of the Forest such as freemining and commoning. These elements can be mapped to indicate the 'extent' of the Forest of Dean's cultural heritage (see Figure 4).
- 2.17. The main cultural influences are based on the natural resources of minerals and timber which have been exploited since Neolithic times in the core area of the Forest. However, these activities depended in turn upon trade and transport. Access routes linked the

Forest with small ports on the River Wye and River Severn where boat-building and local industries became important parts of the local economy in the Region. These secondary activities extend the influence of the Forest over the whole area bounded by the Wye and the Severn, northwards to the A40 road corridor and Gloucester.

- 2.18. The distinction between Forest related activities and wider trading activities complicates the task of defining precise limits to the Forest of Dean, and emphasises the need for clarity in the underlying objective of describing discrete areas. It is an issue which is returned to in the concluding paragraphs of this section of the report.
- 2.19. The present study has highlighted the fact that the Forest of Dean is not a fossilised or 'relict' landscape which needs to be preserved as a 'perfect example of a particular historical period'. It is a dynamic working environment supporting, and being supported by, a wide range of activities such as forestry, sheep grazing, quarrying, coal mining and woodland recreation. These activities are common to the area and represent the *raison d'être* of the Forest and most of its residents. Many of the activities have evolved over two millennia and have shaped the character of the landscape and its inhabitants. The concentration of these activities within a specific geographical area reinforces the claim of the Forest of Dean to be considered as a unique cultural entity.
- 2.20. **Legal Framework and Precedents:** Areas with strong cultural identities invariably have long established legal and administrative frameworks which have evolved in response to changing needs. This is certainly the case in the Forest of Dean. The Hundred of St Briavels is a key administrative unit of the Forest dating back to the Saxon charters and remains a basis for administration of certain rights and activities under Act of Parliament (1838) (see **Figure 5**). The boundary of the Hundred equates with the approximate extent of the Dean Forest in 1066 as recorded in the Domesday Survey. It has featured in successive legal definitions over the last 800 years and today marks the limit of the rights and privileges of Freemaners and Commoners of the Forest, the former institution being unique in Britain. The Hundred is administered by the Deputy Gaveller based in Coleford, which is the administrative centre of the Forest.
- 2.21. The boundary of the Hundred of St Briavels is established in law and is clearly defined on maps. As it corresponds with the historic limits of the Dean Forest, its landscape character, cultural heritage and current working practices it, therefore, constitutes a logical starting point for determining the area of the Forest of Dean to which special status might be applied.

## **DRAWING THE THREADS TOGETHER**

- 2.22. When the various sources of information, including current landscape characteristics, historical and cultural influences, and legal precedents are compared, a picture emerges of a core area of the Forest which has been dominated by woodland throughout history with its own patterns of life and traditions. The boundaries of this area can be traced on the ground with a fair degree of confidence and agreement by different interest groups. The 'edges' of the forest area are broadly co-incident with the boundaries of the Hundred of St Briavels, although there are outlying areas both in the south and north which might justify inclusion if formal designation of the area is taken forward. Beyond this area is a

wider zone extending to the River Wye and the estuary of the River Severn which has close ties with the Forest but is subtly different in landform, topography and land use.

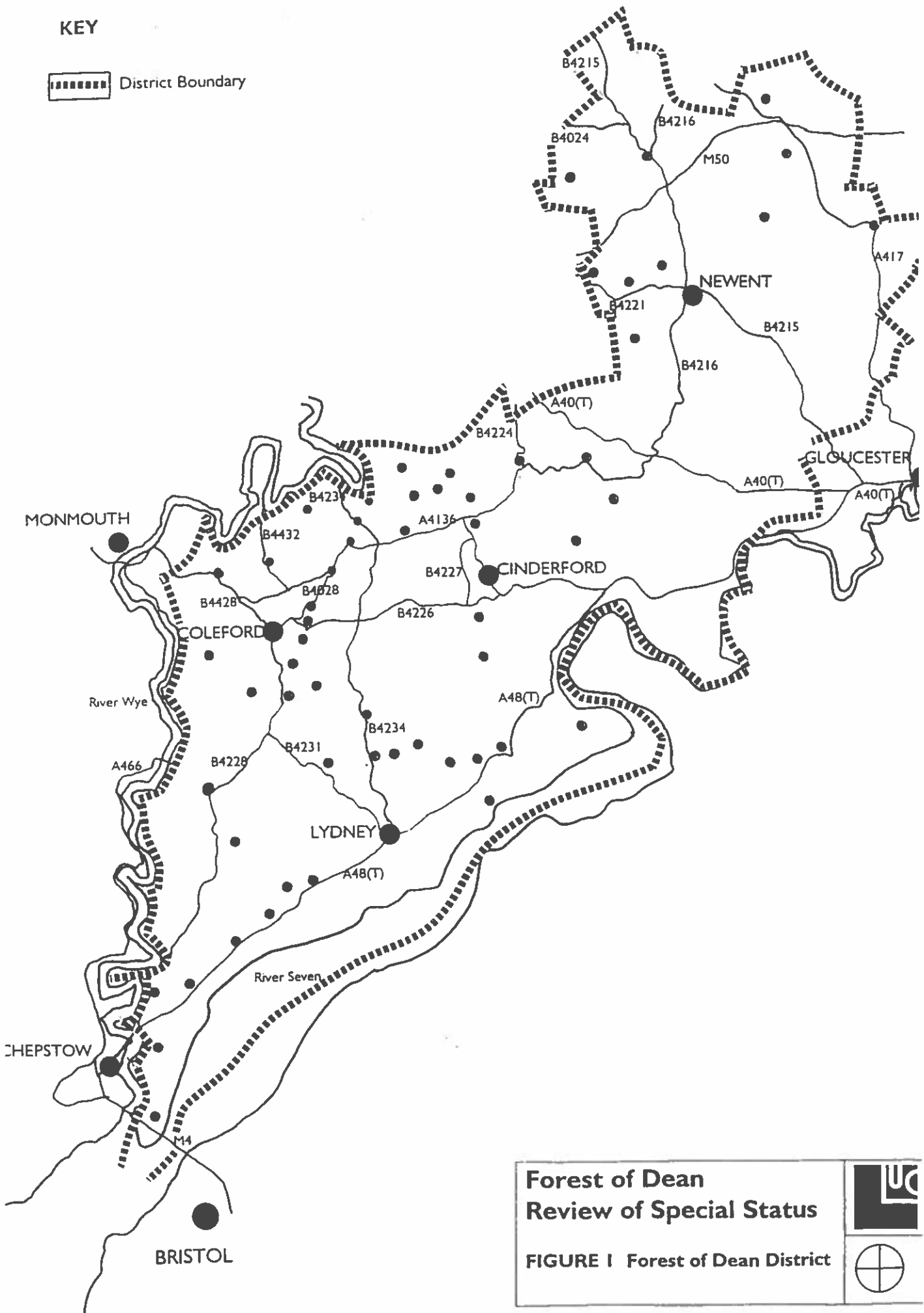
- 2.23. A decision on where any future boundary of the Forest of Dean might be drawn would depend heavily on the underlying purpose of such designation. Before seeking to answer this question it is necessary to consider the extent to which the Forest of Dean justifies some form of 'special status' and whether or not it is faced with pressures for change, or other constraints which would warrant such action. These issues are addressed in the next two sections of the report.



MALVERN HILLS

KEY

 District Boundary



Forest of Dean  
Review of Special Status

FIGURE 1 Forest of Dean District





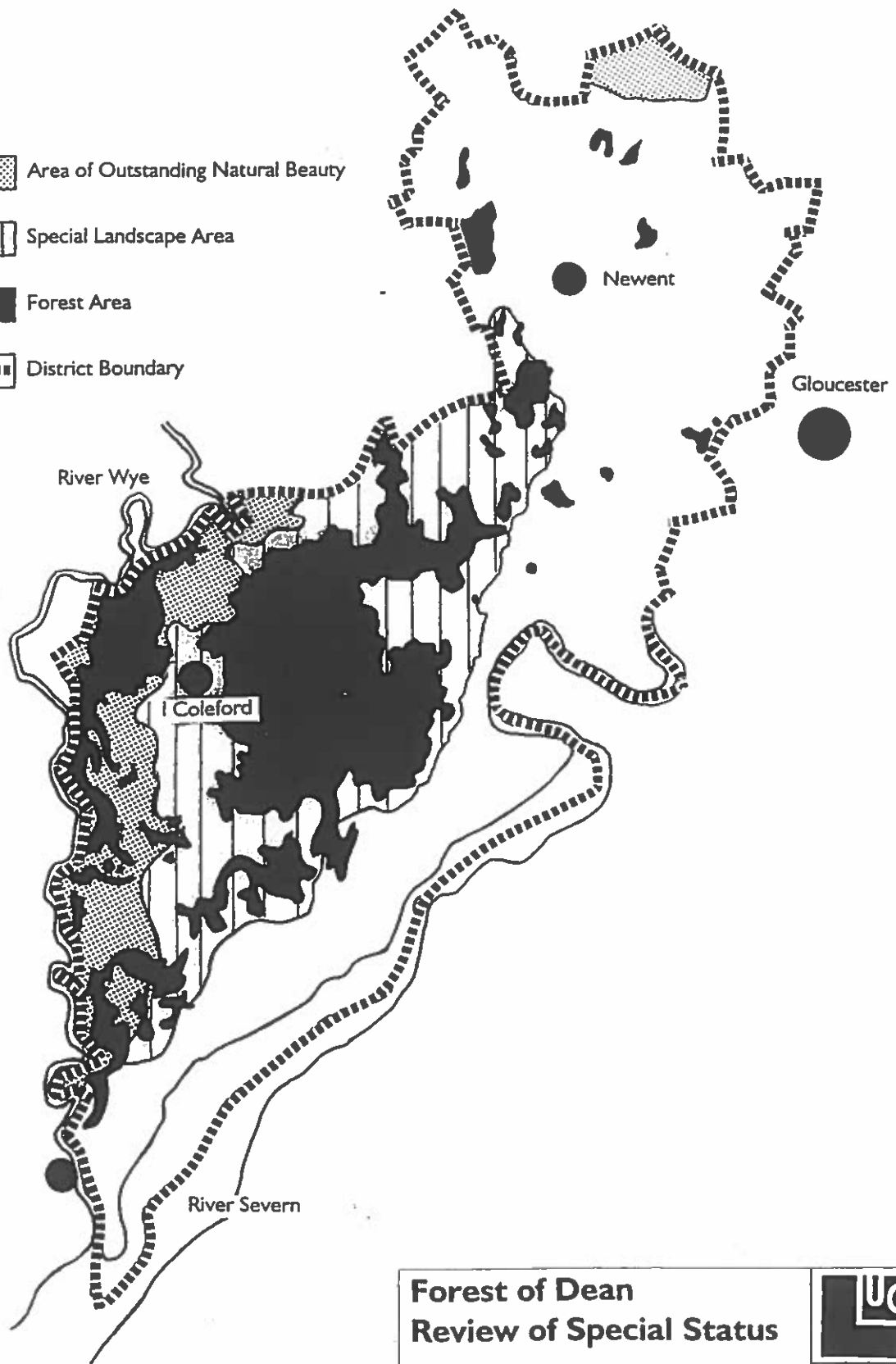
**KEY**

 Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

 Special Landscape Area

 Forest Area

 District Boundary

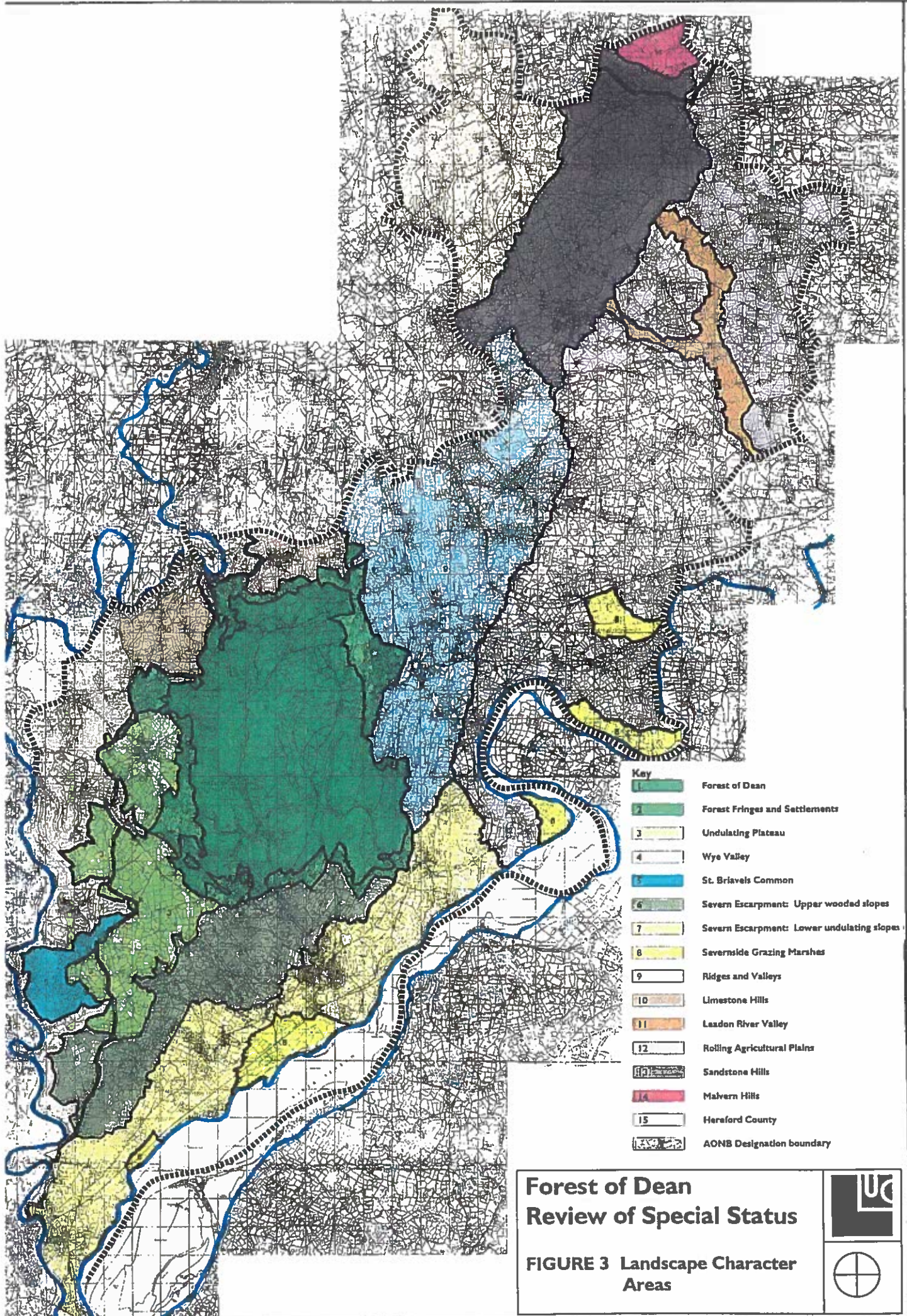


**Forest of Dean  
Review of Special Status**

**FIGURE 2 Landscape Areas**





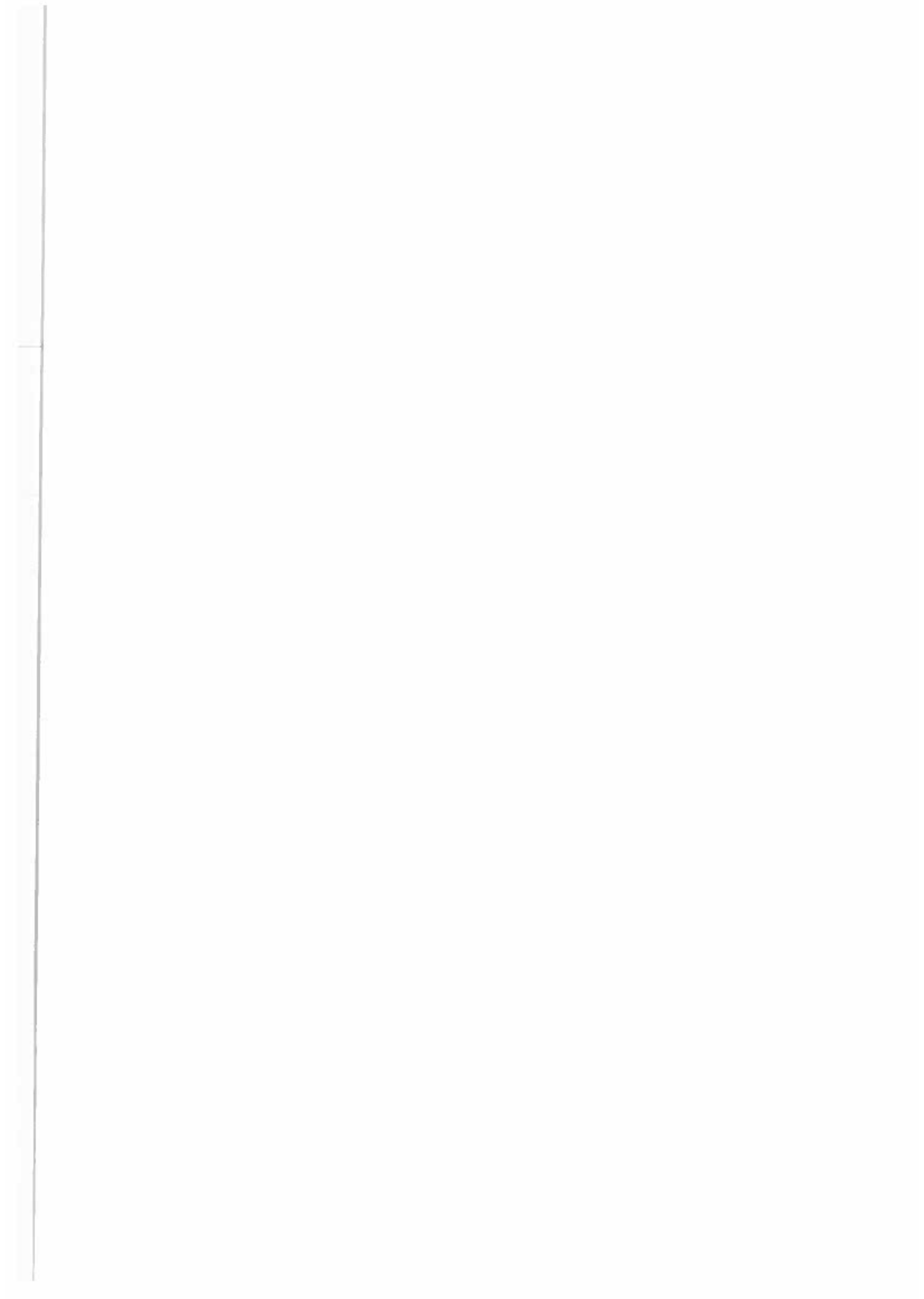


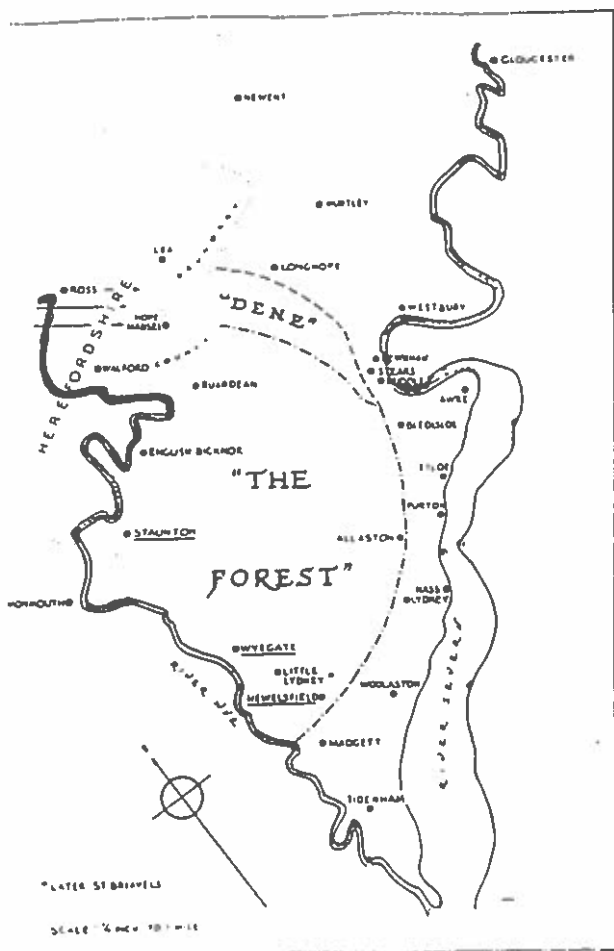
Key	
1	Forest of Dean
2	Forest Fringes and Settlements
3	Undulating Plateau
4	Wye Valley
5	St. Briavels Common
6	Severn Escarpment: Upper wooded slopes
7	Severn Escarpment: Lower undulating slopes
8	Severnside Grazing Marshes
9	Ridges and Valleys
10	Limestone Hills
11	Leadon River Valley
12	Rolling Agricultural Plains
13	Sandstone Hills
14	Malvern Hills
15	Hereford County
	AONB Designation boundary

**Forest of Dean  
Review of Special Status**

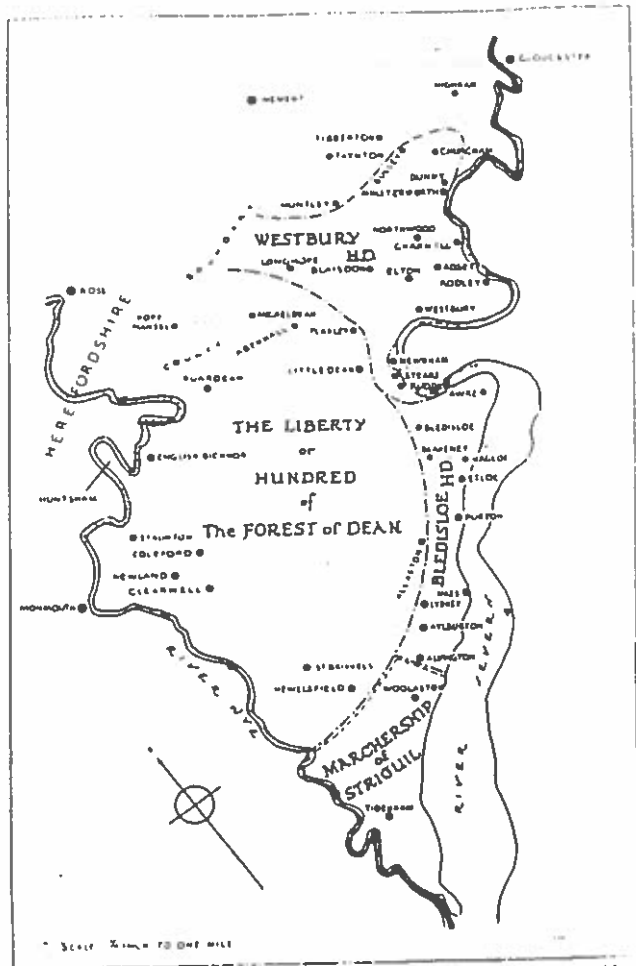
**FIGURE 3 Landscape Character Areas**



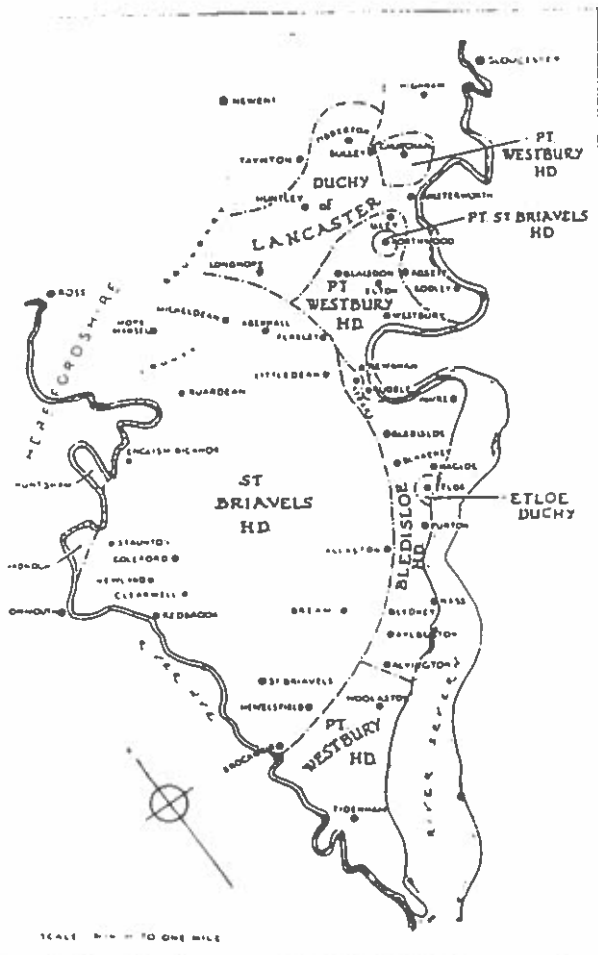




Map I. 'The Forest' at Domesday



Map II. Hundreds at 1220-1275 [and as approximately confirmed by (G) and (H)]



Map III. Hundreds at 1539-46 and 1608



Map IV. A portion of Christopher Saxton's map of Gloucestershire showing the Forest of Dean 1577

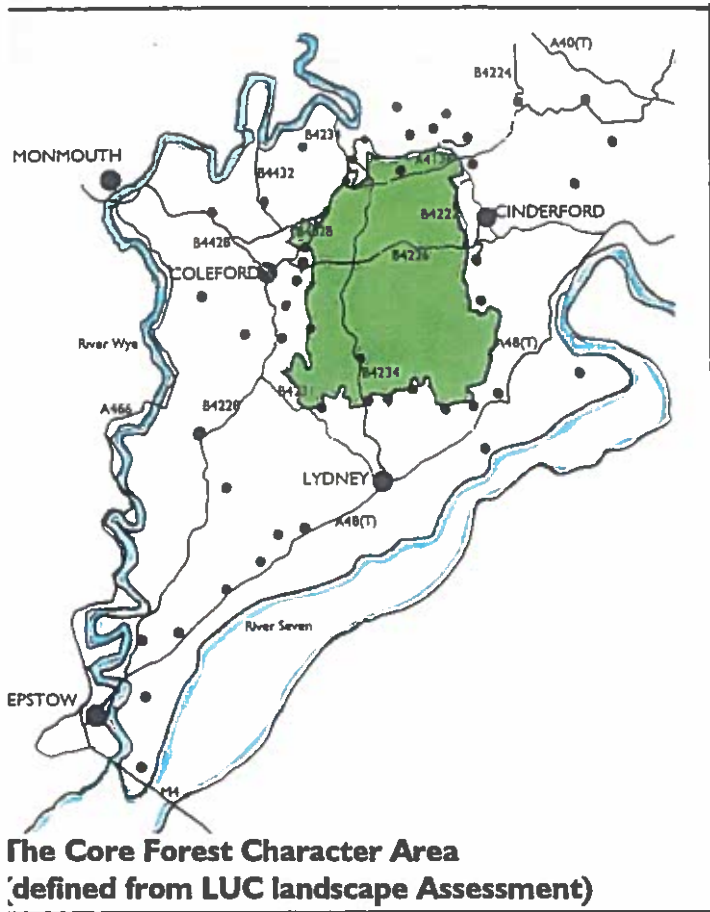
**Forest of Dean  
Review of Special Status**

**FIGURE 4 Historical Development  
of the Forest**

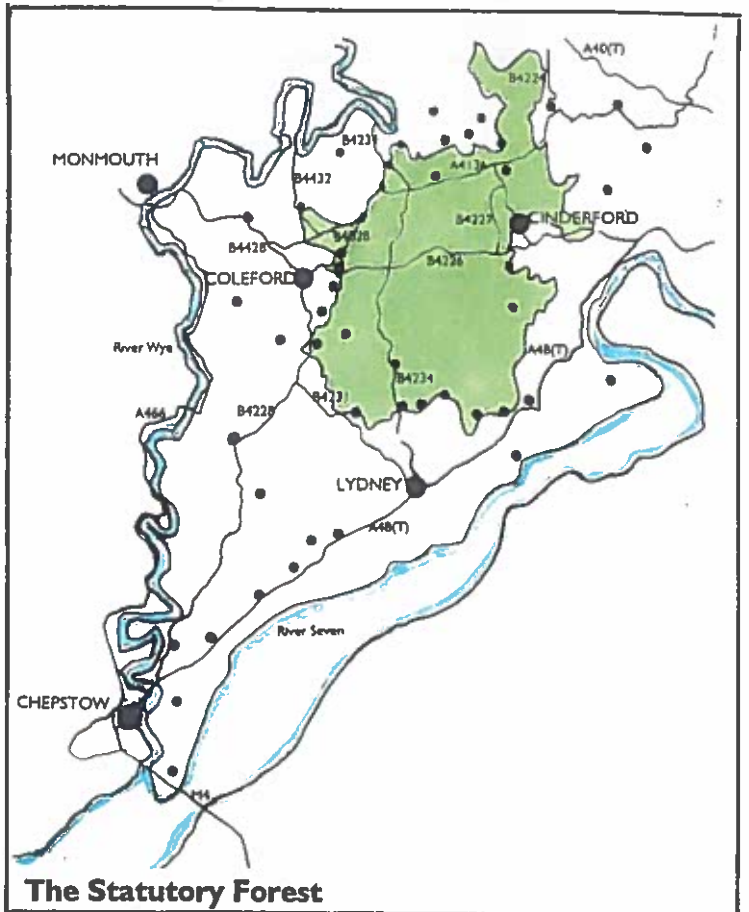








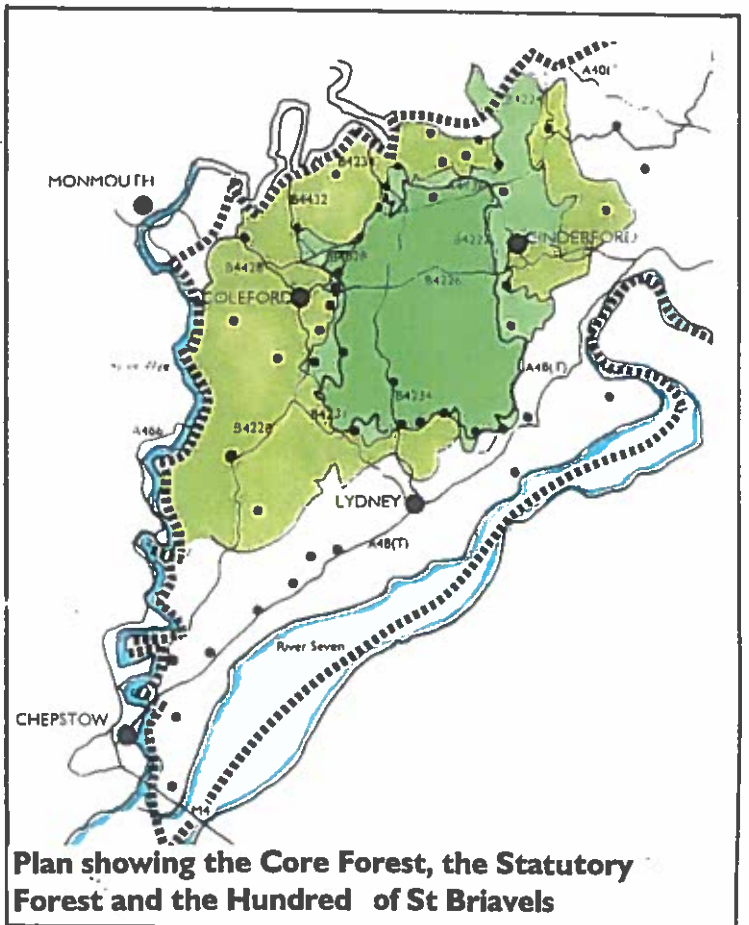
**The Core Forest Character Area  
(defined from LUC landscape Assessment)**



**The Statutory Forest**



**The Hundred of St Briavels**



**Plan showing the Core Forest, the Statutory Forest and the Hundred of St Briavels**

**Forest of Dean  
Review of Special Status**

**FIGURE 5 Plans showing Core Forest, Statutory Forest and Hundred of St Briavels**





### **3. ASSETS AND RESOURCES OF THE FOREST OF DEAN**

---

#### **INTRODUCTION**

- 3.1. This section of the report describes the main assets and resources which give rise to the unique character of the Forest of Dean.

#### **GEOLOGY AND LANDFORM**

- 3.2. The Forest of Dean incorporates a dramatic range of landforms/topography (see **Figure 6**), from the coastal flatlands of the Severn and the banks of the Wye, to upland plateau with elevated areas over 250 metres, as at Ruardean in the north of the Forest. The steep slopes of the Wye and Severn valleys converging in the south contrast with the softer rolling landscape to the north of the district towards Herefordshire.
- 3.3. Geologically, the Forest of Dean is an elevated mass of disturbed old sandstones and limestones. It has been described as a "saucer-shaped" landform defined at the rim by a "horseshoe" of Carboniferous limestone. The formation is tilted to the south and dissected by numerous streams producing an upland landscape of rolling valleys and ridges. The Coalfields/Coal Measures and underlying Carboniferous Limestone series are embedded in a terrain otherwise dominated by great depths Old Red Sandstone. The diversity of the underlying geology has contributed to a rich variety of landscape types.

#### **LAND-USE AND LANDSCAPE**

- 3.4. The Forest of Dean District occupies the western part of Gloucestershire bounded by the Malverns in the north, the Wye to west and the Severn in the south and east. The area is dominated by a heart shaped plateau of high land in the south wedged between the Severn and Wye Valleys. This upland area is predominantly wooded, encircled by small industrial settlements and surrounded by farmland. The land-use varies from extensive mixed woodland, forest waste and smallholdings with orchards, to mixed agriculture and mineral extraction.
- 3.5. The Forest of Dean is a landscape of great beauty and variety, in particular its extensive, mosaic of mixed woodland containing many valuable landscape features, both natural and man-made. An important aspect of the Forest landscape is that much of its beauty or "value" is hidden, for instance the ancient iron ore workings or "scowles". Dennis Potter described the Forest as "strange and beautiful ... a heart-shaped place between two rivers, slightly cut off from the rest of England". This sense of remoteness and concealment coupled with its time depth and an unusual "soft-wildness" of landscape gives the Forest of Dean a unique intangible quality as well as its obvious tangible beauty. The intangible attributes of the Forest constitute a significant part of its landscape

character and quality and inform what the Shadow Environment Secretary described as "... the unique character of the Forest and the needs of people who live in and around it."

- 3.6. The Forest of Dean has long been valued for its landscape character and quality but as yet does not enjoy statutory protection. The district since the early 1970's has included a large section of the Wye Valley AONB and part of the Malvern Hills AONB to the north, and the core forest which became the first National Forest Park in 1938. Furthermore, a large proportion of the district is designated as a Special Landscape Area (SLA) (see Figure 2).
- 3.7. In a recent landscape assessment (LUC 1991) the district was divided into 15 landscape character areas, 7 of these make up the SLA (see Figure 3). The landscape character varies widely from the steep slopes and expansive openness of the Severn Escarpment and Limestone Hills, to the intimate enclosure and local distinctiveness of the Forest of Dean itself and the Forest Fringes and Settlements.

## CULTURAL HERITAGE

- 3.8. The distinctive character of the Forest landscape is closely linked with the cultural heritage and industrial past. Both English Heritage and Gloucestershire County Council regard the area as of "*national importance for cultural heritage particularly in the field of industrial archaeology, which remains relatively unusual and has survived well as the area has not suffered from deforestation*".
- 3.9. The wealth of cultural heritage within the Forest (much unrecorded) ranges from the historical management of the woodland, including wood banks, coppicing and charcoal burning, to the mining and industrial activities within the forest; ranging from roman iron ore mines and medieval "bloomery" furnaces to eighteenth century mineral tramways. The area contains 1386 listed buildings, 25 Conservation Areas and 3367 listed sites in the Sites and Monuments with 47 Scheduled Ancient Monuments including sections of Offas Dyke, Lydney Docks and St Briavels Castle.
- 3.10. Apart from historical evidence on the ground, important customs and traditions of the Verderers, Inclosure Committee, Freeminers and Commoners have been retained. These customs and traditions are deeply relevant to the present culture and for many locals are the defining element of a "Forester's" identity. The Freeminers have statutory rights of mining and quarrying by the Dean Forest Mines Act 1838. The Act declared and established their rights, and a Commission was appointed to ascertain the boundaries of several existing gales (licence area) for coal, iron and quarries. Any male person born and abiding in the Hundred of St Briavels aged 21 or more, who has worked for a year and a day down a mine may register as a freeminer. A further act in 1861 granted that the right could be transferred to their heirs or assigns.
- 3.11. Verderers are elected by the freeholders of the county under the supervision of the county court sheriff. Only four verderers may sit at court at any one time and each is elected for life. Verderers represent the Forest interests, protecting the "vert and venison". The Inclosure Committee was set up through the 1688 Inclosure Act. It consists of 12 commissioners who are appointed by the Crown to regulate the enclosure

of the forest. Regular meetings are held with Forest Enterprise to approve the areas of woodland to be enclosed. The Commoners have a privilege of grazing, pannage and estovers within the statutory forest.

## ECOLOGY & BIODIVERSITY

- 3.12. The Forest of Dean core area is a nationally important ecological resource. English Nature considers the Forest of Dean to be *“a diverse and wildlife rich area, its value reflecting its south-westerly position, its complex geology, mix of landscapes, and ancient history of inhabitation by man. At its heart the Forest of Dean itself is a nationally important site for wildlife supporting a wide range of habitats and species which reflect the ancient nature of a Royal Forest of England, its long history of woodland cover and management and its more recent heritage. This unique combination of factors make the Forest as a whole an irreplaceable resource”*. The geographic location and relative size/scale of the Forest of Dean are two important factors in its ecological significance.
- 3.13. Its geographic location between lowland England and upland Wales provides the Forest with a diversity of both lowland and upland wildlife habitats and species. Due to the scale of its extensive woodland the Forest is a valuable reservoir of wildlife for the region, containing a rich variety of rare plants, birds, mammals and invertebrates.
- 3.14. Habitats, range from mixed semi-natural woodland, lowland heath, acid grassland to parkland and orchards. The lowland heathland habitat is particularly important; the largest area of lowland heath in Gloucestershire is located within the Forest. The Forest contains 19 Nature Reserves (2 National Nature Reserves) and 24 Sites of Biological Interest in addition to 9 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). The great variety of habitats includes a range of niche habitats, both roosting and feeding: from small disused quarries and mines supporting populations of ravens, falcons and bats; to spoil tips, pools and wetland with populations of butterflies and dragonflies.
- 3.15. Numerous rare plants, birds, mammals and invertebrates have been identified as Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species including the Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bats, the Otter and the Dormouse. Other locally important plant and animal species include birds such as Pied flycatchers and Hawfinches, and the lichens inhabiting the “Speech House oaks”.
- 3.16. **Forestry:** Forestry and woodland is the dominant land use and land cover in the Forest of Dean making up roughly 25% of the land area of the district. There is a wide range of woodland types, from ancient broadleaved woods through to commercial conifer plantations. Forestry acts both as a defining landscape element in the Forest and a significant economic resource and source of local employment.
- 3.17. It is the largest ancient forest in public ownership, apart from the New Forest with which it has strong similarities together with the Wyre Forest (see **Figure 7**). Forest Enterprise considers that the area *“is one of the few significant wooded landscapes in England, an excellent example of how the conservation of wildlife, the provision of recreation opportunities for locals and visitors, and the generation of economic benefits through timber production and other activities can be successfully integrated”*.

- 3.18. The Forest of Dean has been exploited for timber since the Iron Age. Its extent was already considerably reduced by the time of Domesday and was so severely worked in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries that only about 500 ha of quality timber remained by the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Such was the concern that two Dean Forest Acts of Parliament were passed in 1668 and 1808 to preserve and replant the forest.
- 3.19. The Statutory Forest of Dean (9,800 ha) was made over to the Forestry Commission (FC) by Act of Parliament in 1922. The area is an important timber resource with an annual production on a sustained basis of 55,000 cubic metres. Forestry operations are co-ordinated by Forest Enterprise (FE) who manage a total 11,000 ha of woodland in the Forest of Dean according to multi-purpose forestry principles - to protect and enhance the landscape and provide recreation and wildlife opportunities (ref Figure 5).
- 3.20. The composition of the Statutory Forest is approximately 50/50 broadleaf to conifer. The combination of its small size compartments, the maturity and age range of its tree stock, and variety of open space within the forest including waste and rides produces a striking mosaic of evergreen and deciduous trees interspersed with heath and unimproved grassland. Notable species include fir, spruce, pine, larch, oak, beech, sweet chestnut and ash. It contains 1000 hectares of prime oak woodland over 150 years old; the largest stand of "Napoleonic" oaks in Britain and probably in Europe planted in 1810 and 1840. However, despite the age of the forest less than 10 ha is ancient woodland. Forest management, in agreement with Inclosure Commissioners, is by rolling enclosure. A limit of 4,450 ha of land is enclosed at any one time. Approximately 84% of the woodland is managed as high forest with the remainder as coppice and scrub. Roughly 4% of the forest is "waste", a large amount of which is open space around the Forest settlements considered locally as "commonland".

## **AGRICULTURE**

- 3.21. Agriculture in the Forest of Dean district is varied, from large intensive arable farms and dairy operations in the lowlands and on the open limestone plateau, to smallholdings and common grazing of the forest and its fringes. Agriculture is in a state of flux and arable farming has intensified in the last ten years. The trend is a move away from dairy, beef and horticulture towards general cropping. Agricultural employment has declined as small mixed farms have gradually amalgamated into larger units. Sheep rearing is an important activity in the Forest of Dean, particularly in the statutory forest where by custom commoners have the privilege of grazing. It is also a contentious local issue with some residents critical of unrestricted sheep grazing and the nuisance caused in settlements and on roads.

## **MINERAL RESOURCES**

- 3.22. The complex geology of the Forest of Dean has resulted in the concentration of a variety mineral resources in a relatively small area, including in particular: iron ore, coal, hardrock and building stone. Historically, the Dean has long been of strategic importance in relation to minerals - it was the first area of iron production in Britain dating back to early

Iron Age (500 BC), and surface or "sea" coal was used by the Romans for heating buildings.

- 3.23. Iron ore was laid down in pockets in the Carboniferous limestone ring around the edge of the core forest. The deposits occurred at or near the surface and are now largely exhausted leaving a legacy of overgrown surface workings or "scowles" and subterranean caves. Associated with iron ore are deposits of ochre traditionally used in paint manufacture.
- 3.24. Coal deposits underlie much of the core forest sandwiched between sandstone and clays, often dipping at shallow angles with the lie of the land. The seams lie close to the surface in some areas cropping out at various places. The coal is of high quality (30% volatiles with low sulphur content) and lying at or near the surface is easily extracted. Much of the coal reserves have been worked out, including the deeper deposits. Some small scale coal mining is still carried out the Dean, there are currently around 12 working mines typically employing 3/4 people. There are opportunities for the recycling of spoil for coal, and secondary aggregates such as clay for brick making, and there is limited potential for small scale open cast coal mining in areas that would benefit from soil amelioration and landscape enhancement.
- 3.25. Small scale quarrying is a traditional activity of the Forest. Limestone deposits suitable for aggregates and sandstone as building stone lie predominately in a ring around the core forest and, in the case of the limestone, between the Forest and the Wye Valley. In recent years, increased demand for aggregates has led to large scale quarrying of hard rock predominately on the Carboniferous limestone to the west of the Forest. The adverse effects such as landscape and HGV traffic impacts, noise, dust and light pollution have lead to much opposition to quarrying from local people.

## RECREATION AND TOURISM

- 3.26. In 1938 the Forestry Commission established the Forest of Dean as the first National Forest Park in Britain to address the growing public demand for outdoor recreation and access to the countryside. Today the Forest is an important recreational resource attracting nearly 3 million visitors per year. The most popular attractions have been identified as Symonds Yat above the Wye Valley, and Beechenhurst and the Sculpture Trail near Speech House.
- 3.27. The Heart of England Tourist Board considers that the Forest of Dean is "a well established domestic tourist destination, growing in importance with overseas visitors. Over three million visitors came to the District in 1997 generating in the region of £38 million. Overseas bed occupancy accounts for around 17% of all staying visitors in 1998 (a 3% rise on 1997). The area has the potential to develop further as a tourist destination, but to do so will require further investment in product improvement and associated marketing. Any future growth in tourism must however be handled sensitively to safeguard and enhance the distinctive quality of the local environment and quality of life for the local residents. The district council's tourist officer has confirmed that it is the peaceful, tranquil and natural environment which provides the special qualities that attract many visitors to this beautiful area time after time."

- 3.28. Visitor patterns are generally local and daily in nature. The area is perceived as a day visitor destination for residents of the Dean and inhabitants of nearby towns and cities such as Gloucester, Bristol and Newport. Only 8% of the total number of visitors stay over night, which may reflect the shortage of accommodation in the Dean. Recreational activities range from passive enjoyment of the natural beauty and tranquillity of the surroundings to active pursuits like mountain biking. The most popular activities catered for in the Forest include walking, cycling, horse riding, camping and orienteering.
- 3.29. The development of recreation and tourism is a major issue in the Forest of Dean with many residents opposed to what is widely perceived locally as the commercialisation of the Forest and erosion of the unspoilt natural beauty/quality.

## **OTHER LAND USE/OWNERSHIP**

- 3.30. Apart from forestry which dominates the region, the other principle land uses are agriculture discussed previously, industry, housing, parkland and a small amount of commonland. Industry and housing are concentrated in a ring around the statutory forest.

## **SETTLEMENT PATTERNS**

- 3.31. The majority of the settlements (apart from Parkend) lie on the fringes of the Statutory Forest, the largest are Cinderford, Coleford, Lydney, Mitcheldean, Drybrook, and Newent further north. The settlements are generally either small towns, low density loose hamlets and building groups, or areas of detached suburbia. Settlements style range from late medieval period through to late 19 century, building materials consist of locally available materials, often stone. The origin, form and appearance of the settlements is very distinctive and closely linked with the forest. Large areas of forest waste divide the settlements from the forest, perceived by the local communities as common land.

## **TRANSPORT & COMMUNICATIONS**

- 3.32. The existing transport infrastructure within the district is very limited. Three main road routes/corridors run through the area; the A48 running along the west bank of the Severn, the A40 running between Ross-on-Wye and Gloucester, and the A4136 which runs through the core forest. Despite the districts close proximity to several motorway networks, the limited transport network and the topography instils a sense of isolation in the local community and tourists who visit the area.
- 3.33. Heavy traffic utilises the forest roads in order to avoid the tolls imposed on the Severn crossings and transport problems are exacerbated by lorries running to and from existing quarries generating dust and noise. The public transport structure is poor. Bus times are limited at weekends and the rail network is restricted to the south of the district running from Gloucester to Chepstow.



## **COMMUNITY VALUES**

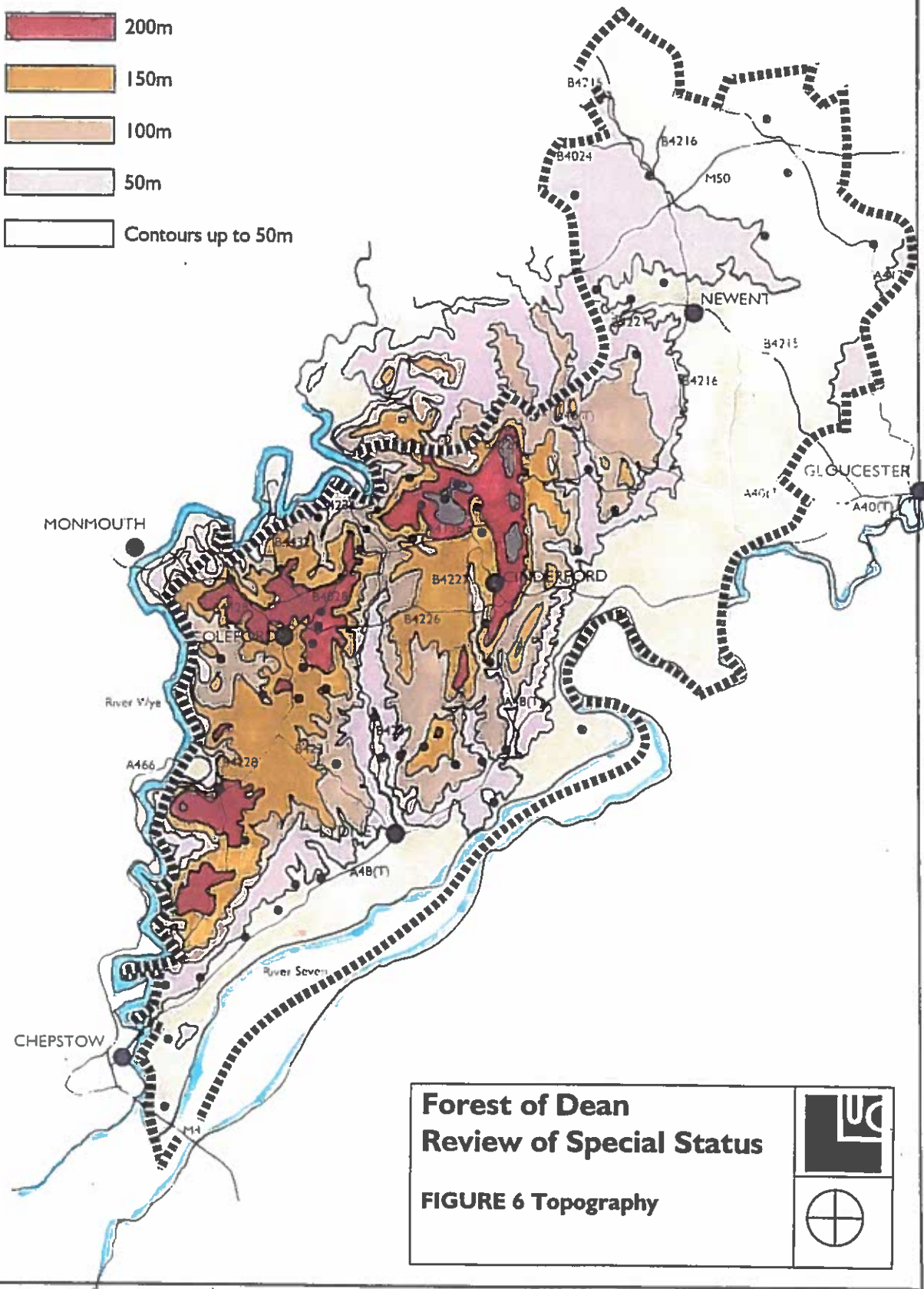
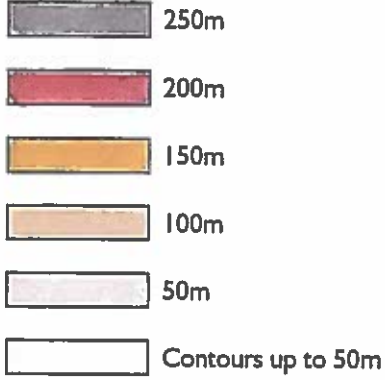
- 3.34. The total population of the Forest of Dean district was estimated 75,900 in 1997 with only a third concentrated in the main settlements. High unemployment and low employment opportunities are a prevalent factor within the district. Traditionally primary industries and manufacturing have provided the mainstay of employment. However these sectors have been declining and the focus is moving increasingly towards business services and tourism. Traditions and customs are an inherent part of forest life.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

- 3.35. The characteristics of the Forest of Dean which have been described above paint a picture of an area which is quite different from its surroundings. While other areas of Britain have similar histories of landuse and development the combination of natural attributes, the richness of its habitats and bio-diversity and the strength of its cultural traditions makes the Forest of Dean a truly unique place. On these grounds it clearly deserves recognition and protection. However in order to determine what form that recognition and protection might take it is necessary to consider to what extent these qualities are under threat. These issues are examined in the following section.



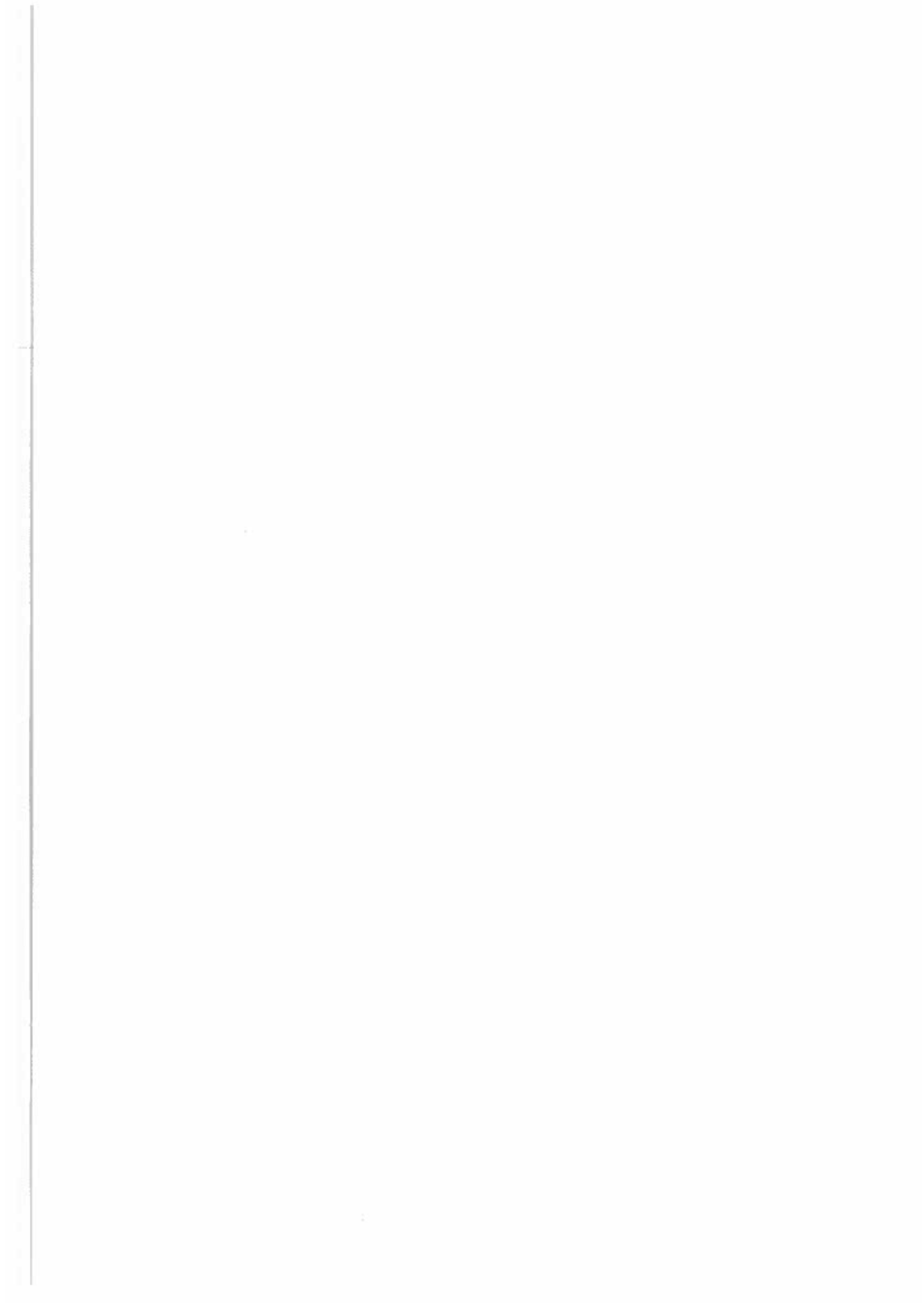
**Key**



**Forest of Dean  
Review of Special Status**

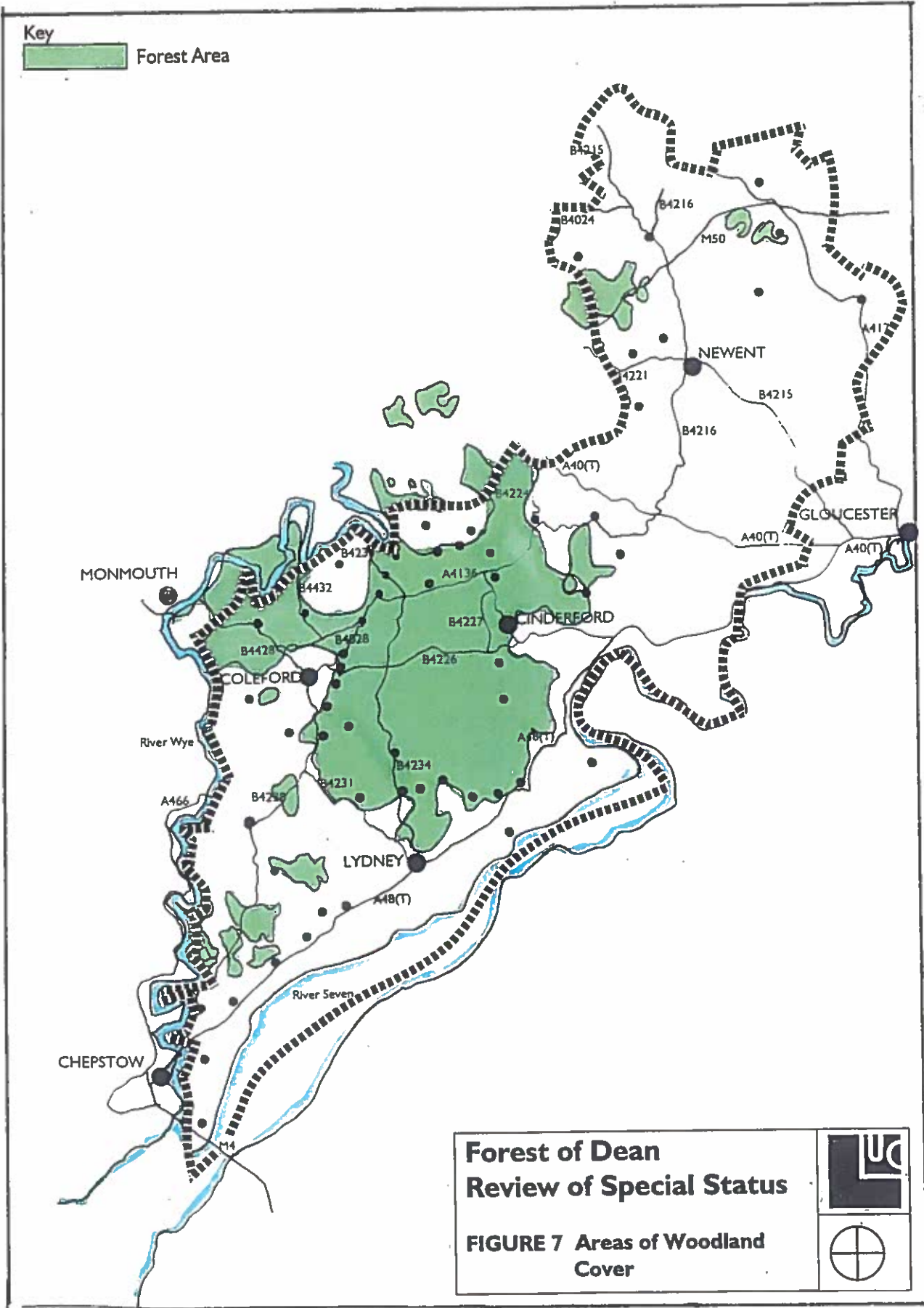
**FIGURE 6 Topography**

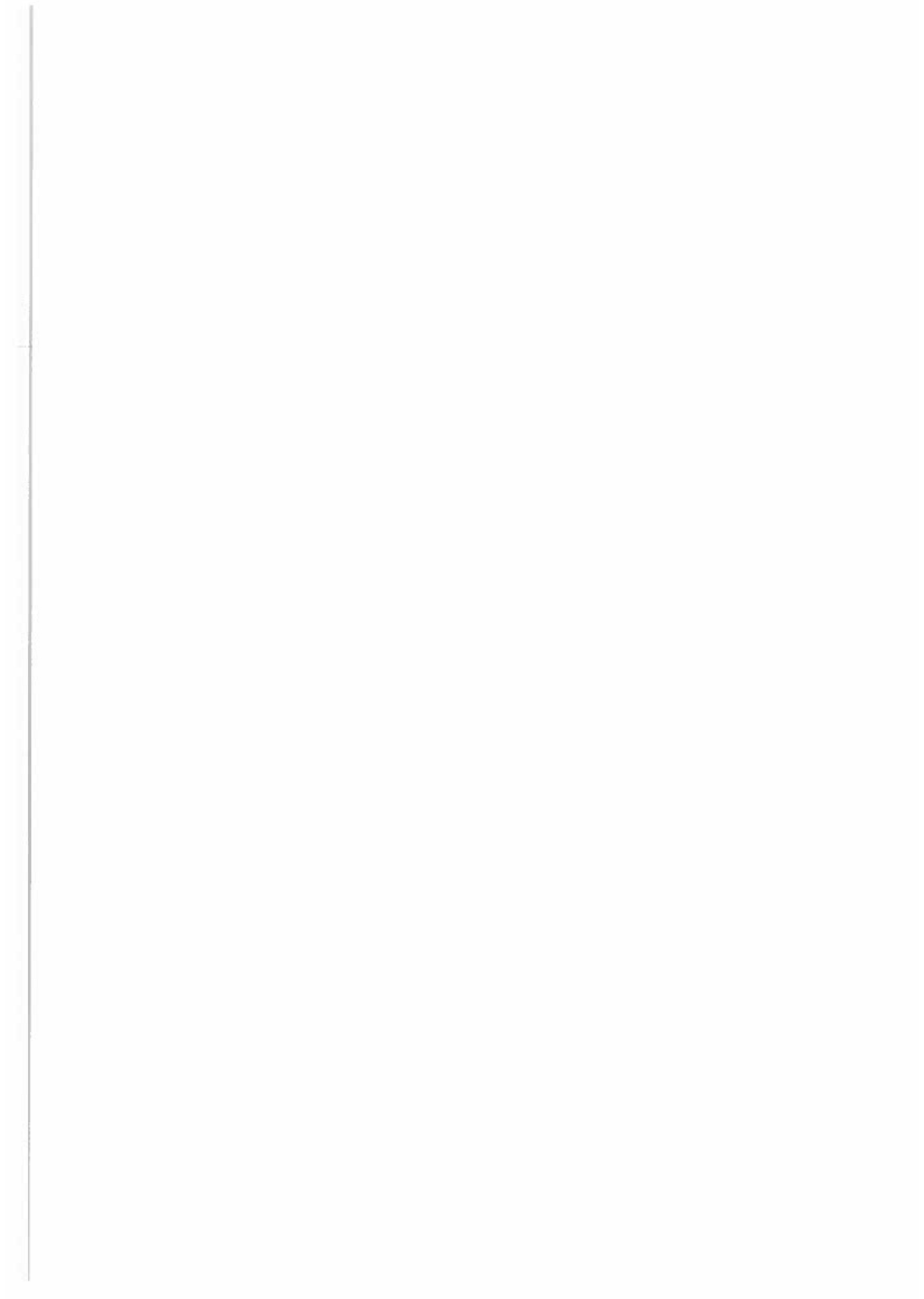




Key

 Forest Area





## **4. ANALYSIS OF ISSUES**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

- 4.1. Various issues have contributed to the call for special status for the Forest of Dean. These include concerns amongst some sectors of the local community about the increasing popularity of recreational facilities provided by Forest Enterprise and the District Council, the pressure of heavy goods vehicle traffic on a local road network which was not designed, and is ill equipped to, accommodate it. Undoubtedly the most serious issue in the minds of local people is what is perceived as a major threat from continued quarrying of limestone, and the possible development of open cast coal mining. The nature of these and other issues is explored in this section.

### **MINERAL WORKING**

- 4.2. Prospects for hard rock quarrying and opencast coal mining lie at the heart of concerns about the future of the Forest of Dean and there are real issues which need to be addressed in relation to the impacts of individual sites and the local communities which lie close to them. However, in order to place these issues in context some commentary on the present and potential level of mineral working in the area is required.

#### **Limestone Quarrying**

- 4.3. The Forest of Dean is an important source of crushed limestone which is used extensively in the construction industry as a principal constituent of concrete, and for road building. Limestone from the Forest of Dean provides 50% of all aggregates quarried in Gloucestershire. The balance is made up of 21% from limestone quarried in the Cotswolds, and 29% from Sand and Gravel. The annual demand for limestone from the Forest of Dean is in the region of 2.2 million tonnes.
- 4.4. Gloucestershire County Council, as Minerals Planning Authority (MPA), is required by Central Government to maintain an adequate landbank of land with planning permission for mineral working. In the case of hard rock, a minimum land bank of 10 years reserves is required. The landbank needs to be maintained at the required level both throughout the plan period, and at the end of it. The size of the land bank which would be required from the Forest of Dean, assuming it continued to meet its current proportionate share of Gloucestershire's aggregates supply amounts to a figure of 44.4 million tonnes. Existing reserves amount to 26.3 million tonnes and there is therefore a shortfall of 18.1 million tonnes. In order to try and meet this shortfall, Gloucestershire MPA has examined the scope for providing extensions to existing quarries, or if necessary, permitting the development of one or more green field sites.
- 4.5. Limestone quarrying currently takes place at four locations in the Forest of Dean; at Dayhouse, Drybrook, Stowfield and Stowe Hill/Clearwell. Dayhouse Quarry is due to

close within two years due to lack of reserves. The first three quarries exploit Lower Dolomite while the fourth works a formation in the Carboniferous Lower Limestone. A further three quarries are currently inactive at Bream, Rogers and Tintern. Three of the seven quarry sites lie within the Wye Valley AONB, and account for almost 75% of available reserves.

- 4.6. The Carboniferous Limestone resource zone extends from Clearwell to Hewelsfield and Bream. Lower Dolomitic Limestone outcrops around the periphery of the Forest of Dean. Although the surface area underlain by both Carboniferous and Dolomitic Limestone is extensive, the number of locations in which limestone could be physically worked is much more constrained by the nature of the underlying geology.
- 4.7. Public concern was raised during the early stages of the Gloucestershire Mineral Local Plan preparation process, when a substantial part of the Clearwell - Bream area was identified as an area of investigation for a potential green field quarrying site. Many people failed to understand the fact that only a small part of the total area of investigation would ultimately be considered for mineral working in the foreseeable future. As a result, major fears were raised that whole tracts of the Forest of Dean were likely to be quarried away over a period of 10-15 years. Following the Local Plan preliminary consultations, these broad areas of investigation were eliminated. Instead, two preferred areas and one small area of search have been identified, adjacent to existing quarries, in the Minerals Local plan, Consultation Draft.
- 4.8. The areas which are now included in the Gloucestershire Minerals Local Plan Consultation Draft comprise:
  - 11 Ha. Preferred Area to the west of Drybrook Quarry (containing up to 4.5 mt)
  - 35 Ha. Area of Search to the north of Stowfield Quarry ( containing up to 25 mt)
  - 39.9 Ha. Preferred Area to the east of Stowe Hill / Clearwell (containing up to 39.9 mt).
- 4.9. The total reserves available within existing active quarries and these potential extensions exceed the cumulative reserves which would be required for the plan period. However, the MPA acknowledges that with current restrictions on annual production from existing quarries there will be a shortfall of supply towards the end of the plan period. The MPA states that the only alternative would be to identify further quarry sites which would incur unacceptable environmental impacts. Under these circumstances the MPA may be challenged by the minerals industry on the grounds that it has failed to meet the requirements of MPG 6 in allocating sufficient reserves to maintain a 10 year land bank to the end of the plan period. The MPA believes its position is justified by the need to protect the highly sensitive environment of the limestone resource zone within the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean.
- 4.10. Although the Mineral Planning Authority has taken a firm line on the scope for accepting further mineral working, inclusion of preferred areas and areas of search in the Minerals Local Plan is strongly resisted by local people, and in particular a group of communities working together as 'Action Against Quarrying' which advocates:



1. an absolute ban on granting of new permissions
2. an immediate and total moratorium on the granting of new permissions
3. that consideration be given to meeting the need for hard rock aggregate from other sources during the time that existing reserves are being worked.

4.11. The groups' arguments are based on the following assertions:

- Modern extraction techniques result in extensive and deep workings which are visually intrusive.
- Production is geared towards profit, by companies who are not locally accountable.
- Existing mineral planning policies give insufficient weight to landscape destruction.
- Regional apportionment of demand for aggregates is self-fulfilling, and there is no serious review of the scope for reducing demand.
- Large scale limestone quarries have not been successfully restored.
- Tourism in the Forest of Dean is adversely affected by quarrying.
- Mineral working contributes little to the local economy.
- Quarrying exacerbates levels of heavy goods traffic, which are already unacceptably high, given the poor quality of local roads.

4.12. The quarry operators in the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley include several of the largest companies in the United Kingdom. Their representatives are well placed to speak from experience about both the importance of aggregate production to the national, regional, and local economy, and the measures which the industry is increasingly taking to deal with environmental problems. Their response to these criticisms has been to emphasise the following considerations:

- A high proportion of the limestone quarried in Gloucestershire is used within the county to meet local needs.
- Historically there were more operational quarries within the Forest of Dean and mineral working in general caused significantly higher levels of noise and air pollution than it does today.
- Environmental standards are being constantly upgraded at major quarry sites in the Forest of Dean.
- The scale of individual workings has increased, but activity is now concentrated on fewer sites, which, in general are better screened and protected than in the past.
- The total surface area of land required to meet 10 years demand for limestone from the Forest of Dean at current production rates is less than 70 hectares. This represents only 0.13 % of the entire Forest of Dean District.
- Recycling of aggregates is being given serious consideration by the Industry, but there are practical limitations and the economic, energy and environmental costs of recycling can be considerable in their own right.

4.13. It would be inappropriate for this report to express views on the merits and demerits of individual quarry sites and proposed preferred areas or areas of search. This is because, although members of the study team have visited all of the sites to form an overview, the level of investigation has in no way equated with the level of assessment required to support or oppose a particular application.

- 4.14. At a strategic level, however, it is clear that applications for mineral working within those areas of the Forest of Dean which lie outside the Wye Valley AONB are subjected to less stringent tests of their acceptability than those which do fall in AONBs. In the light of the study's overall conclusions about the environmental qualities of the Forest there are strong arguments for giving the Forest of Dean equivalent planning status to AONB's and National Parks.
- 4.15. The complexity of the issues surrounding hard rock quarrying in the Forest of Dean are self-evident, and it is clearly important that such issues are resolved by the mineral planning process which has been established nationally to deal with such problems. Following approaches to Richard Caborn, MP Minister for Regions, Regeneration and Planning, by local residents and the County Council, advice has been given by his department, (DETR) that: *"the best way of taking forward public debate would be to progress the Gloucestershire Minerals Local Plan, allowing the issues to be properly investigated through the development plan process and in due course the public enquiry"*
- 4.16. This advice is fully supported by the findings of the Study. It will not be easy to develop additional scenarios and methodologies to deal with the cumulative impacts of several quarry interests, taking into account issues of regional mineral apportionment on the one hand, and the effects on the environment, social structure and the economy on the other. In practice it is likely to take time to develop a comprehensive long term and agreed vision for the future of carboniferous limestone quarrying in the Forest of Dean. In order not to curtail the process of the preparation of the current Minerals Local Plan which already demonstrates a significant shortfall of resource allocation, it is suggested that a long term strategy for limestone quarrying in the Forest of Dean is developed as an urgent first review of the Minerals Local Plan. Initial ideas on how the process might be taken forward are set out in Box 3, although these ideas would be discussed fully between the Minerals Planning Authority, the mineral operators, the Government Officer South West, as well as taking into account consultation with interested parties.

### **Box 3 – Suggested Approach towards developing a long term Minerals Strategy for the Forest of Dean**

A joint exercise should be undertaken by the MPA and companies who are likely to have active workings in the Forest of Dean during the Mineral Plan period to map the likely extent of existing, proposed, and potential quarries (and their extensions) at five year intervals, for a period of up to twenty years. These maps should be based on defined areas of search (or preferred areas where applicable).

Maps for each successive five year interval should show:

- The total area of land under each mineral operator's control.
- The position of processing plant.
- Areas of active working showing extent and depth( i.e. stone extraction) during each five year interval.
- Areas likely to be undergoing rehabilitation or restoration during each five year interval.
- Areas set aside for landscaping, screening environmental protection and other related purposes.
- The location of designated sites of nature conservation, archaeological and other sensitive environmental features in relation to the quarry workings.
- Long term proposals for after use.
- Transport routes from the quarries to principal market areas.

Maps of quarrying activity should be accompanied by a statement of the underlying assumptions about production rates, markets and related issues.

The statement and accompanying maps would represent the best view of what future development patterns might be but could not be regarded as definitive since so many variables could alter with time. It would however, ensure that all parties could present their case from a common standpoint.

## Opencast Coal Mining

- 4.17. In addition to limestone quarrying, the potential for large scale opencast coal working is an issue which causes concern for some local residents. Extensive areas of the Forest have been mined at depth, and underground mining continues in areas where the coal seams lie close to the surface.. There are, however, areas where previous underground extraction methods left substantial reserves of coal intact representatives of the mining industry consider that these deposits, together with secondary reserves in spoil-tips, offer opportunities for opencast coal mining and coal washing or screening at a number of locations in the Core Forest. It has been suggested by some local miners that there is approximately 500 ha of open cast coal mining potential in the Forest of Dean.
- 4.18. In some circumstances, opencast coal extraction can be an effective way of removing dereliction and preparing land for new uses where the risks of subsidence and ground instability prohibit conventional building development. However, it is also a very intrusive operation which can have significant adverse effects on the environment. The Gloucestershire County Council Structure Plan (Policies M2 and M10 [previously M13]) provides clear policy guidance on the prospects of open cast mining. The development plan states that opencast coal extraction will not normally permitted in the Forest of Dean. This strong policy standpoint was not altered by the changes made following the Structure Plan Examination in Public (EIP). Structure Plan Policy M10 states: *"The extraction of coal by opencast methods will be permitted only where it will not have a significant detrimental effect on the recreational and tourism role of the Forest of Dean, environmental or traffic conditions, or on settlements and neighbouring land uses."* The recently published Mineral Planning Guidance MPG 3 (March 1999) states that *"although some sites are capable of being well restored, open cast mining can be extremely damaging to the environment and amenity of a locality whilst it is taking place, and the restored landscape can take several years to mature. The proposals for restoration, and the extent to which the proposals provides local or community benefits must be weighed against the severity of the harm likely to be caused during the duration of the development and the time it would take for the landscape to regenerate following restoration."*
- 4.19. There has been only one recent application for open cast mining, which was in 1995 at Lightmoor Colliery near Cinderford, an area of land lying between Lightmoor Tip and Mallards Pike. The planning application was refused by the County Council and the applicant appealed. The case went to public inquiry where the inspector recommended that the planning appeal should be dismissed, a decision subsequently confirmed by the Secretary of State.
- 4.20. Continued small scale underground coal mining in the Forest of Dean would not necessarily conflict with the objectives of Special Status. On the contrary, some small scale development would be desirable where it benefits both the local economy and the landscape and wildlife.

## **TOURISM AND RECREATION**

- 4.21. The Forest is considered a special resource for recreation. The area provides a variety of recreational needs ranging from active outdoor sports such as walking, cycling, horse riding and orienteering to the passive enjoyment of the countryside and interpretation of wildlife and cultural heritage. The attraction of the area lies in its peace and tranquillity and its landscape appeal. Apart from particular honey pots such as Beechenhurst Sculpture Park where there is occasional traffic congestion during peak season, the majority of visitors are easily absorbed into the wooded landscape. The promotion of recreation and tourism is however hampered by a lack of available accommodation and a limited range of facilities. The majority of people who visit the area are day visitors who invest little in the local economy.
- 4.22. Tensions exist between those who favour increased recreational use of the forest and those who are opposed to such development. A legitimate case exists for promoting tourism within the area to make use of its excellent resources and to stimulate the local economy. At the same time some sectors of the local community are concerned that increased recreational activity within the Forest will destroy the tranquillity of the area, diminish the sense of "islander-isolation" that has been instilled into many of the local communities over the decades, and generate additional pressures on cultural heritage and nature conservation.
- 4.23. One of the current concerns generating tension between the local communities and Forest Enterprise is the growth of off-road cycling. Local communities have objected in particular to a joint partnership project called "Railways to Cycleways", undertaken by Forest Enterprise and Forest of Dean District Council. The project aims to re-use former industrial railway and tram routes as recreational facilities for both visitors and residents, linking local communities by cycle tracks. Some people feel that this would "gradually transform the area into a urban theme park", their resentment has been exacerbated by the fact that they perceive that they not been fully consulted and have been denied the right to object to the development. A counter view is held by the project promoters who believe that democratic processes have been followed, although it is not possible to cater for every interest group in trying to reach a consensus.
- 4.24. One of the key findings of this study is that in order to reduce the tensions that exist between the local communities, Forest Enterprise and the District Authority, a tourism and recreational strategy should be developed to clarify future aims and objectives.

## **LANDSCAPE CHANGE**

- 4.25. A review of landscape change since 1971 was undertaken as part of the present study and an account of the findings is presented in the Technical Report. In essence, the Forest landscape has deteriorated in some areas but improved in others. For some people recreational development is perceived to have eroded the landscape character and quality of some small but sensitive areas of the Forest. On the other hand, many people consider that the Forestry Commission's land reclamation work and woodland management

policies have greatly enhanced the core area of the Forest of Dean in the last twenty years. Box 4 summarises the main issues and concerns relating to landscape change:

- 4.26. **Forestry:** Being a key landscape element of the area, any change to woodland in terms of its extent or composition could have a dramatic impact on the overall landscape. Some concern has been raised over the level of conifer planting and the management approach employed by Forest Enterprise. This research study has shown, however, that Forest Enterprise's work generally enjoys wide public support throughout the area and that their multi-purpose forestry management strategy, involving public consultation, and the use of "forest design plans", has benefited landscape enhancement, nature conservation, recreational opportunities and archaeological conservation. According to many local residents the Forest landscape has been greatly improved since the early 1970s by virtue of the Forestry Commission's land restoration programme and introduction of the Broadleaf Woodlands Management Plan.
- 4.27. **Agriculture:** Declining agricultural incomes and changing markets have brought pressure for farm diversification and the amalgamation of small units into larger ones. Arable intensification, the growth of equestrian activities and the conversion of farm buildings to residential and tourism uses has impacted on the traditional landscape in a number of ways. The loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees, the reduction of permanent pasture and the deterioration of traditional farm buildings and stone walls in some areas are the most obvious consequences.
- 4.28. One contentious issue in the Forest of Dean is the exercise by Commoners of their privilege to graze sheep. This traditional farming practice is important in creating and maintaining the distinctive "open" character of much of the woodland and the spaces both within and around the Forest settlements. However, many local residents consider the sheep to be a nuisance, especially in and around towns and villages, and are critical of the apparent lack of care for the animals shown by the "sheep badgers". Sheep are an integral part of the Forest landscape and their continued grazing is desirable in the interest of maintaining the landscape character and local distinctiveness of the Forest of Dean, but more effective measures are needed to control flocks and prevent straying.
- 4.29. **Quarrying:** The visual impact of hard rock quarrying to the west of the Statutory Forest is seen as the single most important issue in the Forest of Dean. Traditionally, stone quarries were small scale and labour intensive, hence they were tied in to the local community and relatively unobtrusive; in fact old disused quarries are important features within the Forest landscape. Part of the objection to current large-scale workings from local residents is the direct visual impact and the difficulty of achieving any form of restoration in a reasonable timeframe. There are also indirect landscape impacts (such as the pressure for road improvement for HGV traffic).
- 4.30. Quarrying has contributed to landscape change in the Forest of Dean over the past 30 years and more research is needed as discussed in paragraph 4.16 to assess what its future effects are likely to be.
- 4.31. **Coal Mining:** Most activity is limited to small operations typically employing 3-4 local Freeminers. The mines, of which there are currently 10-12 active in the Dean, are small scale and very unobtrusive. The workings are sensitively operated under the guidance of

the Deputy Gaveler with negligible landscape impact. A good example of such a working mine is Quidchurch Colliery.

- 4.32. The opportunity for the recycling of spoil-tips for coal and secondary aggregate (except where the tip is a valued landscape or nature conservation feature) may offer the potential of landscape improvement through mining activity.
- 4.33. **Industrial and Commercial activity:** The Forest of Dean has a long industrial history of mining and iron and steel processing which has steadily declined this century. Many of the surviving disused industrial buildings are now valued landscape features and much effort has been invested locally in their restoration as tourism assets. This includes the restoration of historically important coal and iron ore mines. Good examples of such initiatives include Dean Heritage Centre, Hopewell Colliery and Clearwell Caves. Taken together with many other similar investments across the Forest, by such organisations as Forest Enterprise, these improvements constitute a net landscape gain.
- 4.34. The Forest of Dean has suffered a decline in traditional industries since the 1960s. To compensate for this trend the development of light industry and commercial activities, such as the manufacture of packaging products and electronics, has been encouraged. Industrial and commercial development tends to be large scale in relation to the typically intimate scale of the Forest settlements, and thus of higher landscape impact. There is local concern that the necessary economic development will be at the expense of landscape character and quality.
- 4.35. **Housing:** The Forest of Dean is characterised by its variety of small towns and villages and particularly by a tradition of small scale, piecemeal settlement. Current landscape change is typified by small-scale residential housing development, involving infill of individual houses, and small group of dwellings within existing settlements. Although in many cases appropriate, infill development is altering the characteristic settlement pattern and intervening open space. Sensitive planning is needed to prevent further erosion of landscape character. The District Council's recently published "Building Design Guide" provides useful advice on the appropriate choice of detailing and materials to reflect local distinctiveness, and is a very useful tool in promoting landscape enhancement in the Forest.
- 4.36. **Transport:** For reasons of topography and historical evolution, the transport infrastructure of the Forest of Dean is restricted to relatively small two-lane roads. The small scale nature of the road network is an important aspect of the Dean's landscape character and one that has not changed as dramatically as in many other parts of the country. County and District transport policy aims to make the best use of the existing road network to promote economic development in the Forest of Dean, making improvements only where necessary, within then overall context of restraining traffic growth.
- 4.37. Significant levels of heavy goods vehicle traffic serve the Forest settlements which, together with associated services such as lorry parks and garages, add to the character of the forest as a working environment. Road development is restricted to a limited amount of junction improvement and road widening with its associated landscape impacts such as signage and loss of vegetation. The A48 has been identified as a development corridor for the Forest of Dean and is therefore an area of potential landscape change. However, the

proposed de-trunking of that road is a factor determining levels of future development in the district, especially at related settlements along its length such as Lydney.

- 4.38. **Recreation:** The Forest of Dean has experienced considerable recreational development in recent years, particularly within the statutory forest itself. Although much work has been done by Forest Enterprise to sensitively integrate the facilities and activities into the fabric of the forest, there have been concerns raised over the loss of landscape character and wildlife habitat due to an over-emphasis on recreation. In particular, trails have been developed on disused railways for cyclists and walkers. There has been criticism in some cases for insensitive restoration and inappropriate use of surfacing materials, and the resultant loss of tranquil areas and undisturbed habitats.



#### Box 4 - Overview of changes to the landscape since 1971

<p><b>Forestry and woodland</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• restocking of conifer plantations with native broadleaves</li><li>• protection and management of ancient woodland and heath</li><li>• forestry recreation – development of cycleways and trails</li><li>• “common” sheep grazing of forest/woodland</li><li>• bracken encroachment of woodland/forest</li><li>• lack of natural regeneration in some areas</li></ul>
<p><b>Agriculture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• agricultural intensification - pasture to arable</li><li>• “common” sheep grazing</li><li>• loss of hedgerow trees and hedges, and replacement with post and rail fencing</li><li>• drainage improvements of low lying pasture and unimproved grassland</li></ul>
<p><b>Quarrying and Coal Mining</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• highly visible medium to large scale limestone quarries</li><li>• restoration of mineral workings, quarries and coal spoil</li><li>• landscape impacts associated with increased HGV traffic</li></ul>
<p><b>Industrial and commercial activity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• medium scale industrial development - light industrial units</li><li>• older, large scale industrial/commercial complexes</li></ul>
<p><b>Housing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• infill housing development in the Forest Fringes and Settlements</li><li>• non-vernacular building materials</li><li>• extensions and farm building conversions</li></ul>
<p><b>Transport</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• road widening</li><li>• junction modification</li><li>• level of HGV traffic</li><li>• A48(T) development corridor</li></ul>
<p><b>Recreation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Development of picnic/recreation areas with facilities</li><li>• Conversion of disused mineral railways to cycle trails</li><li>• Conversion of derelict industrial buildings to visitor centres/museums etc.</li></ul>

## **CULTURAL HERITAGE**

- 4.39. The main concerns which are addressed by the Verderers, are conflicts between commoners grazing rights and local concerns over animal husbandry and the nuisance sheep are causing within settlements edging the forest.
- 4.40. Historical interpretation on the area is provided at Clearwell Caves, Dean Heritage Centre. There are several publications on the Dean, in particular a notable collection by Dr Hart, a senior verderer of the forest, and active amateur archaeologists who have collated historical data on the Forest. Existing archaeological data is largely founded on local knowledge.
- 4.41. The heavily wooded nature of the area has protected the cultural heritage of forest but also restrain the ease by which archaeologists can record historic features. Concern has been voiced that large areas which are unrecorded will be lost to further development before a true estimate and understanding of the extent of historical evidence is obtained. Local concerns are primarily focused towards further hard rock quarrying and development pressures from recreation and tourism activities, in particular the potential damage of mineral tramways by cycleway proposals.
- 4.42. There is an urgent need for the development of a heritage strategy which should be developed in consultation with the local communities to give recognition to the importance of the area's cultural heritage. The strategy should promote heritage interpretation based on public enjoyment of this unique historic resource. Recognition should be given, in particular, to the important role the customs and rights of the Verderers, Freeminers, Commoners and Inclosure Committee play in maintaining the unique qualities of the forest.

## **NATURE CONSERVATION**

- 4.43. English Nature is supported by a number of voluntary organisations in protecting and enhancing the natural environment of the Forest of Dean. Extensive areas are notified as Sites of Scientific Interest, and since many fall within the Statutory Forest they are managed by Forest Enterprise. Other woodland sites are in private ownership and receive relatively low levels of management and intervention. Large scale quarrying has the potential to damage sites of nature conservation importance, although the approach adopted by the Mineral Planning Authority in sieving out sensitive sites as potential areas of search has ensured that such threats are kept to a minimum. Inevitably, quarrying destroys vegetation cover, and displaces soil. It can also cause significant changes to ground water movement which has indirect effects on nature conservation. However, in cases where English Nature has been directly involved in planning mitigation and rehabilitation works compensatory measures have been introduced. These include the creation of bat caves, and the sculpting of quarry faces to encourage ravens, and raptors to breed.

Increases in recreational activity are reported to have had some adverse effects on areas of nature conservation interest, especially in the Cannop Valley, but in the context of the overall forest environment these effects have been slight.

## **LOCAL ECONOMY**

- 4.44. Despite its close proximity to large towns and cities the Forest of Dean is relatively isolated. It has a limited transportation network, higher levels of unemployment than other parts of Gloucestershire and the second lowest income levels in the County. The area is heavily dependant on a declining manufacturing based industry. A high percentage of the population work outside the district and a large proportion of the unemployed are unskilled. The area has the highest fertility rates in the county, a low car ownership and limited childcare facilities; the limited public transport system only exacerbates the problems that already exist.
- 4.45. The Forest of Dean has been designated a Rural Development Area since 1984 and re-designated in 1994 (see **Figure 8**). Rural Development status and funding has helped to expand and develop the local economy, creating employment opportunities, providing opportunities for affordable housing, and supporting local community facilities through additional funding initiatives. The area has however lost assisted area status since 1994, dramatically reducing funding for the area.
- 4.46. Key community concerns are that the area is declining, limited investment has been targeted at the appropriate regions and there is a need to promote small to medium labour intensive industries. There are however reservations about how far development should be promoted and a "reluctance to see change".
- 4.47. In order to achieve a balance between all the differing needs and concerns of the local community a strategy needs to be developed which achieve a balance between promoting local employment, economic growth and or investment opportunities whilst conserving the unique nature of the area.

## **VIEWS OF COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL REPRESENTATIVES**

- 4.48. In discussing the future of the Forest of Dean several representatives of commercial and industrial businesses have emphasised the importance of retaining local skills and harnessing the enthusiasm and involvement of local people. They have stressed that the forest is a working environment which is dependent upon continuing investment, and economic renewal. There is a danger that constant worries about environmental protection could stifle essential economic activity. Planning policies in particular are often seen as restrictive and reactive in their effects, stultifying growth and development.

## **VIEWS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

- 4.49. Discussions were held with a number of individuals representing Action Against Quarries and other local community interests in the Forest of Dean. Only a small number of people were consulted during the study and their views are not necessarily representative of the majority, nor are they automatically correct. Nevertheless, their comments suggest that there is a high level of concern and resentment that the existing processes of local government provide very little opportunity for active participation in decision-making that affects the local area. Comments were frequently made that decisions on issues like mineral planning, waste disposal and transport were taken in Gloucester by individual officers or elected members of the County Council with only limited knowledge of local conditions. Other criticisms were levied at the District Council and Forest Enterprise, on the grounds that these bodies are inclined to act in an autocratic manner without effective consultation.
- 4.50. Officers for the County Council and District Councils who were asked to comment on these statements explained that very extensive consultation exercises are undertaken as a matter of course in connection with the Development Plan process, and did not consider that all of the criticisms were justified.
- 4.51. The study team also noted that one of the strongest characteristics of local communities within the Forest of Dean is their relative independence, and resistance to directions imposed from outside. In consequence some of the comments received may simply reflect a general dislike for regulations and formal plans. Nonetheless, the fact that such concerns were raised on a number of occasions suggests that local people have legitimate worries which need to be addressed in considering what form of special status is appropriate for the Forest of Dean.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.52. This review of key issues affecting the Forest of Dean points to two or three principal concerns, relating primarily to the impacts of mineral working, and pressures from recreational development. Less obvious, and more pervasive problems arise from the area's relative isolation, the difficult local economic conditions and the absence of any overall strategy or vision for the future development of the area which is endorsed by local communities.
- 4.53. Although the Forest of Dean is widely known to visitors it exists in a vacuum, and few people are able to identify its precise location and extent. It is an area of immense character and interest and yet its assets remain largely hidden. This is one of the areas' major weaknesses and yet, paradoxically, it is also one of its strengths. Isolation has ensured that the area has remained intact with its cultural traditions in place, but there are new influences which are bringing cultural change. An increasing number of people travel out of the area to work, and there has been a steady influx of 'outsiders' attracted by the tranquil surroundings of the Forest who bring with them the demands and pressures of modern living. Unintentionally they represent a threat to the integrity of what the Forest stands for as an example of a largely self-sufficient sustainable community.

- 4.54. While many these factors represent a negative view of the area's future, there are many more positive attributes which could and should be harnessed to realise the full potential of the area. The Forest of Dean is a unique area of national importance in terms of its landscape and nature conservation interest, it has a rich cultural heritage and strong local communities with many entrepreneurial skills.
- 4.55. Action needs to be taken to realise the full potential of the area, and special status would undoubtedly assist this aim. The questions which are addressed in later sections of this report are whether special status can be provided within the confines of existing designations or alternatively through some purpose made approach?

## **Box 5 - Summary of Key Issues Affecting the Nature of Special Status**

### **Mineral Working**

- Proposals for large scale mineral working within the Forest of Dean do not receive the same level of scrutiny as those proposed in other equivalent areas like the Wye valley and the Cotswolds AONB's.
- In the absence of comparable status to National Parks and AONBs the forest of Dean is likely to experience higher levels of mineral extraction in future.
- Large scale mineral working conflicts with protection of the Forest of Deans' special landscape qualities.

### **Tourism and Recreation**

- Promotion of tourism and recreation in the Forest of Dean has been hampered by a lack of available accommodation and a limited range of facilities
- Conflicts of interest arise between those who wish to keep the Forest as a quiet refuge with low-key informal access and those promoting initiatives to encourage wider participation in recreational activities like cycling for which the Forest is ideally suited.
- Some residents believe there should be unrestricted access to all areas of the forest and object to temporary enclosure of some woodland areas.

### **Landscape Change**

- Landscape change is an essential characteristic of a working forest. In general woodland management practice has improved, with benefits to the landscape through increased planting of Broad leaved species.
- Felling of large coupes has given rise to criticism in the past. However, The scale and nature of extraction has changed in recent years.
- Adverse changes have occurred in open areas within and surrounding the Forest through the decline in agricultural profitability and lack of resources and labour to maintain buildings, walls and hedges.
- Localised but major adverse landscape changes have occurred in areas subjected to large scale quarrying.
- For some the qualities of tranquillity and remoteness have been adversely affected in some areas by increased recreational activity. Conversely many visitors have gained increased enjoyment of the Forest landscape and environment.

## **Box 5 - Summary of Key Issues Affecting the Nature of Special Status (Continued)**

### **Nature Conservation**

- In general, the quality of the natural environment remains high, and the mosaic of woodland creates ideal conditions for the maintenance and development of diverse habitats. Where pressures do exist they come from large scale development, like quarrying, and greater intensity of recreational activity in some isolated areas in the Forest.

### **Local Economy**

- The area suffers from higher levels of unemployment than other parts of Gloucestershire, particularly in terms of lower skilled workers.
- Income levels are below average for the region.
- The area is heavily dependant on a declining manufacturing based employment sector.
- Opportunities for attracting new investment are hampered by poor transport links and limited public transport.
- A high percentage of the population work outside the district.

### **Transport**

- Local roads are heavily used and there is little prospect of providing significant road improvements.

### **Cultural Heritage**

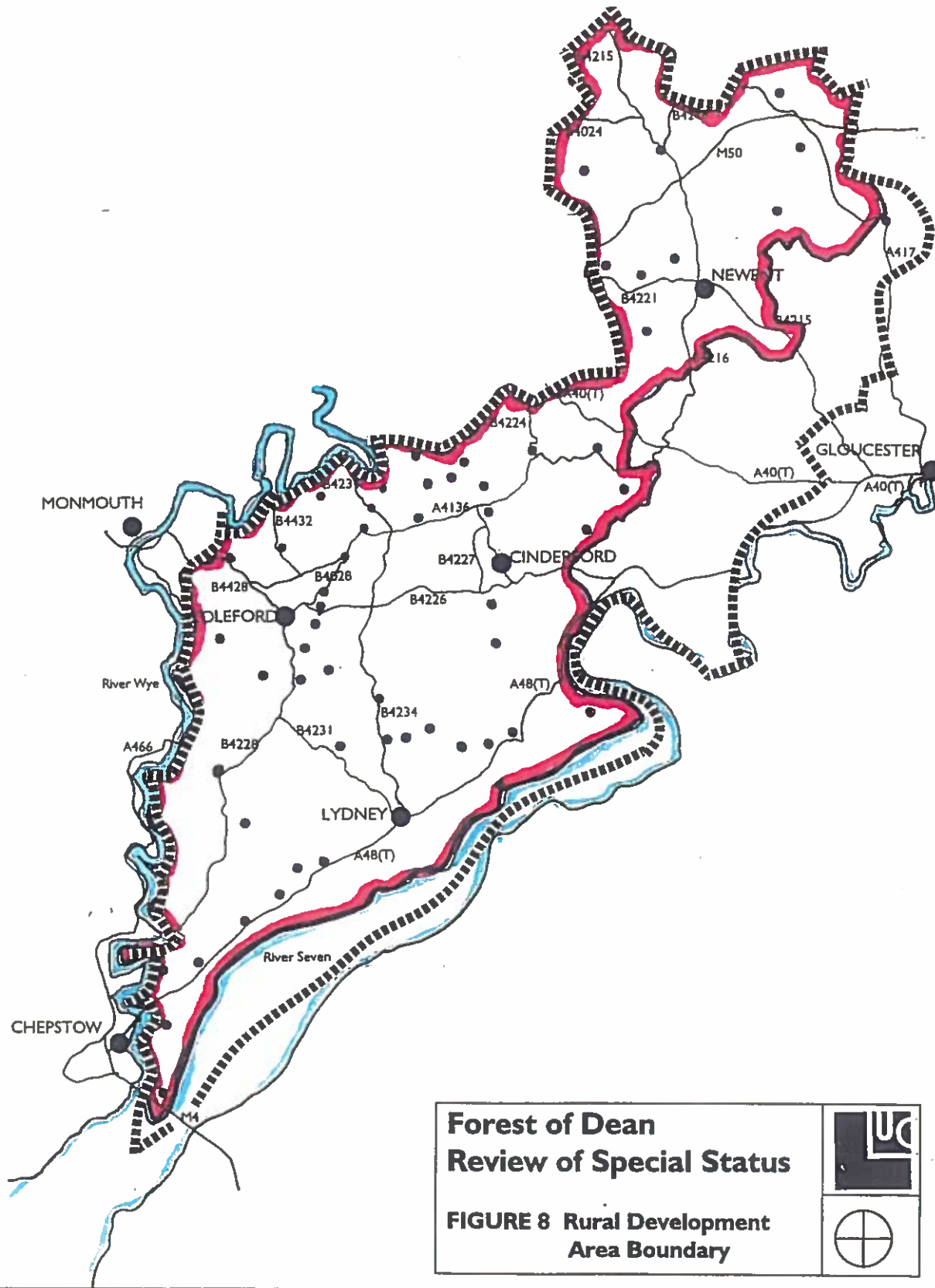
- Insufficient progress has been made in recording the unique cultural heritage of the Forest due in part, to the heavily wooded nature of the area.
- Development pressures in the area could lead to destruction of assets before they are properly recorded.
- The lifestyles of many residents are changing, increasing pressures of commuting, and traffic generation but also breaking down established traditions.
- Many local people feel they do not have a sufficient voice in planning the future of the Forest.





Key

 Rural Development Area



**Forest of Dean  
Review of Special Status**

**FIGURE 8 Rural Development  
Area Boundary**





## 5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EXISTING POLICIES AND DESIGNATIONS

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### INTRODUCTION

- 5.1. The previous two sections have highlighted the fact that the Forest of Dean has no overarching protection or status, in spite of the fact that it is a unique area which is of national importance for its landscape, cultural, and ecological characteristics. There are a number of pressures adversely affecting the environmental qualities of the area and there is an apparent lack of cohesion in the way in which such issues are addressed. As a result, the long term protection and enhancement of the areas' assets and communities is dependent upon the effectiveness of existing policies laid down by local authorities. It also relies on the various strategies and policies of other agencies, including Forest Enterprise English Nature, the Environment Agency and the former Rural Development Commission, now part of the Countryside Agency.
- 5.2. This section considers the extent to which existing policies and designations are capable of safeguarding and enhancing the qualities that make the Forest of Dean a special place.

### EFFECTIVENESS OF THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN PROCESS

- 5.3. The development plan process which operates under the Town and Country Planning Act provides a national framework for steering development and protecting the environment. A strategic view is provided through National and Regional Planning Guidance but the main vehicles for directing development at local level are the Gloucestershire Structure Plan, the Forest of Dean Local Plan, and the Gloucestershire Minerals Local Plan (currently at Consultation Draft stage).
- 5.4. All plans follow a hierarchical structure, in that lower tier plans must observe the policies defined at the higher or more strategic level. In consequence, the policies relating to the Forest of Dean in the Forest of Dean Local Plan reflect the broad policy aims set out in the Structure Plan. The efficacy of existing policies in these documents is reviewed under the headings of:
  - Conserving and enhancing environmental character
  - Providing protection against inappropriate development
  - Providing recreational and tourism opportunities, and
  - Enhancing social and economic opportunities
- 5.5. **Conserving and enhancing character:** Policies within the Gloucestershire Structure Plan and the Forest of Dean Local Plan identify the need to protect and enhance particular qualities of the forest which make the area unique. Particular mention is given to the importance of forest 'waste', relic industrial landscapes and the need to identify and protect the distinctive ring of settlements around the edge of the core forest.

- 5.6. **Providing protection from inappropriate development:** A large proportion of the Forest of Dean District has been defined as a Special Landscape Area (SLA). The relevant policies in both the Structure Plan and Local plan emphasise that development within the Special Landscape Area should *"fully respect the key characteristics of the surrounding landscape type"*. However policies to control development within the Special Landscape Area are less stringent than those which apply to the adjacent Wye Valley AONB which states that *"major commercial and industrial development will only be permitted where it cannot be located elsewhere and is justified by proven national interest"*.
- 5.7. **Providing recreational and tourism opportunities:** The Local Plan is supportive of the development of recreation and tourism within the area. It highlights the need to maintain a balance between recreational pressures and the quality of the landscape and countryside. The Local Plan also indicates that tourism development proposals will be permitted so long as this does not result in unacceptable additions to visitor pressures upon the countryside and landscape or detract from the overall quality of the environment.
- 5.8. **Enhancing social and economic opportunities:** The local plan is supportive of the need to promote the growth of housing, employment and development in the south of the district, principally along the A48 corridor, but states that development in the north of the district should be restricted. In particular, proposed housing is concentrated around Lydney, Cinderford and Coleford with additional small infill housing development in other settlements. The plan indicates the importance of linking new housing with existing public transport infrastructure, as identified in the "Economy of the Forest of Dean" December 1998.

## REVIEW OF PLANNING CONTROLS

- 5.9. **General Development Control Policies:** Taken at face value, these planning policies provide a good basis for controlling and stimulating development within the Forest of Dean. However, as with all planning policies the real test of efficacy lies in the way in which individual decisions are taken and the cumulative effects that such decisions have over time.
- 5.10. The present study has relied largely on reported opinions, supported by a rapid visual inspection of the area. It cannot therefore give an authoritative view on whether or not planning decisions within the Forest of Dean are more or less effective than elsewhere. In general, standards of development control appear to be high. However, the absence of any form of national designation for the Forest does mean that the level of scrutiny, and the need to provide a formal justification for all types of development, is less demanding than would be the case in a National Park or AONB.
- 5.11. **Mineral Planning Policies:** This issue is particularly significant in relation to mineral working because the sieving process adopted by the Mineral Planning Authority for the identification of potential limestone extraction areas in the Draft Minerals Local Plan affords a lower order of protection to the Forest of Dean than it does to the Wye Valley, and Cotswold AONBs. In the long term this must concentrate the attention of mineral operators on opportunities for working within the Forest of Dean, rather than in other

areas with higher protection. This is not an acceptable position because the Forest of Dean has been shown in this report to warrant the highest level of planning protection, commensurate with that given in National Parks and AONBs.

- 5.12. Critics of existing Government policy on mineral working may argue that giving higher status and greater protection to the Forest of Dean would be a largely academic exercise since most of the aggregate production in Gloucestershire already takes place in the Wye Valley and Cotswold AONBs. However, with hard rock quarrying it is essential to take a long term perspective. The capital investment required to open up a new limestone or other hard rock quarry requires a minimum of 15 years production life and, in most cases, reserves of 20 –50 years will be sought. It is, therefore, essential that the case for developing new quarries or extending existing workings in the Forest of Dean should be fully justified by prospective operators, using the same criteria as apply in AONBs.
- 5.13. Mineral producers are often accused of pursuing profits at the expense of the environment and of having an irresponsible attitude towards restoration and after-care. The study team does not accept this view of the majority of operators within the Forest of Dean and was impressed by the level of care and attention being devoted towards environmental matters at several of the major quarries. Nevertheless, mineral production is a very competitive business, and operators must win contracts to supply their markets. It is therefore vital that societies' demands for construction materials at the lowest possible cost should be balanced against protection of local communities and the environmental qualities of the Forest of Dean.
- 5.14. Aggregates are high volume, low cost products that are essential to the construction industry. They can only be extracted where the appropriate minerals are found, and these are invariably located in attractive rural locations. Given the quantity of raw material which is consumed each year in the South-west Region it is inconceivable that all production from the AONBs in Gloucestershire, and the Forest of Dean could be halted. This would only transfer the economic, social and environmental costs to other equally valued parts of the region, or elsewhere.
- 5.15. If, however, environmentally sensitive areas of the country like the Forest of Dean are to be safeguarded from unacceptable levels of mineral extraction in the long term it inevitably follows that a higher proportion of aggregate needs will need to be met from recycled and secondary products, that non-essential demand will need to be curbed in the interests of achieving sustainable development, and that the proportion of the overall costs of production allocated to environmental protection, restoration and rehabilitation will have to rise.
- 5.16. Mineral Planning Authorities have no powers to control the uses to which minerals are put, and control therefore needs to be exercised at the point where planning permission is sought for new development. The onus of proof must rest with mineral developers to show that:
  - Materials are being processed and marketed for the most suitable end-uses,
  - Serious efforts are being made to introduce recycling and the use of secondary products and that,
  - the real costs of environmental protection and rehabilitation of workings are passed on to the consumer.

- 5.17. The consequence of such action will be an increase in the cost of aggregates, but this is a price which society will have to pay if it wishes to give increased protection to environmentally sensitive areas.

## **DEVELOPING STRATEGIES AND A VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

- 5.18. Notwithstanding the increasing emphasis on the role of the Development Plan in guiding future development, the land use planning system is essentially a reactive process which responds to specific development proposals and determines whether permission should be granted or not. It is less effective as an enabling tool for stimulating new development and promoting new economic initiatives. Existing planning policies tend to deal with issues on a topic by topic basis, for example housing, shopping, transport and recreation. In discussion with interested parties criticisms have been justly levied against both the Gloucestershire Structure Plan and the Forest of Dean Local Plan on these grounds. There is a general concern that the Forest of Dean lacks a clear statement of intent or a vision of what the area will be like in 10, 20, or 30 years' time.
- 5.19. It is a general shortcoming that the timescale for adopting plans and the need for formal review tends to mitigate against creative and proactive responses to opportunities as they arise. Such initiatives therefore tend to result from non-statutory programmes and activities.
- 5.20. In the Forest of Dean, Forest Enterprise is giving higher priority to the preparation of its own management plans, but the organisation is accused by some of being largely unaccountable to the public and local residents in particular.
- 5.21. Important partnerships have been established in recent years between the local authorities, the Rural Development Commission, Forest Enterprise and local businesses, to promote rural regeneration. These initiatives have met with some notable success, but they highlight the need for greater interaction between the different sectors of the community in order to establish a tangible set of goals and objectives for the future. There is a strong desire for new methods of working which encourage flexibility of approach, get the best out of resources, and harness dynamism, and leadership. Such aims cannot be delivered solely through adoption of a formal report or plan.

## **EFFECTIVENESS OF DESIGNATIONS**

- 5.22. The principal landscape designation of "Special Landscape Area" is of relevance as a formal policy in the Gloucestershire Structure Plan, but it is not a national designation, and it does little to safeguard the wider environmental concerns which have been highlighted in earlier sections.
- 5.23. Nature Conservation designations are more effective in protecting the area's most important habitats, but there is only limited scope for English Nature, or individual site owners, to undertake detailed management of Sites of Special Scientific Interest. These

areas are exposed to recreational and other pressures, and the cumulative impacts of other development which takes place beyond, but in close proximity, to their boundaries.

- 5.24. Scheduled Ancient Monuments are protected from disturbance by law, but again they are vulnerable to forms of development which do not require planning permission. In most cases damage to sites of cultural heritage interest is caused by accident and lack of knowledge of the site's existence, rather than deliberate actions.
- 5.25. Existing designations for landscape, nature conservation, and heritage protection are valuable in safeguarding specific sites but they serve quite separate interests and do not provide a framework for comprehensive action. As such they have little impact on the overall protection and enhancement of the Forest of Dean.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

- 5.26. Although the Forest of Dean is clearly identified in planning policies, it does not have the status accorded to other areas like the Wye Valley and Cotswolds, even though it is of comparable landscape quality and is of equal or higher value in terms of its nature conservation, archaeological and cultural value.
- 5.27. Policies designed to regulate major development, and in particular mineral working, are inadequate to safeguard the interests of the Forest of Dean when hard choices have to be made about future mineral supply.
- 5.28. Other planning policies and designations are generally effective in protecting specific features of the Forest, but there is an absence of any long term vision or plan for how the Forest of Dean should develop over time. In addition, major opportunities are being lost for promoting the areas' economic and social well being through lack of cohesion in the way in which individual development initiatives are planned and implemented. Specific requirements include the development of a recreation and tourism strategy, and increased emphasis on the interpretation and exploitation of the areas' cultural heritage. These measures should include marketing of local products and skills as well as presentation of the areas' physical assets.
- 5.29. One of the greatest resources of the area is its people, but there is evidence that many residents feel they have no voice in their own affairs.
- 5.30. Against this background it is concluded that existing policies and designations are inadequate to safeguard the long term interests and values of the Forest of Dean and that some form of Special Status is fully justified.





## 6. REQUIREMENTS FOR SPECIAL STATUS

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### INTRODUCTION

- 6.1. In the previous section it has been argued that existing planning policies and designations are only partially effective in protecting the environmental qualities of the Forest of Dean, and that new mechanisms are needed to stimulate development, and create more effective systems of land management. This section reviews the basic objectives behind giving the Forest of Dean increased status.

### AIMS AND OBJECTIVES IN PROVIDING SPECIAL STATUS FOR THE FOREST OF DEAN

- 6.2. The first requirement in considering the case for special status is to clarify what 'Special Status' is trying to achieve, and to establish whether local people, visitors to the Forest, and those who depend upon its resources to underpin their local economy share a common view of what the future should hold.
- 6.3. In order to try and answer this question a statement of 'Aims and Objectives' see **Box 6**, was discussed at a meeting with invited representatives of a wide range of interest groups in Cinderford in February 1999.

#### **BOX 6 - Aims and Objectives in Giving the Forest of Dean Special Status**

- To create a Vision /Strategic Plan for the Forest of Dean
- To achieve Tighter Control over Mineral Working
- To protect and Enhance Landscape Quality
- To protect and Enhance Cultural Heritage
- To promote Economic Development
- To strengthen the Forests' Image and Identity
- To give a Stronger Voice to Local People
- To increase Potential Sources of Funding

Each aim was introduced in the terms set out in the following paragraphs.

#### **Creating a Vision and Strategic Plan**

- 6.4. Planning policies for the protection, enhancement and long term development of the Forest of Dean exist in both the County Structure Plan, and the District Local Plan. There are also similar policies and strategies for forestry management prepared by Forest Enterprise. There is, however, no single statement about the aspirations for the future which gives a clear indication of what people can expect the Forest to be like in 20, 30 or more years time. That vision of the future should be produced not as a blueprint which

should be slavishly followed but as a goal against which progress can be monitored, and ideas developed and modified over time.

- 6.5. The vision should outline expectations in relation to all forms of cultural and land use activity. It will need to deal realistically with hard choices about future development, including topics like mineral working, siting of industrial premises, housing needs, recreation provision, landscape enhancement and nature conservation.

### **Achieving Tighter Control over Mineral Working**

- 6.6. Although many people would like to see the permanent cessation of mineral working, and particularly hard rock quarrying and opencast coal mining within the Forest of Dean, these are aspirations which it is unlikely that any Government would be willing to meet. Pressures from mineral working, and other forms of intrusive development occur in many parts of the country with equally valuable and sensitive environmental resources. It would not be in the national interest, to prohibit development in all such areas as a matter of principle.
- 6.7. What is appropriate, however, is to ensure that safeguards which are designed to minimise damage, and to encourage sustainable use of natural resources are applied with equal effect in all areas of environmental sensitivity. The Forest of Dean requires the same level of protection and control as National Parks and AONBs and this should be one of the basic aims in conferring Special Status upon it.
- 6.8. The principle should be that applications for Mineral Working within the Forest of Dean will only be approved if it can be demonstrated by the prospective operator that;
- Alternative sources of materials have been fully investigated and found to be inadequate,
  - All alternative sites lying outside the forest of Dean have been examined and shown to be unacceptable, and
  - The proposed development can be undertaken in a way which minimises environmental impact.
- 6.9. In order to satisfy conditions relating to environmental safeguards and protection, applications for mineral working within the Forest of Dean should be subject to a full Environmental Assessment, with formal requirements for subsequent monitoring and review in the event that permission is granted.
- 6.10. It is suggested that a map showing the prospective development of limestone quarries within the Forest of Dean at five yearly intervals over 20 years should be prepared jointly by the Mineral Planning Authority and those Minerals operators who expect to quarry limestone in the area during this period (see page 23 Box 3).

## **Protecting and Enhancing Landscape Character and Quality**

- 6.11. The aim behind protection and enhancement of Landscape Character and Quality should be to ensure that those features which create local distinctiveness and identity are identified and enhanced. This will not be achieved by a sterile approach to regulation and control over development but instead will require a creative response to all aspects of development and land management. Mechanisms for achieving improvements and enhancement could include the creation of a local landscape enhancement fund.

## **Protecting and Enhancing Cultural Heritage**

- 6.12. A major initiative is required to identify, record and safeguard features of archaeological, industrial archaeological historic and cultural interest in the Forest of Dean. Opportunities also exist for developing arts and crafts, and products and resources sourced within or manufactured in the Forest. The process of protecting and enhancing the cultural life of the Forest should be proactive, leading to the better display and interpretation of features of interest, the development of educational facilities and the creation of job opportunities linked with the presentation of the areas' cultural heritage to visitors and tourists.

## **Promoting Economic Development**

- 6.13. Promotion of Economic Development should build on all the resources of the Forest, including its natural products, its culture, and the skills and enterprise of its people. There are close links between realisation of this aim and the achievement of all other goals. For example, environmental enhancement and the strengthening of cultural heritage will only be secured if the area prospers economically. Significant opportunities exist to promote green tourism in the Forest.

## **Strengthening the Forests' Image and Identity**

- 6.14. In order to achieve the long term vision for the forest, it will be important to strengthen its image and identity to a wider public audience. Local residents understand its values but while the name is familiar, people living outside the area have difficulty describing the location or characteristics of the Forest. Image and identity can be strengthened in many different ways, including adoption of a distinctive house style for signs, outdoor furniture, information packs and other publicity. The adoption of kite-marking and quality assurance badges for local products, and co-operative marketing initiatives are other effective ways of re-inforcing an image, and promoting economic development at the same time.

## **Giving a Stronger Voice to Local People**

- 6.15. Much of the criticism from local people picked up during the course of study surveys has revolved around the alleged 'aloofness' and remoteness of local authorities and other institutional bodies. However, a particular character and strength of many Foresters is

their individualism and their inherent distrust for authority. It must therefore be recognised that some criticism may be unjustified and needs to be weighed against the necessity of officials and elected members sometimes taking unpopular decisions. There is, nevertheless, a real sense in which the feelings of local people may not emerge in major decisions affecting the area. An important aim behind giving the Forest of Dean special status should be to increase the voice of local people. This should carry with it real responsibility and commitment to making the vision for the Forest a success.

### **Increasing Funding Sources**

- 6.16. Many of the aims and objectives for the Forest are capable of generating their own sources of finance, but the area remains relatively poor and isolated and it requires further pump-priming activity to deliver its targets. Creation of a special status for the Forest should bring with it the opportunity to tap into new resources, by creating pilot schemes, and testing new concepts. Many of the initiatives and ideas set out here have their parallels elsewhere in the country and in continental Europe. One of the goals should be to maximise the area's links with similar regions, including other locations which abut or cross national boundaries.

## **RESPONSE TO THE PROPOSED AIMS AND OBJECTIVES FOR SPECIAL STATUS**

- 6.17. There was broad unanimity of view from the invited representatives of different interest that these general aims matched their expectations, although most bodies reserved their position until the details emerged of how aims and objectives might be translated into action.

## **7. RELEVANCE OF EXISTING NATIONAL DESIGNATIONS AND OTHER ALTERNATIVES**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

- 7.1. In section 6 the basic aims and objectives which would underlie special status for the Forest of Dean have been considered. This section examines the strengths and weaknesses of existing national designations and other alternative mechanisms, based on wider European experience, that might be used to meet these requirements.
- 7.2. In terms of national countryside designations within the United Kingdom the two obvious categories are National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There are also other purpose made designations to cover special cases like The Norfolk Broads, and the New Forest Heritage Area

In the wider context of other European designations, the most relevant which has been identified through this research is the concept of Natural Regional Parks. These are found in several countries but the most appropriate model is considered to be the French Parcs Naturels Regionaux (Natural Regional Parks).

- 7.3. Each type of designation is discussed in outline in the paragraphs which follow, before seeking to summarise their strengths and weaknesses in relation to the needs of the Forest of Dean.

### **NATIONAL LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS**

#### **National Parks:**

- 7.4. Primary legislation is required to designate National Parks, and the creation of any new Park, on the recommendation of the Countryside Agency requires Central Government approval. In practice, this is a very long drawn out process, as evidenced by the slow progress of the New Forest Heritage Area towards national recognition.
- 7.5. The purpose of National Parks is to conserve and enhance landscape beauty, promote recreation, protect places of architectural and historic interest, and to foster economic and social well-being of their local communities.
- 7.6. The structure of each National Park Authority varies but around 50% of members are appointed by constituent local authorities with the remainder being appointed by the Secretary of State, half of whom are drawn from parishes lying within the park boundaries. This division is intended to ensure that local, regional and national interests are voiced.
- 7.7. Each National Park Authority is required to prepare a development plan, outlining their objectives and implementation strategy. Development control rests with the National Park Authority, which is responsible for determining all planning applications. Planning

Policy Guidance (PPG7) highlights the fact that tight controls exist over the introduction of large-scale development, within National Parks; *“such developments will be subject to the most rigorous examination.”*

- 7.8. The majority of funding is provided by Central Government (75%) and local government (25%) but National Parks may also generate their own income. The budgets of the ten National Parks range from £2.1 million for Northumbria to £8.6 million for the Peak District.
- 7.9. National Parks have substantial staff complements, ranging between 40 - 220 officers.
- 7.10. **Discussion:** The process of establishing National Parks in England and Wales took over twenty years and some have been in existence for nearly half a century. The most obvious locations were the first to be designated, but the exercise of considering areas which were initially excluded, like the Broads and New Forest has become increasingly protracted. This reflects, in part, the concerns of major land-owning and other commercial and business interests that the policies of National Parks are skewed heavily in favour of environmental protection and impose unacceptable restrictions on essential development. It also reflects a concern on the part of Government and the former Countryside Commission that a sufficiently large area of the Country's most sensitive environment has been covered by designations of this type.
- 7.11. It therefore needs to be recognised from the outset, that any proposal to designate the Forest of Dean as a National Park would face a very long and uncertain gestation. In practical terms the Forest of Dean covers a substantially smaller area than any of the existing National Parks. Since it would abut the Wye Valley AONB, which is equally important as an environmental and recreational resource, it would be appropriate to consider the inclusion of this area as well. From preliminary soundings made during the present study, it is clear that the two areas are viewed by many people as quite separate and distinct entities. It is therefore likely that opposition to the formation of a single Wye Valley and Forest of Dean National Park would be considerable.
- 7.12. The main benefits in designating the Forest of Dean as a National Park would lie in giving it enhanced status and recognition. It would also provide the opportunity for introducing stricter planning controls over mineral working. However, these objectives could be achieved at lower cost and with less delay by other means. It is concluded that the concept of designating the area as a National Park has no advantages and many disbenefits by comparison with other options and this approach is not recommended.

### **Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty:**

- 7.13. No primary legislation is required to create an AONB, but Central Government approval is necessary in response to a proposal from the Countryside Agency.
- 7.14. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) are designated for their landscape beauty, although account is also taken of the needs for agriculture, forestry, other rural needs, and the economic and social needs of the local communities.

- 7.15. Planning and management of AONBs is the responsibility of county and district councils. Where AONBs cover more than one district or county Joint Advisory Committees (JAC) or comparable organisations are usually established. In most, but not all, cases representatives of amenity and land-users groups are included on the JAC as well as local authority members. Meetings are usually held four times a year and recommendations from these meetings to local planning authorities ensure that consistent and co-ordinated policies for the area are developed.
- 7.16. Local authorities are encouraged to put forward management plans for AONBs outlining their objectives and implementation proposals. The designation is intended to offer tighter controls over development through planning polices and planning policy guidance.
- 7.17. Staffing levels are very low with seldom more than 2 officers, and sometimes not even a single full time post.
- 7.18. Funding is very variable, and tends to be allocated for specific management or development tasks.
- 7.19. In the past, the performance of local planning authorities in implementing policies for environmental protection in AONB's has not been particularly good or effective. AONBs have also been hampered by limited funds although an increased budget has recently been agreed by Central Government. This should help to support the implementation of objectives outlined in AONB management plans which are heavily dependant on funding from local planning authorities and the Countryside Commission. Unlike National Parks AONBs cannot generate their own funding.
- 7.20. In recent years significant advances have been made, through experimental projects, to develop more effective ways of administering and managing AONBs. These initiatives have incorporate many of the concerns which have been raised in relation to the Forest of Dean. One of the best examples is that of the Sussex Downs.

### **Sussex Downs**

- 7.21. The Sussex Downs is an AONB with enhanced powers. The objectives of the "enhanced AONB" are wider than the single objective of other AONBs, concentrating on promoting sustainable forms of economic and social development, and working with farmers and landowners to encourage effective land management.
- 7.22. There are 36 members of the Board, 24 of whom are nominated by the constituent local authorities and 12 are appointed by the Countryside Agency.
- 7.23. Management of the Downs is achieved through a limited co-operative, which is a partnership between the local authorities and other amenity/land-owner groups. The establishment of a conservation board has had an impact on the local arrangements for formulating development plan policies and determining individual planning applications. A total of 30 staff are employed either directly by the Board or on secondment from constituent bodies.

- 7.24. The Board is required to produce a management plan for the area. Like the Norfolk Broads, funding contributions from the Countryside Agency are higher than in other AONBs due to its experimental nature. Its current budget is £1.3 million.
- 7.25. The Board has no executive powers in terms of development control, relying on local authorities to implement its advice /views. Due to the experimental nature of the Board the area receives additional funding from the Countryside Commission. Many of its achievements would not have been implemented without this additional funding.
- 7.26. **Discussion:** The detailed review of landscape character and quality undertaken as part of this study provides strong grounds for designating the Forest of Dean as an AONB, providing the arguments about the qualities of introspective woodland landscapes and the importance of the areas' cultural landscape are accepted. The one detractor which works against this recommendation is the significance of the group of settlements which ring the Forest. Some of these settlements are sufficiently small to be included without difficulty, but the larger towns of Cinderford and Coleford would not fit so comfortably with AONB status and might need to be excluded.
- 7.27. Designation of the Forest of Dean as an AONB would give added protection to those areas which form part of the limestone resource zone and are already under consideration, or could be considered in future, for mineral working. It would also be possible to develop many of the initiatives which have been highlighted in Section 6 within the framework of an AONB modelled on the Sussex Downs example. However, AONB status would tend to convey a 'historic' and landscape-oriented image on the area which is not really in keeping with many of the underlying sentiments which are to recognise its vibrancy and importance as a living cultural environment in which people are as important as the natural resources.

## OTHER UNITED KINGDOM DESIGNATIONS

### The Broads

- 7.28. The Broads, through the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act 1988 has a status equivalent to National Parks. Apart from the main objectives of National Parks, the Broads has specific objectives focusing particularly on the need to protect navigation interests and protection of the mix of waterways, wet woodlands, fens and marshes.
- 7.29. The role of the Broads Management Board is to co-ordinate, listen and consult, "*drawing on the skills and local knowledge of others to secure the best future for the area and its people*" (Broads Authority, 1997a, pg. 160).
- 7.30. The Boards maintains strong partnership links with local, national and European conservation bodies and the local community through its partnership style operation.
- 7.31. The Broads has planning authority status but relies on local planning authorities to process planning applications and reports. Concern has been voiced that the large membership of the board (35 members from county, district and the Countryside Commission) tends to hamper decisions making, added complications are that an additional committee sits to



discuss navigational issues. The Board also relies on the Environment Agency to regulate and manage the water environment.

### **New Forest Heritage Area**

- 7.32. The New Forest Heritage Area depends upon policies in constituent Development Plans for its recognition although it has been proposed as a candidate National Park. Its status is currently under review and proposals for primary legislation are being considered.
- 7.33. The New Forest Heritage Area exists to promote conservation of its natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage. A New Forest Committee has been formed which is an unincorporated voluntary association, consisting of officer and councillors and includes observers such as the County Landowners Association, National Farmers Union and Verderers of the forest.
- 7.34. Staffing is provided by employees of the Forestry Commission, of whom around 30 are engaged on Heritage Area tasks. The annual budget is in the region of £120,000 roughly half of which is paid for from Central Government funds and the remainder by local authorities.

### **Heritage Coasts**

- 7.35. The aims of Heritage Coasts cover a broader set of objectives than both National Parks and AONBs. They aim to conserve, protect and enhance the natural beauty, facilitate and enhance their enjoyment, understanding and appreciation of the countryside, maintain and improve environmental health and consider the agricultural, forestry, fishing, economic and social needs of small communities.
- 7.36. Heritage Coasts receive official recognition through Planning Policy Guidance 20 and receives some funding from the Countryside Commission. Management plans are drawn up and objectives agreed by the local communities.
- 7.37. **Discussion:** The various examples described in the preceding paragraphs all offer potential models for the creation of a new form of Special Status for the Forest of Dean. What they have in common is an administrative structure which provides a partnership between national regional and local interests, with landowners and land managers being represented alongside local interests. Each organisation has its own budget, and develops strategies and management plans which can be implemented directly. Responsibility for planning matters remains with the respective local authorities, although the bodies in question have a substantial voice in making recommendations.

## OTHER EUROPEAN EXAMPLES

- 7.38. A wide range of potential designations have been considered as prototypes for Special Status for the Forest of Dean, of which the European Natural Regional Park has emerged as one of the most promising. This reflects the fact that promotion of cultural heritage, environmental protection, and integrated rural development all figure in the aims and objectives for creating such Parks. In addition the administrative structures and management systems depend upon a high level of active involvement by local communities.

### Natural Parks (Parc Naturel)

- 7.39. The Natural Park is a recognised statutory designation within continental Europe. The objectives of Natural Parks are not only to protect national heritage (nature and landscape), but also to promote the economic, social and cultural vitality of the region, through agricultural diversification and re-establishment of traditional economic activities, to attract and educate the public, and to contribute to rational land use planning. The objectives focus on improving lifestyles of those living and visiting the park, concentrating on local area initiatives, and schemes and proposals developed at a "grass roots level".
- 7.40. In France, individual communes hold equivalent powers to English local authorities. These communes may range in size from communities of only a few hundred inhabitants to major cities. The concept of Parcs Naturels was developed in the 1960s as a way of achieving integration and co-operation amongst communities who were unwilling to give up their individual powers although they shared common problems and opportunities.
- 7.41. In order to create a new Parc Naturel consensus has to be reached amongst the majority of communes, although it is possible for individual communes to opt out. A 10-year Charter is developed, outlining the Park's objectives and implementation proposals in conjunction with local communities and bodies who are consulted over a four month period prior to finalisation of the Charter. The Charter must be submitted to and approved by the French Government before a Parc can be designated. The Parks are reviewed every ten years.
- 7.42. Management of the Parks is undertaken by a Board which elects its own President who is usually an influential politician. The Board delegates some responsibilities to a director who is also responsible for the staff. Most decisions are subject to approval of, and implementation by, the rural communes. Natural Parks receive funding from both local and regional bodies and there is also the potential to attract additional funding from the European Union under the Leader programme.
- 7.43. **Discussion:** The Natural Park concept matches very closely the aspirations which have been set out for the Forest of Dean, but it would be difficult to introduce an identical model into the United Kingdom without primary legislation.
- 7.44. Although there are many attractive features in the way in which Natural Parks are operated they do have their own limitations. In some areas the effectiveness of the

designation has been hampered by lack of central government support and funding. In addition the realisation of Charter aims is not always achievable within ten years. As a general rule individual projects and initiatives sponsored by the Natural Parks must become independent and self-financing within a relatively short period of time. When funding ceases unsuccessful projects have to be abandoned with consequent job losses.

- 7.45. These limitations are a timely reminder that even with the best administrative systems and designations it can be difficult to overcome all problems.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

- 7.46. Having explored different types of designation which are applied in England and Wales and elsewhere in Europe, a number of models have been identified which appear appropriate to the Forest of Dean. Favoured models are the enhanced AONB framework adopted for the Sussex Downs, and the French Parc Naturel.



## 8. CONCLUSIONS

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### INTRODUCTION

- 8.1. This chapter draws together the findings and conclusions from the technical studies and discussions undertaken by Land use Consultants over a period of five months. It also sets out a series of recommendations to assist the Countryside Agency in its deliberations on the advice to be given to Central Government. It is hoped that the format of this report will also be of assistance in any consultations, which may be planned with the people, and various interest groups in the Forest of Dean following completion of the Consultants' contract.

### DOES THE FOREST OF DEAN WARRANT SPECIAL STATUS?

- 8.2. The research and analysis which has been undertaken as part of the present study gives a number of clear pointers to the unique qualities of the Forest of Dean and the reasons why it deserves Special Status. These are summarised below:
- 8.3. **Historical Precedence:** The Forest of Dean has been recognised from the earliest stages of formalised landscape assessment and characterisation as a distinctive area worthy of conservation. It was included in the original list of Conservation Areas recommended by the Hobhouse Committee. In addition, minutes and letters describing the Committee's deliberations, make it clear that the reasons for not including the Dean when the Wye Valley AONB was designated had more to do with its distinctive quality, and its status to qualify for protection in its own right, than any suggestion that it was, in some way, of lesser worth.
- 8.4. **Landscape Character and Quality:** The technical studies and background research confirm that the area of the Forest of Dean has a landscape character and local distinctiveness which sets it apart from all other areas. The open landscape between the Wye Valley AONB and ancient forest is of the highest quality and meets the criteria for designation as an AONB. The core of the forest is of exceptional value as an enclosed and secretive landscape, in which cultural heritage is of special significance.
- 8.5. All of the areas which might be considered for mineral working in the distant future (i.e. beyond the life of the current Minerals Plan) were described in the 1992 Forest of Dean Landscape Assessment as "equivalent to AONB status". That position remains unchanged today and the areas in question warrant the highest level of landscape protection and conservation.
- 8.6. In recent years the effect which human activity has had in moulding land use and landscape, has received increased recognition in formal landscape assessments. In the case of the Forest of Dean it is this aspect of the landscape which gives it a unique character.

- 8.7. The core area of the forest has different attributes to those which are characteristic features of most AONBs. However, it is precisely because the Forest is an enclosed and secretive landscape that it has retained qualities that are increasingly rare in the overcrowded areas of southern Britain. If these qualities are taken into consideration a very strong case can be made for giving the core area of the Forest the same level of protection as its eastern rim
- 8.8. **Cultural Heritage:** The Forest of Dean is recognised as being an area of national importance for archaeology and industrial archaeology. It also has a major resource in the traditions and skills of its people.
- 8.9. Exploitation of its mineral and timber resources since Neolithic times has left a rich legacy of archaeological and industrial archaeological remains (much of which is unexplored) and the landscape itself is almost entirely a product of human intervention. At the same time that transformation has been achieved without loss of the richness and diversity of its 'natural' habitats.
- 8.10. Physical remains are only one part of that cultural heritage, which is portrayed most vividly in the distinctive characteristics of the local population. Foresters are, by nature, resourceful and independent people, who resist regimentation and regulations, and are wary of intervention by outsiders. The Forest is theirs, and they jealously guard rights and traditions, even though some are of limited practical application in a modern world.
- 8.11. **Legal Status:** Many laws and regulations relating to activities in the Forest of Dean have their origins in the medieval age, and even earlier. Forest statutes date back over 800 years, and the administration of the area has been treated as an entity throughout that time.

**Nature Conservation:** As in the case of landscape character, the Forest of Dean is identified as a distinct Natural Area, within which the range of habitats represent both upland and lowland conditions. Much of the core area is either notified as SSSI or is regarded as of equivalent status.

- 8.12. **Cumulative Effects:** Each of the elements described above provides its own justification for regarding the Forest of Dean as a special place, but the degree of overlap between them and the consistency with which they apply to the same geographical boundaries adds even greater weight to the individual strengths.

#### **Recommendation I**

The Forest of Dean warrants special status on the grounds of its unique landscape, nature conservation interest and cultural heritage.

## IS THERE A NEED FOR SPECIAL STATUS?

- 8.13. The Forest of Dean is a unique and special place, which is under pressure for a number of reasons. These include:
- **Prospects for further mineral working** of hard rock and opencast coal, in circumstances where existing planning protection is not as strong as it would be if the area had National Park or AONB status.
  - **Increasing strains over recreation and tourism** between sections of the local community, the local authority and Forest Enterprise over the most appropriate directions in which to develop recreational facilities like cycleways.
  - **Concerns that the processes by which land management decisions are taken** by Forest Enterprise and the local authority do not involve local people as much as they could.
  - **Poor performance of the local economy** due to absence of adequate transport links and relative isolation.
  - **Failure to capitalise fully on the skills, resources and enterprise of the area.**
- 8.14. Each of these concerns raises different sets of issues, and requires different types of solution, many of which can be developed within the framework of existing legislation. It is nevertheless the view of the study team that existing planning policies and administrative structures fail to give the focus, direction and overall co-ordination which is required to realise the full potential of the Forest of Dean.

### **Recommendation 2**

The Forest of Dean should be awarded special status in the interests of achieving an integrated approach to its environmental, social and economic problems and opportunities.

## THE AREA TO BE CONSIDERED FOR SPECIAL STATUS

- 8.15. Consideration of a wide range of issues including landscape character, the identity of natural areas, the current land uses, and social and economic characteristics suggest that the core area to be considered for Special Status is the Hundred of St Briavels which encompasses the ancient Forest. This area is shown in Figure 7.
- 8.16. In terms of local distinctiveness in landscape character, and the existence of a cohesive natural area in geological, topographic and nature conservation terms, the boundary of the Hundred of St Briavels give a good starting point.

- 8.17. The main environmental, social and economic concerns and opportunities arise within this core area, although for each topic of special interest, there may be justifications for extending the boundary in different directions. These issues would need to be explored in follow up investigations.

### **Recommendation 3**

The boundary of the Hundred of St Briavels should be taken as the starting point for developing an area of the Forest of Dean to which Special Status should apply. The precise boundary of the area of special status should be assessed in the light of detailed public consultations.

## **WHAT FORM SHOULD SPECIAL STATUS TAKE?**

- 8.18. Proposals for awarding special status to any area need to be considered very carefully. It is important to assess whether the overall objectives behind awarding special status could be achieved by better use of existing powers and resources, and what additional benefits would be achieved by the introduction of new designations or administrative structures.
- 8.19. The campaign for Special Status which has been pursued by local interests in recent years, and the process of the study itself, has raised awareness about the particular problems which exist in the Forest of Dean. These activities, in themselves, have helped to increase awareness of the area.
- 8.20. It would certainly be possible to meet a number of concerns by strengthening existing procedures. For example, planning policies for the Forest of Dean could be written with the same aims, and conditions, as apply to other sensitive areas which have AONB status. Similarly, voluntary agreements could be introduced by Forest Enterprise and the local authorities, to involve local people more fully in decision –making on land management issues. However, measures of this nature would not have the degree of commitment and support, which would be afforded by special status. More importantly, simply re-inforcing existing procedures would miss out on the opportunity for creating a new, more integrated approach designed to bring added benefits and returns to the area, as well as resolving some of its difficulties.



#### **Recommendation 4**

The boundary of the Forest of Dean as defined under Recommendation 3 should be delimited on maps as a distinct geographical entity. The area should be designated an AONB with Enhanced Status

#### **Recommendation 5**

Specific policies, plans and procedures for safeguarding and enhancing the environmental and cultural qualities, and development of the local economy of the Forest of Dean should be put in place.

### **WHAT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES SHOULD SPECIAL STATUS ACHIEVE?**

- 8.21. The study has explored the potential aims and objectives, which special status would seek to deliver, and these are listed in Recommendation 6.

#### **Recommendation 6**

Special Status should aim to provide:

- a clear vision and strategic plan for the area
- greater control over mineral working
- protection and enhancement of landscape quality and character
- protection and enhancement of Cultural Heritage
- promotion of economic development
- a strengthened image and identity for the area
- a stronger voice for local people
- an increased voice for local people
- increased funding sources

## WHAT ADMINISTRATIVE AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE IS REQUIRED?

- 8.22. A range of different models has been considered for the creation of a new management and administrative structure for the Forest of Dean. These models have included:
- National Park Status with an independent Park Authority
  - AONB status with an Advisory Management Committee
  - 'Natural Park'/'Cultural Park' using mainland European examples
- 8.23. It has been concluded that the area is likely to be too small to warrant consideration in its own right as a National Park, unless it were to be combined with the Wye Valley AONB in a single new designation. (Consideration of this option has lain outside the remit of this study but is generally regarded as impractical for reasons quoted in the report.)
- 8.24. There are elements of the Broads Authority and New Forest Heritage Area management structures, which could be relevant in developing a new approach towards the Forest of Dean.
- 8.25. Traditional approaches towards AONB designation and management are judged to be too narrow to meet the full aims and objectives set out for the Forest of Dean. However, many new and imaginative approaches are being developed for the administration of AONB's and equivalent areas in the United Kingdom. A number of these like the approach to the Sussex Downs offer parallels and prototypes for the Forest of Dean.
- 8.26. In terms of management and administration the study has examined experience on the mainland of Europe in setting up and managing Natural Parks, which is highly relevant to the concepts which are emerging for the Forest of Dean. These initiatives rely heavily on participation of regional bodies, organisations and local communities in order to achieve a fully integrated approach towards environmental social and economic initiatives. Important lessons can be learnt from these examples which should assist in by developing a tailor-made solution for the Forest of Dean.
- 8.27. The consultants preferred model is for the Forest of Dean to be designated as an AONB as soon as practicable in order to secure the basic planning objectives discussed in paragraphs 5.25 – 5.30. Use of this designation should not obscure the wider objectives lying behind the drive to create a new status for the area. An innovative and expanded approach should be taken to AONB designation with emphasis being placed on community involvement, and partnership between the different local authorities and other interested parties. This approach has the merits of ensuring that the status of the area could be upgraded in a relatively short timescale of 2-3 years under existing legislation.
- 8.28. A strong case could be made for pursuing the French "Parc Naturel" concept, but new legislation would require to introduce a formal UK designation, and this could take 5-10 years to achieve. In these circumstances it would be preferable to incorporate the best elements of the French Parc Naturel and successful UK models like the Sussex Downs suitably modified to meet the special needs of the Forest of Dean.

### **Recommendation 7**

The Forest of Dean should be designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty for planning control purposes, but this title and status should be interpreted in a new and imaginative way to enhance social, cultural and economic as well as environmental objectives.

### **Recommendation 8**

A purpose built management and administrative structure should be considered for the Forest of Dean which will deliver an integrated response to environmental, social and economic issues. This structure should draw on the best examples and components of other systems, and avoid being conditioned by established frameworks and precedents. There is an opportunity to develop new concepts and to test innovative ideas, which will draw on the best parallels in Britain and mainland Europe.



## APPENDIX I



## **CHRONOLOGY FROM THE INDUSTRIAL AGE ONWARDS**

### **THE INDUSTRIAL AGE**

#### *1600-1700 Pre-Industrial Period*

- 1653 - Act for the Deafforestation
- 1657 - Forest Act
- 1668 - The Dean Forest (Reafforestation) Act

#### *1700-1950 Industrial Period*

- 1808 - The Dean Forest (Timber) Act 1808
- 1819 – Dean Forest (Gale Rent) Act
- 1838 – The Dean Forest Mines Act
- 1861 – Dean Forest Act
- 1871 – The Dean Forest (Mines) Act
- 1904 – The Dean Forest (Mines) Act
- 1919 – Forestry Commission established
- 1923 – Transfer of Woods and Forests Act
- 1927 – Forestry Act
- 1929 – Forest of Dean Byelaws
- 1938 – Coal Act
- 1946 – The Coal Industries Nationalisation Act
- 1949 – National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act

### **THE POST INDUSTRIAL AGE**

#### *1950-Post Industrial Period*

- 1968- Countryside Act
- 1971- Wild Creatures and Forest Laws Act
- 1972 - Local Government Act
- 1981 - Forestry Act
- 1981 - Wildlife and Countryside Act
- 1985 - Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Act
- 1991 - Environment Protection Act
- 1994 - Coal Industry Act
- 1995 --Environment Act





## APPENDIX 2



# INDICATIVE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE FOR THE FOREST OF DEAN (AONB)

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This appendix provides a brief outline of the type of administrative structure which might be considered for the Forest of Dean AONB. The new designation area would be overseen by a management board this would be:

- An Independent Body comprising County, District, Government and Local Interests.
- The board would meet 3-4 times a year (or more frequently if business required).

## Management Board

Executive Functions: of the board would include:

1. Preparing the Dean Strategy/Vision Statement (Reviewed 5 yearly)
2. Issuing Annual Report

## Advisory Role:

The board would also have an advisory role in:

- 1 Commenting on all statutory planning processes
- 2 Advising on economic development strategy
- 3 Advising Government Agencies on strategic issues affecting the future of the Forest of Dean Interests

## Administration/ Staffing:

Administrative support might be provided by Forest of Dean District Council and Gloucester County Council through secondment of staff.

Professional advice would also be provided by a full time Dean Project Officer

## Membership

The board might typically have a membership of 32. An indicative structure is set out below for discussion.

Membership	(32)
Nominated by:	No.
Forest of Dean Council	6
Gloucestershire County Council	4
RDA	2
Countryside Commission	2
Forestry Commission	2
Verderers	2
FreeMiners	2
Commoners Association	2
Chamber of Commerce	4
Parish Councils	6

