

THE TRANSITION FROM FARMING TO FARM FORESTRY IN THE NATIONAL FOREST

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The National Forest covers 51,800 hectares in the heart of England. Since 1992 woodland cover in The National Forest has increased from 6% to 17%, landscapes have changed and many farming practices have altered radically. To effect this change over £30million (€40million) has been directly invested in woodland creation in The National Forest.

The increase in woodland in the Forest has resulted from a mix of planning related gain, strategic land acquisition, and, most significantly, by participation in the National Forest Tender Scheme (NFTS). The NFTS has secured over two thirds of the land committed to the Forest. The NFTS is a voluntary scheme that enables landowners, or those that would like to own land, to submit a scheme of their own design and at a price that they determine is competitive. To date the scheme has been very successful, attracting over 175 winning schemes that collectively have submitted in excess of 3,000 hectares of land. The majority (in excess of 80%) of new woodlands created through the NFTS have been submitted by farmers.

In the Forest, private landowners have shattered many myths about farmers and forestry. Although not a prerequisite of the Tender Scheme, public access is largely welcomed with permissive access exceeding 85% by land area. Sites are maintained to a high quality, managed well and are frequently aimed at producing a crop. Landowners have also proved to be adept at designing/managing woodlands that can truly be described as multipurpose - combining woodland with new fishing lakes, log cabins, off road driving courses, parklands and camping/caravanning facilities. Landowners have drawn lessons from novel woodlands - such as the 13,000 walnut trees planted at the Jaguar Woodland - by planting commercial woodland and using different silvicultural methods. Equally as important, landowners have created far more than areas of trees. Using the revenue secured from their TS many landowners have re- invested in their farm buildings, converting them to tea-rooms, conference centres and small business units.

This paper will explore the success of The National Forest in creating diverse farm woodlands, quantify its socio-economic impacts, examine the future for its woodlands (and their owners) and suggest how The National Forest could be used elsewhere in the UK to facilitate successful, profitable and sustainable farm woodland.

